



Between the Highway and the Red Dirt Track

Subaltern Urbanization and Census Towns in India

SRILATA SIRCAR | FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES | LUND UNIVERSITY



Between the Highway and the Red Dirt Track

Subaltern Urbanization and Census Towns in India

Srilata Sircar



LUND
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by due permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University, Sweden.
To be defended at Världen, 1st floor, Geocentrum 1. 9 December, 2016. 13:15hrs

Faculty opponent

Dr. Tariq Jazeel

Reader in Human Geography

Dept. of Geography, University College London

| | | |
|---|--|-------|
| Organization LUND UNIVERSITY | Document name | |
| Department of Human Geography | Date of issue | |
| Author(s) Srilata Sircar | Sponsoring organization | |
| Title and subtitle: <i>Between the highway and the red dirt track: Subaltern Urbanization and Census Towns in India</i> | | |
| Abstract: | | |
| <p>In the 2011 census of India, more than 2500 settlements have been newly inducted into the category of 'census towns' – the lowest size-class of urban settlements in India. This is a staggering figure in light of the observation that a comparable number constituted the total number of all urban settlements recorded since 1900. Furthermore, it has been revealed through aerial images, that a vast majority of these new census towns are situated away from million-plus metropolitan areas and are parts of smaller settlement agglomerations (Pradhan 2012). This geographical phenomenon of small-town based urbanization independent of state planning has been termed <i>subaltern urbanization</i> (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zerah 2012).</p> <p>Taking this to be the point of entry, this thesis attempts to explore the nature of urbanizations unfolding in small-town India, from a subaltern studies perspective. It is meant to be an empirical and conceptual intervention into the dominant understanding of urbanization processes, both in state-led official accounts and in critical urban theory. It also attempts to throw light on the everyday politics of the production of the urban at these sites. The central question is to find out what a subaltern studies approach can reveal about this phenomenon of proliferating census towns.</p> <p>The analytical apparatus is built on core concepts of Subaltern Studies such as autonomous domains of political consciousness, and the notion of a sovereign historical subject. The empirical analysis combines discourse analysis of policy documents and official interviews, narrative analysis of personal interviews, participatory mapping exercises, and a household survey. The study was conducted in West Bengal - the state with the highest share of new census towns. The fieldwork was carried out in two towns in the south-western districts of West Medinipur (Garbeta town) and Bankura (Jhantipahari town).</p> <p>The thesis consists of five articles and an introductory 'kappa'. I argue that i) there exists a clear dissonance between the official epistemology and the locally circulating forms of meaning-making; which renders official classifications redundant for the lived experience of urbanization ii) a complex multitude of socio-economic logics are at work in shaping the dynamics of this urbanization process, which cannot be fully represented through existing categories of theorization: hence this is an attempt to push the boundaries of how urban justice may be conceptualized and iii) the urban here is amalgamated into the agrarian and thrives on the perpetuation of power relations that are characterized by the Hindu caste order, although everyday forms of 'resistance as negotiation' are incessantly at work to prevent the power structure from stagnating. Thus, I imagine the census towns as sites of dynamic continuity and call for a democratic historiography of the urban that can do justice to the radical heterogeneity of lived experience.</p> | | |
| Key words: Subaltern urbanization, census towns, India, urban theory, postcolonial, Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi | | |
| Classification system and/or index terms (if any) | | |
| Supplementary bibliographical information | Language English | |
| ISSN and key title | ISBN 978-91-7753-066-4 (print) 978-91-7753-067-1 (electronic) | |
| Recipient's notes | Number of pages | Price |
| | Security classification | |

I, the undersigned, being the copyright owner of the abstract of the above-mentioned dissertation, hereby grant to all reference sources permission to publish and disseminate the abstract of the above-mentioned dissertation.

Signature 

Date 31/10/2016

Between the Highway and the Red Dirt Track

Subaltern Urbanization and Census Towns in India

Srilata Sircar



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Coverphoto by Srilata Sircar

Copyright Srilata Sircar

Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Human Geography

ISBN 978-91-7753-066-4 (print)
ISBN 978-91-7753-067-1 (electronic)

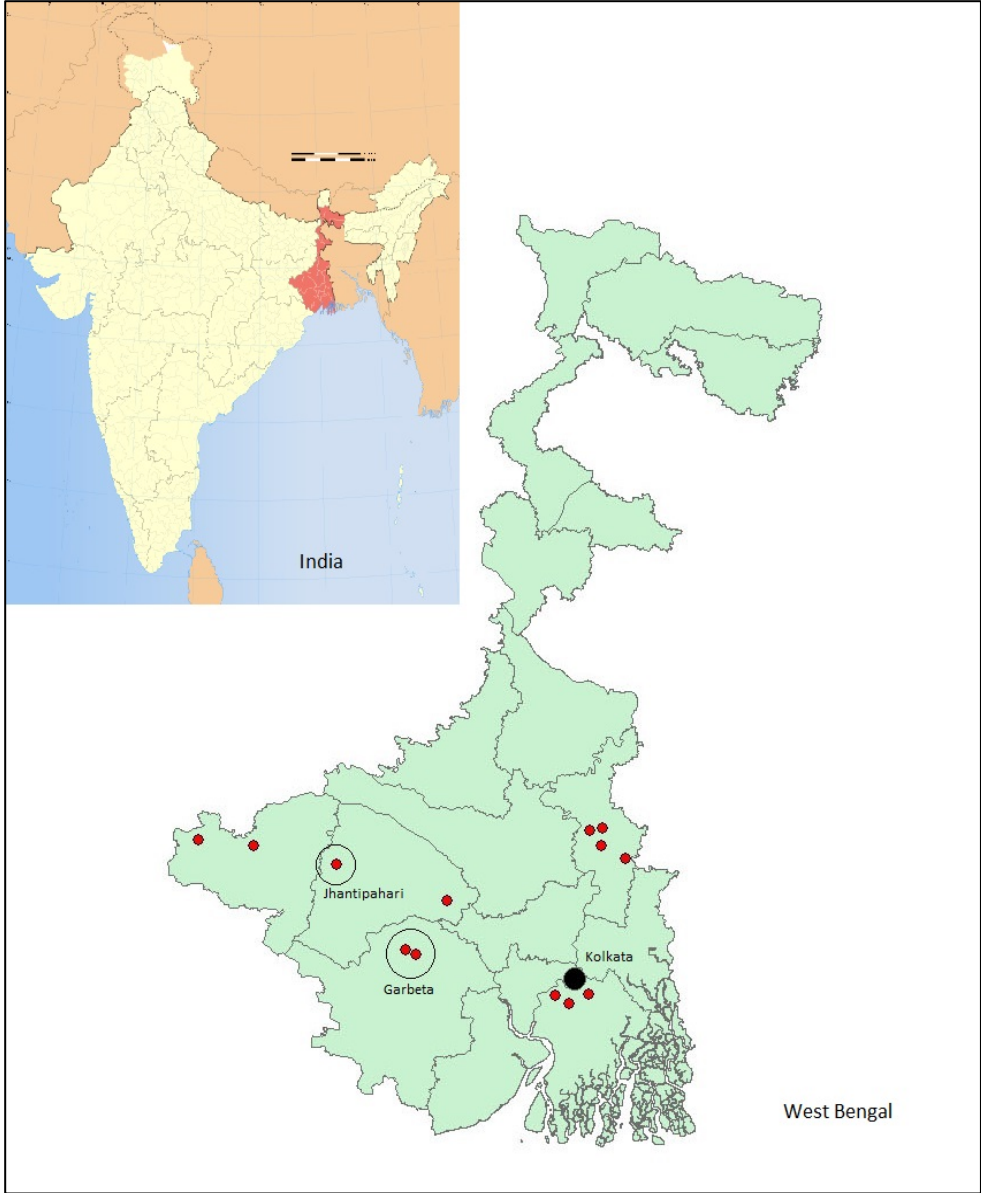
Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University
Lund 2016



To Pinjra Tod
In Love and Solidarity

“There is a price that has to be paid for this shift to the ethnographic, the practical, the everyday and the local [...] It is undoubtedly true that the weaving of a local historical narrative with detailed ethnographic description of local practices requires immersion in a seemingly bottomless pool of names, places and events that are unlikely to be familiar to readers outside the immediate geographical region [...] But then, we should remember that if history students all over the world could read about daily life in a single village in the French province of Languedoc in the 14th century or about the mental world of a solitary Italian miller in the 16th century, then in principle there is no reason why they should not do the same with a book about subaltern life in a village or small town in south Asia.”

- Chatterjee, P. (2012) “After Subaltern Studies”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVII: 35, pp 49



Map 1. Location of pilot visit and fieldwork sites in West Bengal, India

Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Contents..... | viii |
| Acknowledgments..... | x |
| List of Articles..... | xiii |
| Glossary..... | xiv |
| List of Abbreviations and Acronyms | xvi |
| List of Maps, Figures, and Tables..... | xvii |
| Synopsis in Bangla..... | 1 |
| <i>বড়রাস্তা ও রাঙামাটির মাঝামাঝিঃ নিম্নস্তরীয় নাগরিকায়ণ ও ভারতের সেন্সাস টাউন</i> | 1 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 9 |
| Prologue..... | 9 |
| Census Towns: The Birth of a Topic..... | 12 |
| Research Questions..... | 15 |
| Structure of the Thesis..... | 16 |
| 2. Conceptualizing the Urban: Critical Urban Theory and its Postcolonial Critique..... | 17 |
| Urbanization as Capitalism | 18 |
| Urbanization as a collection of “global city” units | 21 |
| 3. Subalternity: An Analytical Framework..... | 27 |
| Subaltern Studies as the politics of epistemology..... | 27 |
| Subalternity as “a position without identity” | 29 |
| Subaltern Studies and its Critics | 34 |
| Subalternity in Geography | 37 |
| 4. India and West Bengal: An Introduction to the Political Setting..... | 41 |
| State, polity, and society in post-colonial India..... | 41 |
| Capitalist development in post-colonial India | 44 |
| ‘Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi’ as social and analytical category..... | 47 |
| Feminist Scholarship in India..... | 51 |
| West Bengal..... | 52 |
| 5. Urbanization in India: In figures and in discourse..... | 59 |
| Urban Growth Trends..... | 59 |

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| | Urban Policy..... | 61 |
| 6. | Methodology: Empirical Explorations from Spreadsheet to Transcript..... | 71 |
| | Navigating the official knowledges of the urban..... | 71 |
| | Site Selection..... | 73 |
| | Gatekeepers and Pilot Visits | 77 |
| | Fieldwork..... | 78 |
| | Narrative Analysis..... | 85 |
| | Household Survey..... | 88 |
| | Ethical Considerations..... | 89 |
| | A Note on the Identity of Participants | 89 |
| | A Note on Self-reflexivity: Who am I and Why am I doing this? | 89 |
| 7. | Synthesis of Arguments..... | 93 |
| | Subaltern Urbanization, Official Epistemology, and the Post-colonial State Apparatus..... | 98 |
| | Subaltern Urbanization and Dominant Discourses..... | 102 |
| | Subaltern Urbanization and Everyday Politics..... | 105 |
| 8. | Conclusion | 109 |
| | References..... | 117 |

Acknowledgments

On the last day of fieldwork in Bhuiyandanga, a small Dalit settlement in the vicinity of Jhantipahari town, I missed my usual train back to the district headquarter of Bankura. What followed was a mildly panic-stricken two hours of traveling by bus, “shared tempo” (mini-vans ferrying passengers across fixed distances), and on foot; down a convoluted route put together by the kind directions of absolute strangers and my own instinctive “find-your-way-back” radar. Despite having a lot else on my mind through that trip, I found myself thinking incessantly about whether my path would ever again cross those of the unknown well-wishers who ensured that I made it safely back to my hotel room that night. And if not, then how would I ever convey my gratitude to them. That trip back to the hotel room could well be a metaphor for my journey through this PhD project. It went by precariously with a lot on my mind, leaving me wondering how I could ever acknowledge, let alone repay, the immense debts I have accrued on the way. I will nonetheless give it a try.

The very first words of gratitude must go to my supervisor Agnes Andersson Djurfeldt, who has time and again, gone far beyond the demands of her professional role and made me feel at home not just in this project and this department, but also in my own being as a researcher. I am particularly thankful for her support and company in the pilot visits phase of the study. I hope to work with her on many more exciting projects in the future.

Thanks are due to my co-supervisor Pernille Gooch, who has facilitated enriching conversations both on and off topic. My work has benefitted thoroughly from the critical insights of discussants at various stages – Magnus Jirström in the research proposal seminar, Jytte Agergaard in the mid-term seminar, and Seema Arora-Jonsson at the final seminar. I am deeply thankful to all of them for their time and thoughts. Tomas Germundsson, Guy Baeten, and Henrik Gutzon Larsen have played important roles in this journey in various capacities. I thank them for their time and help.

Göran Djurfeldt has accompanied us on the pilot visits and presented me with the opportunity to collaborate on a book manuscript that has contributed to my thesis work. I am grateful for this learning experience.

Anasua Basuroychoudhary at Calcutta Research Group, Partha Mukhopadhyay and Kanhu Charan Pradhan at Center for Policy Research, and Marie-Helene Zerach at Center for Social Sciences and Humanities have played crucial roles in enabling the empirical aspects of this project. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged. Rik Sundar Sasmal and Ayanangsha Maitra have been committed facilitators in the field. I am thankful for their assistance during the pilot visits.

Maria Archila in the department at Lund has entered the survey data into SPSS. I thank her for her help at a crucial time.

The fieldwork for this project was supported by grants from the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography and the Margit Althin Fund of the Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien. I thank them for their continued support to young researchers. None of this would have been possible without the participation of all the interviewees and informants of this study. The people of Garbeta and Jhantipahari have taught me to see familiar surroundings with fresh eyes and listen to old stories with new ears. I reserve my deepest gratitude for all of them and hope to have done justice to their life experiences.

At the department in Lund, the intellectual company and moral support of my fellow doctoral students has been invaluable. I particularly thank Andreas Malm, Erik Jönsson, Hjalti Nielsen, Karin Lindsjö, Lovisa Solbär and Ståle Holgersen. Thanks to my Free Tibet gym-wear, I once tricked Gregory Pierce into a conversation. In him and in Paula I have found friends for life. I have many bottles of beer and soulful conversations to thank them for. Thanks to his incessant and ‘puzzling’ morning alarm, I was drawn into a close friendship with Mikhail Martynovich. I have much to thank him for, but not the least for being a great deadline-twin and keeping me company on the late evenings in our shared office. Noura Alkhalili has been like a sister to me. I thank her for her warmth and strength. Salvatore Paolo de Rosa has been a co-traveler on this journey and I owe him thanks for introducing me to the better parts of Copenhagen. Wim Carton and Chia-Sui Hsu have been equally thoughtful as friends and colleagues. Vasna Ramasar has opened up and fiercely guarded a space for honest and compassionate conversations. I am delighted to call her a friend. Sarah Alobo, Sarah Kollnig, and Suheyla Turk have been pleasurable company in the process of figuring it all out. Mona Tykesson has been a friendly refuge in the stormiest of times. My heartfelt thanks go to her. I wish them all success and joy in their careers.

The final stages of the writing process were made enjoyable by the energy and camaraderie of Siri Kjellberg, Mads Barbesgaard, Katherine Burlingame, Ilia Farahani, Kadri Kuusk, Andreas Roos and Claudia Deijl. Their presence has pumped new blood into the academic ambience of the department. I wish them exhilarating journeys of their own. Arvin Khoshnood, Marie Wiman, Elin Brudin, Linda Stihl, and Iana Kalinichenko have provided essential administrative support in course of my time as a doctoral candidate. I thank them for their pivotal role in keeping the department running.

Since August 2015 I have been a guest PhD at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen. I am thankful for the warm welcome and the stimulating environment that have greeted me there. Cecilia Milwertz and Bo Aerenlund Sorensen have generously read and commented on a draft article. David Stuligross

has been immensely forthcoming in his feedback. I thank him for his time and timely instigations of all kinds. Thanks are also due to the staff at Kaffehuset on Norrebrogade 183. They have kept the iced coffee flowing through the hectic summer months and their hospitality has fostered many student essays, including my own.

My friends from/at home in India have stuck with me through thick and thin. Gautam and Srabashi have opened their home and their hearts to me. It would be an affront to their friendship to try and thank them in words. Debapriya has been there for me, as always. There is nothing I can say to truly convey what it has meant over the years. Through the ebb and flow of life, Ram Krishna Ranjan's friendship has emerged as a constant source of support. Moumita has kept me going through her indomitable presence on Skype. Abhishek Anicca's spirited poetry has been a source of succor. Altaf's sensitivity and sensibilities have brought relief and cheer in equal measures. Priyadarshi Banerjee has, for long, been a kindred spirit. Akanksha Mehta, Maruf, and Ian Cook have been fellow PhDs who have lent support from afar.

The tides of time have turned my little brother Sromon into a strong and dependable moral force in my life. I thank him for his wisdom and his unconditional love. I thank my parents for teaching me early on that the measure of my life was not in my marriageability. I thank my Dida for stories and songs that helped me build a relationship with Bengal outside of Kolkata.

In the course of this journey my partner Mikkel has stepped into my life and unbeknownst to me, made everything brighter. I thank him for his tremendous warmth, patience, and generosity; and for never keeping track of my turn to do the chores. I will now be more attentive to that.

During the writing of this thesis a lot has taken the world by storm. People in places across the globe have risen in resistance to unjust orders. Though my work is not directly relevant to all their struggles, I am personally invested in their cause. I stand in solidarity with the people of Syria, with the Kashmiri peoples' struggle for self-determination, with persecuted atheists and minority rights activists in Bangladesh, with the Dalit struggles for dignity in Una and Hyderabad and with protectors of the Standing Rock Sioux, amongst many others. In the face of this increasingly devastating milieu, my fellow students in various parts of India have kept my hope kindled by organizing, agitating, and making the world known that the fight for justice is well and alive. One such movement is *Pinjra Tod: Break the Hostel Locks* – an intersectional feminist platform that has occupied the dangerous nights and empty streets of my alma mater, Delhi University, and turned them into a celebration of resistance against patriarchy. I dedicate this thesis to my sisters at *Pinjra Tod* in love, solidarity, and admiration.

List of Articles

Article 1.

Sircar, S. (2017) “Census Towns in India and What it Means to be Urban: Competing Epistemologies and Potential New Approaches”, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, in press.

Article 2.

Sircar, S. (*to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal*) “The small and the south in urban theory: Lessons from a Census Town in India”.

Article 3.

Sircar, S. (*under review at a peer-reviewed journal*) “You can call it a *Mufassil* Town, but Nothing Less: Narratives of Subaltern Urbanization from New Census Towns in West Bengal, India”.

Article 4.

Sircar, S. (*submitted to a peer-reviewed journal*) “Placing the Urban in its Rural Context: A Mixed Methods Case Study of a ‘Census Town’ in India”.

Article 5.

Sircar, S. (*submitted to a peer-reviewed journal*) “Reflections for Feminist Geography from a census town in India”

Glossary

Adivasi: Literally “old inhabitants” in Hindi, Bangla and other sub-continental languages; it is the chosen self-description of communities listed as “Scheduled Tribes” in the Indian constitution, following the colonial nomenclature. There also exist communities that are not listed as “Scheduled Tribes” but identify as Adivasi based on historical experience and contemporary life practices. Adivasis constitute about 8 per cent of the national population i.e. close to 100 million people. While they are often compared to indigenous or aboriginal people elsewhere, the Indian state does not recognize their claim to indigeneity. The term encompasses a vast diversity of communities across more than twenty states. In West Bengal the *Santhals* constitute the largest Adivasi community.

Ambedkarite: Followers of the political philosophy based on the life and works of Dr. Bheemrao Ambedkar (1891-1956)- jurist, political activist, and Chairperson of India’s constituent assembly (that drafted the constitution). He was amongst the chief architects of the modern Dalit political movement, based on anti-caste consciousness, and struggle for dignity and justice.

Bahujan: Literally “people in the majority” in Hindi, it is a term used to refer to the political collective of all oppressed communities like Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, and religious minorities. Used as an umbrella term to forge political solidarities, it has been popularized by the Bahujan Samaj Party.

Dalit: Literally “oppressed” in Hindi, Marathi and other sub-continental languages; it was popularized by B.R. Ambedkar as the self-chosen name for “ex-untouchable castes”, also listed as “Scheduled Castes” in the Indian constitution. In the Hindu caste structure, these were considered to be structurally below the four *varnas* and therefore the “lowest castes”. Dalits constitute close to 17 per cent of the national population.

Mauja/Mouja: A sub-unit of a Panchayat in West Bengal; at times corresponds to a census village- the smallest unit used for census operations. Usually one mouja consists of one or more settlements and surrounding fields although some moujas consist of only fields or forests with no settlements included. As such it is a revenue unit and not an administrative one.

Mufassil: The term “mufassil” was introduced during colonial times to distinguish the “provinces, country stations and districts” from the Presidency. “Thus, if in Calcutta; one talks of the Mofussil, he means anywhere in Bengal, out of Calcutta...” (Yule, H: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases)

Other Backward Classes: A term used to refer to “socio-economically and educationally backward” groups that are not listed as “Scheduled Castes” or “Scheduled Tribes”. Most groups under this category correspond to castes belonging to the lowest of the four *varnas* but the term “classes” is used instead to include “backward” groups within religious minorities like Muslims and Christians. Exact figures are unknown but various estimates place the proportion of OBC population at between 41 and 52 per cent of the national total.

Panchayat: Literally “gathering of five people” in Hindi, Bangla and other sub-continental languages; it refers to local self-governing bodies in rural areas. The term and the practice of local self-governance have been in existence for centuries. It was formalized as a constitutionally mandated three-tier system of governance (Panchayati Raj) in 1992, leading to the mandatory creation of panchayats at village, block and district levels in all states. The number of seats in each panchayat is proportional to the population of the area within its jurisdiction and members are elected into five-year terms with proportional representation for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes.

Savarna: Literally “with/of *varna*”, the term refers to a member of one of the first three *varnas* in the Hindu caste order. The caste order consists of four *varnas* arranged in the following hierarchy – *Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras* – followed by *Avarna* groups i.e. Dalit and Adivasi groups. Each *varna* consists of several hundred castes which are further segmented and placed in hierarchies by surnames, customary rights, and ritual status among other things. Together, they constitute the “upper castes” or “general category”. Although majority of OBC groups belong to the *Shudra varna*, the term Savarna is not used in reference to them. The political deployment of the term is in identifying and demarcating caste privilege.

Urban Local Bodies: Institutions of urban local governance, also mandated by the constitutional amendment that institutionalized Panchayati Raj in 1992.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|------------|---|
| AITC | All India Trinamool Congress |
| BSP | Bahujan Samaj Party |
| CNG | Compressed Natural Gas |
| CPI(M) | Communist Party of India (Marxist) |
| CT | Census Town |
| DBA | Dalit Bahujan Adivasi |
| EPW | Economic and Political Weekly |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| Gol | Government of India |
| GoWB | Government of West Bengal |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| JNNURM | Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission |
| LPG | Liquefied Petroleum Gas |
| NCEUS | National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector |
| NDA | National Democratic Alliance |
| OBC | Other Backward Classes |
| OGs | Outgrowths |
| PCP | Petty Commodity Production |
| PILs | Public Interest Litigations |
| PwC | Pricewaterhouse Cooper |
| RJD | Rashtriya Janata Dal |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences |
| STs | Statutory Towns |
| SUBURBIN | Subaltern Urbanisation in India |
| ULBs | Urban Local Bodies |
| UNFPA | United Nations Fund for Population Activities |
| UN-Habitat | United Nations Human Settlements Program |
| UPA | United Progressive Alliance |

List of Maps, Figures, and Tables

| | |
|--|------|
| Map 1. Location of pilot visit and fieldwork sites in West Bengal, India | vii) |
| Map 2. Districts of West Bengal | 56. |
| Map 3. Distribution of new CTs amongst districts of West Bengal and their location with respect to Kolkata | 75. |
| Map 4. Location of new CTs for pilot visits | 76. |
| Map 5. Hand drawn map of moujas in Garbeta Village Panchayat office | 81. |
| Map 6. Map of Garbeta town collated through participatory mapping exercises | 82. |
| Map 7a) Digitized version of map of Garbeta town collated through participatory mapping exercises | 83. |
| Map 7b) Digitized version of map of Jhantipahari town collated through participatory mapping exercises | 84. |
| Figure I. Schematic representation of analytical framework | 40. |
| Figure II. Locating the sites of the study within parallel systems of urban classification | 69. |
| Table I. Districts of West Bengal and their ranks by HDI in 2004 | 57. |
| Table II. Size-class ranks of urban settlements in India | 61. |

Synopsis in Bangla

বড়রাস্তা ও রাঙামাটির মাঝামাঝি: নিম্নস্তরীয় নাগরিকায়ণ ও ভারতের সেন্সাস টাউন

২০১১ সালের ভারতীয় জনগণনায়ে ২৫০০-ও বেশি বসতিকে “সেন্সাস টাউন” হিসাবে চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছে। সেন্সাস টাউন অর্থাৎ এমন সকল বসতি যেখানে জনসংখ্যা অন্তত পাঁচ হাজার, ঘনত্ব ৪০০ জন প্রতি বর্গ কিলোমিটার বা বেশি, এবং পুরুষ শ্রমিকদলের অন্তত ৭৫ শতাংশ কৃষিকর্মের বাইরে নিযুক্ত। সমগ্র ভারতের এই ২৫০০ নতুন সেন্সাস টাউনের মধ্যে ৫২৬টি সেন্সাস টাউন পশ্চিমবঙ্গে অবস্থিত। অন্য সমস্ত রাজ্যের তুলনায় পশ্চিমবঙ্গে সেন্সাস টাউনের সংখ্যা বেশি।

ঐতিহাসিক পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে এটি একটি অভূতপূর্ব ঘটনা। এর আগে, বিগত ৭০ বছরে, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে কেবলমাত্র ১৫০টি সেন্সাস টাউন চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছিল এবং সমগ্র রাজ্যের নগরীয় জনসংখ্যার কেবল ৭ শতাংশ এই টাউনগুলিতে বসবাস করতেন। অথচ ২০০১ ও ২০১১-র মধ্যবর্তী দশ বছরে এই টাউনের সংখ্যা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে ৫০০-র থেকেও বেশি এবং নগরীয় জনবৃদ্ধির হারের ক্ষেত্রে এই টাউনগুলির অবদান ৬৬ শতাংশের কাছাকাছি। অর্থাৎ, বর্তমান কালে স্থানীয় এবং রাষ্ট্রীয় স্তরে, নাগরিকায়ণের বিষয় চর্চা করতে গেলে “সেন্সাস টাউন” শ্রেণীটিকে বাদ দিলে চলবে না।

বর্তমানে এই সেন্সাস টাউন সম্পর্কে আমাদের অবগতির সীমা খুবই পরিমিত। ২০০১ ও ২০১১ সালের মাঝামাঝি এমন কি ঘটে থাকতে পারে যে এতগুলি নতুন টাউন দেখা দিয়েছে? এই প্রশ্নের উত্তর খুঁজতেই আমি পশ্চিমবঙ্গের জেলায় জেলায় প্যারি দিয়েছিলাম ২০১৩ সালে। নদিয়া, বর্ধমান, উত্তর ২৪ পরগনা, দক্ষিণ ২৪ পরগনা, বাঁকুড়া, পুরুলিয়া, ও পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুর সহ সাতটি জেলায় এগারোটি সেন্সাস টাউনে প্রাথমিক অনুসন্ধান চালানোর পর, আমি তিনটি টাউনকে পরবর্তী বিস্তারিত পর্যবেক্ষণের জন্য নির্বাচিত করি। নির্বাচনের প্রধান অনুমাপক- টাউনের সুগঠিত অর্থনৈতিক কাঠামো ও স্থানীয়

বাসিন্দাদের সহযোগিতার আশ্বাস। এই তিনটি টাউন হল পশিম মেদিনীপুর জেলার গঢ়বেতা ও আমলাগোড়া, এবং বাঁকুড়া জেলার ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী।

২০১৪ সালের অক্টোবর মাস থেকে ২০১৫ সালের মার্চ মাস পর্যন্ত আমি এই তিনটি টাউনে বহুসংখ্যক স্থানীয় মানুষজনের ব্যক্তিগত সাক্ষাত্কার সংগ্রহ করি এবং তাঁদের দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকে নাগরিকায়ণের অভিজ্ঞতাটি বুঝতে চেষ্টা করি। টাউনের বাসিন্দারা কি বসতিটিকে টাউন হিসাবেই দেখেন না কি গ্রাম বলে মনে করেন। তাঁদের বসতির তত্ত্বাবধান কি তাঁরা পৌরসভার হাতে তুলে দিতে চান না কি পঞ্চায়েতের অধীনেই রাখতে চান? বসতির সমস্ত মানুষের কাছেই কি বিগত দশ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা একরকম না কি বিভিন্ন শ্রেণীর মানুষের মধ্যে রয়েছে কিছু কিছু মতভেদ? এই প্রশ্নগুলিকে কেন্দ্র করেই আমার গবেষণা। সেই গবেষণার পরিণতি স্বরূপ আমার তিনটি প্রধান বক্তব্য এখানে রাখতে চলেছি।

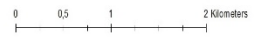
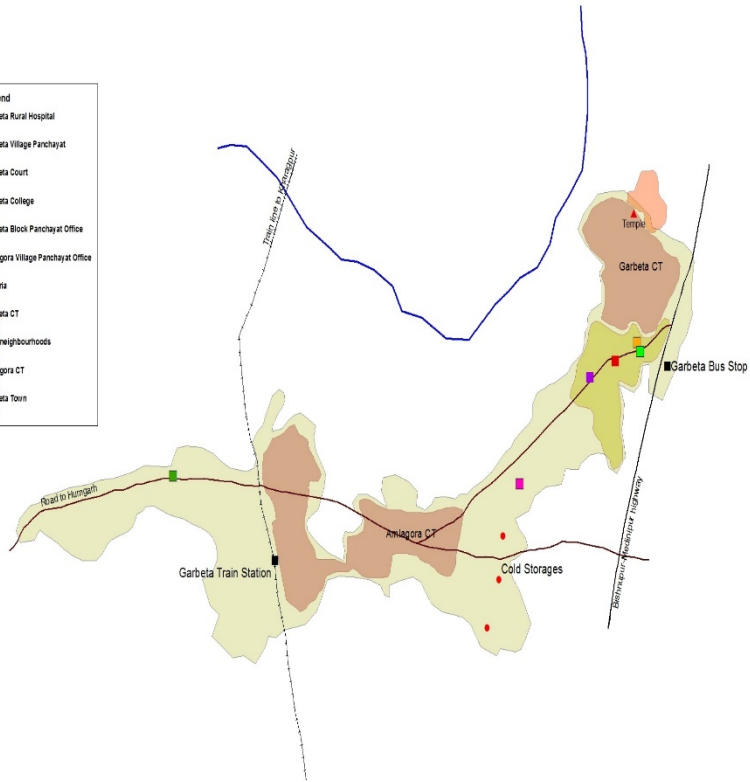
১। নাগরিকায়ণ বলতে আমরা কি বুঝি?ঃ রাষ্ট্রীয় জনগণনা ও দৈনন্দিন অনুভবের মধ্যকার পার্থক্য

সেম্বাসের তথ্যগুলি ঘেঁটে দেখলে বোঝা যায় যে স্প্রেডশীটে তালিকাভুক্ত জায়গার নাম এবং বাস্তবে সেই জায়গার অভিজ্ঞতার মধ্যে অনেক পার্থক্য রয়েছে। সেম্বাসের তালিকায় গঢ়বেতা ও আমলাগোড়া দুটি আলাদা জায়গা। দুটির মধ্যে ব্যবধান কতটা, আর্থিক বিনিময় কতটা, দুই জায়গার মানুষের মধ্যে আদান-প্রদান কতটা, তা বোঝার উপায় নেই। অথচ বাস্তবিক ক্ষেত্রে সাধারণ মানুষের দৈনন্দিন জীবনে, গঢ়বেতা ও আমলাগোড়া একই সবিস্তারিত জায়গার অংশ। স্থানীয় বাসিন্দাদের সাহায্যে বানানো এই মানচিত্রগুলি বিবৃত করে যে সেম্বাসে যে ভূমিখণ্ডটিকে সেম্বাস টাউন হিসাবে তালিকাভুক্ত করা হয়েছে তা এক প্রসারিত জনবসতির অংশ মাত্র। ফলত, নাগরিকায়ণের সম্পূর্ণ চিত্র সেম্বাস তালিকায় প্রতিফলিত হয়নি।

সমগ্র ভারতের জনবসতির স্যাটেলাইট ছবির ভিত্তিতে কিছু ভৌগোলিক অনুমান করেছেন যে সেম্বাসের গণনার তুলনায় বাস্তবিক অভিজ্ঞতায় নাগরিকায়ণের ব্যাপ্তি অনেক বেশি। আমার অনুসন্ধান অনুযায়ী দৈনন্দিন জীবনের গঢ়বেতা টাউন ও ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী টাউন, সেম্বাসের গঢ়বেতা টাউন ও ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী টাউনের তুলনায় অনেক বেশি প্রভাবশালী ও প্রগতিশীল। এই মতামতের ভিত্তিতে আমার নিবেদন যে নাগরিকায়ণ কি এবং কতটা তা ঠাঠা করার ক্ষেত্রে সেম্বাস তালিকার উপরন্তু সাধারণ মানুষের দৈনন্দিন জীবনের অভিজ্ঞতাকে কেন্দ্র রাখা হোক।

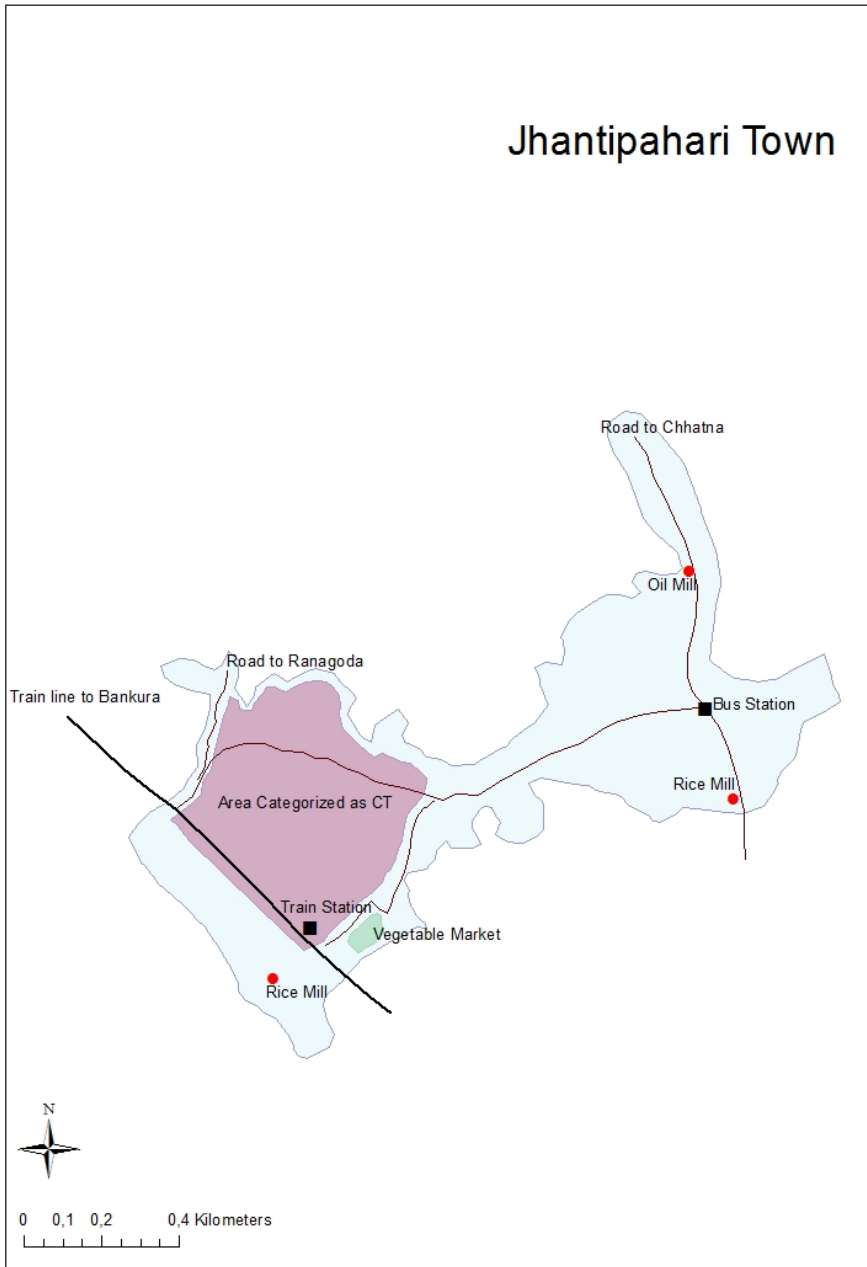
Garbeta Town

- Legend
- Garbeta Rural Hospital
 - Garbeta Village Panchayat
 - Garbeta Court
 - Garbeta College
 - Garbeta Block Panchayat Office
 - Am Jagersa Village Panchayat Office
 - Lapsuria
 - Garbeta CT
 - Dalit neighbourhoods
 - Am Jagersa CT
 - Garbeta Town



গড়বেতা টাউনের মানচিত্র

Jhantipahari Town



ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী টাউনের মানচিত্র

২। ছোটো শহর ও নাগরিকায়ণের ইতিহাস

জ্ঞানতন্ত্রের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে নাগরিকায়ণের ইতিহাসকে মূলত ধনতন্ত্রের ইতিহাস হিসাবে উপস্থাপন করা হয়েছে। অর্থাৎ একটি শহর এবং সেই শহরের মানুষের ইতিহাস খুঁটিয়ে বুঝতে গেলে সেখানে ধনতন্ত্রের ক্রমবিকাশ কীভাবে ঘটেছে তা বোঝা দরকার। অন্তত ইউরোপ এবং আমেরিকা মহাদেশের মহানগরীগুলিকে এই দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকেই দেখা হয়েছে। যেহেতু আমাদের সামগ্রিক সমাজ ব্যবস্থায় ও তত্ত্ব-বিবেচনায় ইউরোপ এবং আমেরিকাকে প্রাধান্য দেওয়া হয়েছে, সেহেতু আমরা বিশ্বব্যাপী সমস্ত ছোটো শহরগুলিকেও এই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি থেকেই দেখে চলেছি। এর ফলে ছোটো শহর সম্পর্কে আমাদের চিন্তাভাবনা এক সঙ্কীর্ণ গতানুগতিক পদ্ধতিতে এগিয়ে চলেছে। ছোটো শহরের উদ্দেশ্যে আমরা প্রশ্ন ছুঁড়ে দিয়েছি – শহরটি বড় হল না কেন? শহরটি দেশের প্রগতির ক্ষেত্রে কি কাজে লাগতে পারে? কেন্দ্রীয় স্তরে কি ছোটো শহরের পৃষ্ঠপোষকতা সমর্থনযোগ্য?

আমার গবেষণায় আমি ছোটো শহরগুলিকে একটু অন্যরকম ভাবে দেখতে চেষ্টা করেছি। গঢ়বেতা ও ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী – এই দুটি শহরই অনেক কাল ধরে স্থানীয় মানুষের কাছে সুপ্রতিষ্ঠিত ব্যবসায়িক কেন্দ্র হিসাবে পরিচিত। গঢ়বেতায় আলু এবং কাপড়কে কেন্দ্র করে, এবং ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ীতে চাল, তেল, ও শাকসবজিকে কেন্দ্র করে এক সুগঠিত অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থা গড়ে উঠেছে। সেই ব্যবস্থার মধ্যে আবদ্ধ রয়েছেন অনেক মানুষ যাঁদের গতানুগতিক ভাবে পুঁজিবাদী বা শ্রমজীবী হিসাবে শ্রেণীভুক্ত করা অসম্ভব। অনেকে সরকারী চাকরির বেতন থেকে ব্যবসা শুরু করেছেন, অথবা চাকরি এবং ব্যবসা সমান তালে চালিয়ে গেছেন। আবার অনেকে কৃষিকাজে শ্রমজীবী কিন্তু বছরের বিশিষ্ট কিছু সময়ে ব্যবসাতে স্বল্পপরিমাণ পুঁজি বিনিয়োগ করেন।

তাই আমার মতে এই ধরনের ছোটো শহরগুলিকে ঠিক মত বুঝতে গেলে আমাদের নতুন করে নাগরিকায়ণের তত্ত্ব আলোচনা করা দরকার। কৃষি এবং কৃষিভিত্তিক জীবনধারাকে আশ্রয় করেও শহর গড়ে উঠতে পারে। এবং সেই শহরের গুরুত্ব কেবল স্থানীয় মানুষের কাছেই নয়, সমগ্র প্রদেশের সামাজিক ও অর্থনৈতিক অবস্থার কাছেও বটে। তাই ছোটো শহরের প্রতি প্রশ্ন ছুঁড়ে দেওয়ার বদলে, সেখানকার মানুষের সাথে পরামর্শ করাটাই নাগরিকায়ণের সঠিক পথ।

৩। ছোটো শহরের নিম্নবর্গীয়রা

বড় শহরের মত ছোটো শহরেও নাগরিকায়ণের অভিজ্ঞতা সব স্তরে সমান নয়। গড়বেতা ও ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ীতে বাস করেন অনেক মানুষ – বিশেষত দলিত এবং আদিবাসী বর্গের অনেক মানুষ – যাঁদের পরিশ্রমের উপর সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে নির্ভরশীল এই টাউনগুলির অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থা ও দৈনন্দিন জীবনধারা। যদিও বিগত ২০-৩০ বছরে এঁদের অবস্থায় কিছু উন্নতি হয়েছে, জাতীয় প্রেক্ষাপটে এঁদের প্রতি বৈষম্যমূলক ব্যবহার এখনও অনবরত।

যেহেতু এই ছোটো শহরগুলি কৃষিভিত্তিক জীবনধারাকে কেন্দ্র করেই গড়ে উঠেছে, সেহেতু কৃষি ব্যবস্থার বহু বর্জনীয় লক্ষণ এখনও এই শহরগুলিতে স্থায়ী রয়েছে। বিশেষত জাতিভিত্তিক বৈষম্য এখানে খুবই প্রকট ভাবে লক্ষণীয়। নিচের ছবিগুলিতে চিত্রিত শহরের বিভিন্ন পাড়াগুলির অবস্থায় এই বৈষম্যের প্রতিফলন দেখা যায়। অতএব নাগরিকায়ণের সুভবিষ্যৎ, শহরের নিম্নবর্গীয়দের উন্নয়নের উদ্দেশ্যে ন্যায্য হস্তক্ষেপের উপর নির্ভরশীল।

এছাড়াও আছে মহিলাদের জীবনের কথা। গড়বেতা টাউনে অনেক যুবতী মহিলা কর্মসূত্রে বা শিক্ষাসূত্রে, স্বাধীনভাবে বসবাস করেন। এঁদের কাজকর্ম ও লেখাপড়ার স্বাচ্ছন্দ্যের কথা মাথায় রেখে নাগরিকায়ণের পথ নির্ধারণ করা প্রয়োজন। ঝাঁটিপাহাড়ী টাউনে অনেক আদিবাসী মহিলা কর্মরত রয়েছেন। অন্যান্য বর্গ-শ্রেণীর মহিলারা কর্মক্ষেত্রে কিছু কিছু পক্ষপাতী ব্যবহারের সম্মুখীন হয়েছেন। ব্যবসা চালানো কিংবা পারিবারিক সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে তাঁদের মতামতকে গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হয় না; কখনও বা তাঁদের কাজের ক্ষেত্রে নানারকমের বাধা সৃষ্টি করা হয়ে থাকে। এই নিয়ন্ত্রক চিন্তাধারা থেকে উন্মুক্ত না হয়ে নাগরিকায়ণের সুভবিষ্যৎ কল্পনা করা সম্ভব নয়।



গঢ়বেতা টাউনের আমলাগোড়া এলাকা



গঢ়বেতা টাউলের পার্শ্বতী ডোম পাড়া

1.Introduction

Prologue

On November 1, 2014 I interviewed the owner of Appayan Lodge, my home in Garbeta town for two months. Appayan, meaning hospitality in Bangla, was one of several ‘lodges’ in the town that provided basic living and dining arrangements. It was located conveniently along the road to the train station and very close to the Block Panchayat office premises. The usual customers at Appayan were sales representatives for various fertilizers and farm equipment. It was a popular choice of venue for promotional workshops because it had a large garage area that was easily converted to a meeting hall accommodating up to thirty people. My pursuit for an interview with one of the owners or managers of the lodge had proved to be daunting during the first few weeks. Although very welcoming of my stay in the town, none of the men (and it was only men) who worked (or spent their days hanging out) in the reception area downstairs, were willing to sit down with me to answer some questions. “Go to the Panchayat office, they have all the information”, they would say; or “Go to Master Moshai¹ in Banerjeedanga...he will be able to give you the correct answers.” Finally, in the second to last week of my stay at Appayan, I managed to persuade the owner, to sit with me in his tiny, poorly lit office room and talk about his experience of living and working in Garbeta. He was in his early forties and had studied to be a chartered accountant in Kolkata. However instead of taking up an accountancy job in a metropolis far away like many of his peers, he decided to return to his family in Garbeta town and the five acres of farm land that his family owns. In 2001 he bought a small patch of land by the highway, at a subsidized price from his maternal aunt, and set up Appayan Lodge. “Don’t write my name in your book”, he insisted. “I am afraid I might give you some wrong information.” I hope I convinced him by the end of the interview that there was no right or wrong in the kind of ‘information’ I was looking for. Below is an excerpt from our conversation, transcribed and translated from Bangla:

¹ This is a term used to refer to male teachers, a derivative of the British term “Schoolmasters”. We hear more from this particular Master Moshai in Article 3.

Me: *So taking everything into consideration, would you say that you are living in an urban area or a rural area?*

A: *Village would mean...I mean...how can I call this a village?² A village is what we grew up watching around us. There are mud huts with thatched roofs...and there are red dirt tracks... through green fields and ponds. As you can see, there are none of these over here. On one side we have the national highway. There's constant traffic on that road...buses, cars, trucks...everything. Then we have the hospital, the college, the stadium...all that is counted in the town...and behind the stadium you can see some fields again until you reach the river. So between the highway and the red dirt track is the town. The rest you can call a rural area.*

This is a thesis about small towns in West Bengal, India- a location, as we will come to see, that is deeply marked by its colonial history and postcolonial³ politics. What do we know about small towns in such a context? How can we make sense of them as urban entities? And what can they tell us about the overall urban condition in contemporary times? These are some of the questions that animate the discussions that are to fill the pages of this thesis. In doing so, the thesis becomes also about small towns in the Global South- the everyday politics of their existence, their relationship with what is widely held to be a universal urban theory, and their relationship with the post-colonial state that governs them. However, before launching into these discussions, a few things need to be said by way of streamlining and building context.

The very framing “small towns in the Global South” seems to take for granted that there is a commonality and comparability to all small towns in the Global South that makes them into a coherent analytical category. This is of course, as in the case of most analytical categories, simultaneously true and false. What cements this category is the small-ness of the towns in terms of area and population within their own relative contexts and the notional South-ness of their position on a global map of urbanization. What breaches this homogeneity is the vast diversity of places, people, and practices that the category encompasses and that defy simplified generalization. Keeping this in mind, I define the scope of this thesis to include only those small towns in the South that exemplify the geographical phenomenon named as “subaltern urbanization”. The term- coined by Denis, Mukhopadhyay, & Zerah (2012)⁴ - refers to those settlements denoted urban,

² The Bangla term for ‘rural’ (“grameen”) is the adjective form of the term for ‘village’ (“gram”). Hence there is a jump in terminology when translated to English.

³ In this thesis I use ‘post-colonial’ to signify a chronological period as in ‘after colonial rule’ and ‘postcolonial’ to signify the school of thought referring to the condition of having been subjected to colonial domination.

⁴ The authors are members of the SUBURBIN project on smaller urban centers in India. See more on the project at <http://suburbin.hypotheses.org/938>

which are not proximal to other large urban centers and were not cultivated by way of planning. They are urban settlements that have exhibited growth independently of the metropolitan areas and that conduct autonomous relations with other settlements at the local, regional, or global levels. The authors have selected the term as a discursive tool for engagement with the tradition of the “global city”. This makes their choice of nomenclature a political one- a politics of postcolonial positionality that I wish to align myself with. In doing so, I also wish to extend the idea of subalternity in “subaltern urbanization” to beyond its immediate geographical implications. As discussions in later chapters will elaborate, the settlements in question are also subaltern in terms of their relationship with state, science, and scholarship.

What brought about the coinage of “subaltern urbanization” in the first place was the Census of India 2011, which recorded an unforeseen and unprecedented trend in urbanization. To begin with, the predicted rate of urban growth was superseded by the actual rate of urban growth, resulting in a higher absolute growth in urban population as compared to rural population, for the first time in the recorded history of urbanization in the country. Secondly, more than one-third of this growth was spread across 2774 newly designated urban settlements- a number higher than the total number of settlements designated as urban since 1900. Moreover, 2532 of these new urban centers belonged to the category of “census towns”. Census towns have been defined in the census guidelines as settlements fulfilling the following criteria: 5000 or more population, density of at least 400 per square kilometer, and 75 per cent of the male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. Together these 2532 new census towns (henceforth CTs) accounted for thirty per cent of the decadal urban growth in India in the period 2001-11.

Taking this as a point of entry, this thesis will attempt to explore CTs as examples of subaltern urbanization in India. This is also a project in critical social science in the sense that it adopts a critical stance towards the status quo in urban policy, urban theory, and the everyday making of the urban. The aim of the resulting scholarship is to make underlying assumptions and flows of power explicit, thereby making progressive social change possible.

Census Towns: The Birth of a Topic

In late 2011, the *Economic and Political Weekly*⁵ carried a brief four page commentary on the urban data from the Census of 2011 by one of the most well-known demographers of India, Amitabh Kundu. Kundu (2011a) had previously authored reports and papers for agencies like the UNFPA (Kundu 2011b), and the India Infrastructure Report (2006). In this particular commentary, Kundu was pointing to the apparent discrepancy between two parts of the system of knowledge production about the urban. On the one hand he was pointing to the predictions of urban growth rates by various agencies such as the Registrar General of India (in charge of all Census operations in the country), the McKinsey Global Institute, and the United Nations Population Division. The common thread underlying the analysis behind all of these predictions was the assumption that “urban rural growth differential follows a logistic path” in mathematical terms (Kundu 2011a: 14). On the other hand he was pointing to “structural parameters in the socio-economic system, definitions of the concepts and procedures for data collection”. According to Kundu (2011a), the dissonance between these two aspects of knowledge production- the mathematical predictions based on analysis of data and the practical actions that go into the making of the data itself- had led to the mismatch between the urban growth rates predicted by the various agencies and that recorded in the census.

While the predictions by all of these agencies had been “pessimistic” the actual census data had revealed that not only was the real urban growth rate (2.76%) higher than what had been predicted (2.24-2.39%), but also the absolute growth in urban population had for the first time been greater than the absolute growth in rural population. Alongside this mismatch, Kundu (2011a) noted that the total number of urban centers in India that had grown only by 2541 in “all the 10 decades of the last century” had now shot up by 2774 in just one decade between 2001 and 2011. Two aspects of this messy play of numbers stand out as extraordinary from the perspective of urban studies in India. The first is the preoccupation with predictions of growth rates and the second is the explosion in the number of urban centers. I expand on each of them.

Population growth has for a long time been a morally and politically charged issue for India. As the country with the second highest population – “one sixth of humanity” as former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee put it⁶ – the stakes have always been high for India in proving its success at “population control”. From

⁵ The EPW, as a journal bridging the gap between reportage and scholarship, is an institution in Indian public and intellectual life. It recently completed fifty years of publication. For more see <http://www.epw.in/>

⁶ See full speech here: <http://archivepmo.nic.in/abv/speech-details.php?nodeid=9009>

forced sterilization attempts during the Emergency era of the 1970s to constant anxieties over the communal implications of population growth trends⁷, the matter has never been one of simple numbers. In this ideological climate it is hardly a surprise that planning and policy-making is carried out on the basis of model-based predictions such as those from the agencies named above; and that a huge premium is placed on the accuracy of these predictions. However a certain contradiction exists between the moral climate surrounding the predictions of overall growth rates and those of urban growth rates in particular. While population rise in itself is seen through the lens of impending doom, rise in urban population is hailed as a marker of progress and modernity. There are in fact, frequent comparisons to the Chinese growth and urbanization rates by way of boosting national morale. Thus, a higher than predicted population growth rate is expected to garner much cynicism, but in this case the higher than predicted urban growth rate was a cause for optimism.

That brings me to the second aspect – the distribution of this growing urban population amongst the 2774 new urban centers. Kundu’s report attributed this growth to the “phenomenal jump” (ibid: 15) in the number of “census towns”. Of the 2774 new urban centers 2532 were “census towns” which was a category that many encountered for the first time in this report.⁸ What then were these “census towns” that had arrived unannounced and dented the analytical credibility of such premier institutions? Kundu (2011a) identified them as settlements denoted urban in the census based on the definitional criteria described above.

According to him this proliferation of census towns was most likely a case of “census activism” wherein the directorate of census operations had “become a bit more enthusiastic in identifying new urban centers” (2011a:15). He went on to demand a monograph from the Registrar General indicating how the new census towns had been identified, so that the census data could be used by researchers with adequate methodological transparency. In the absence of such a monograph, Kundu (2011a) asserted, one could only assume that sectoral diversification had occurred in rural areas to an extent that this “massive crop of new towns” had emerged.

This hypothesis for explaining the emergence of CTs coalesce the issues of urban growth and agrarian structural transformation. This constitutes an important analytical juncture. It brings the phenomenon of exploding numbers of CTs

⁷ See for example this newspaper report from 20.04.2016 about shares of religious groups in growing population <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/5bsICkXv14t4hXSewk8bkN/Four-out-of-five-Indians-will-still-be-Hindu-even-when-Musli.html>

⁸ As an aside, might I add that along with wrongly predicting a lower growth rate, the McKinsey Global Institute (2010) had also predicted the emergence of only 1000 new urban centers in India over the next two decades?

directly into conversation with the question of the nature of socio-economic development taking place in India. In their 2011 call for “resurrecting scholarship on agrarian transformations” Shah and Harriss-White had pointed out the importance of studying the diversity of transformation trajectories in the context of India. This is an assertion that is in line with a long stream of scholarship on the particular forms of development in India and their relationship to the globally hegemonic narrative of capitalism (e.g. Sanyal 2006, Harriss-White & Heyer 2014 etc.) In particular, I pay heed to the following call from Shah and Harriss-White (2011: 17):

Case studies emanating from the village level - though in no sense does this mean treating the village as a static, bounded unit - are crucial to reveal the complexities of transformations, raise new questions and analyse continuities and changes. But they should not be used for generalisations. A dialectical treatment of case studies and new larger-scale data sets, with both being used to ask new questions of each other, must be the foundation for the way forward with this new research agenda.

This project is a response to this call. The case studies here are from CTs instead of villages, although before 2011 they were in fact categorized as “census villages” – the geographical unit used for census operations. As the upcoming papers will elaborate, the urban status accorded by the census does not immediately translate into CTs being brought under the jurisdiction of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), the institutions of urban governance in India. They continue to be governed through the rural institutions of the Panchayati Raj, sometimes for several decades. CTs therefore represent a conflicted category of settlements that are urban in theory, transitional in everyday experience, and rural in state praxis. The large-scale data set of the census has presented us with this analytical category. The case studies from within this category are meant to throw light upon the crucial nuances that are lost in large datasets; but also ask questions of the socio-political conditions that make the production of these datasets and subsequent modes of analysis possible in the first place. Such a discussion would necessarily implicate CTs in the broader discourse on capitalist development, urbanization, and postcolonialism.

Research Questions

In that endeavor, this thesis raises the following question:

What can we know about census towns as urban entities from a subaltern studies perspective?

Supporting the investigation of this broad question are the following subsidiary questions that define the domain of enquiry in more specific terms:

- How does subaltern urbanization relate to the official epistemology of the urban, and the post-colonial state apparatus?
- How does subaltern urbanization relate to the categories through which the dominant discourse on urbanization has been articulated?
- What socio-economic and political processes make the everyday production of subaltern urbanization possible?

I submit that from the perspective of subaltern urbanization, defined more fully in the pages to come, the urbanity of census towns is a form of dynamic continuity of the social relations of the agrarian order. As opposed to the understanding of the urban as a distinct break from the past – a modern ‘city’ binary to the traditional ‘country’ or a site of cosmopolitan denouncing of provincial identities culminating into the making of a true citizen, a worthy political subject – the urban in the new census towns is amalgamated into the agrarian. This amalgamation is both spatial and socio-political. It is borne out of identities, hierarchies, and intricacies of everyday politics that have shaped the form of the agrarian and is in that sense an unbroken continuation of the same.

Yet, this continuity is neither static nor stale. In fact it is constituted by the continued resistance offered by the subaltern spheres to the rigidly persistent hierarchies of power and knowledge. These resistance change in their specific forms, sites of operation, and political vocabularies but remain steadfast in delineating the limits of domination. In this sense it is a dynamic continuity.

Structure of the Thesis

The argument is developed and presented through five essays – proposed journal articles at various stages of peer review – in the format of a compilation thesis. A compilation thesis is a collection of articles knit together by the introductory “kappa”. The kappa – “overcoat” in Swedish – is explanatory by nature and its purpose is to set the stage for the articles to be read as independent contributions that are united under a larger thematic banner. At the same time, the kappa is meant to crystallize the key arguments of the thesis, as developed in the articles. Thus a certain degree of repetition is inevitable in this format and the same holds true for this compilation thesis. Given that this is a relatively under-explored area of study, some elements such as the definition of CTs, the description of the specific towns I visited, and the core concepts I deploy to understand them, are repeated in several articles. However as the pivotal elements that hold the thesis together, they bear repetition in this kappa as well.

Chapter two of the kappa will situate this thesis conceptually within the ongoing debates between critical urban theory and its postcolonial critics. Chapter three will elaborate on what it means to adopt a subaltern studies perspective and present the analytical framework for the thesis. Chapter four will introduce the political setting of India and West Bengal. Chapter five will describe the trends and summarize the policies around urbanization in India in the post-independence period. Chapter six will discuss the methodology followed and the kinds of analysis carried out. Chapter seven will present a summary of the articles and a synthesis of arguments. Chapter eight will conclude the kappa with a brief note on the theoretical and conceptual contributions of this thesis for imagining subaltern urbanization.

2. Conceptualizing the Urban: Critical Urban Theory and its Postcolonial Critique

In this chapter I discuss the core themes that dominate the understanding of urbanization within the critical social sciences. I further describe the postcolonial critique of these thematic constructions and the challenges posed by scholars of the South to mainstream urban theory. This will demonstrate how this research relates to the existing scholarship on urbanization and establish the conceptual base from which the subsequent argumentation is launched. In specific, I tackle two themes that have been so predominant within urban studies that they have come to represent the prevailing common sense within the field – i) urbanization as capitalism and ii) urbanization as a collection of global city units. For both of these themes, I restrict my discussion to scholars of critical urban theory and their (primarily) postcolonial critics.

There are of course other streams of scholarship on urbanization and urban questions: the agglomeration economies thesis (Venables 2005, World Bank 2009, Henderson 2010, Moreno-Monroy 2012), the urban bias thesis (Lipton 1977, Rigg et al 2009, Jones & Corbridge 2010), and writings on the informal sector (Breman 1996, Harriss-White 2002, Potts 2008) to mention a few. All of these streams are thematically allied to the discussion that is to follow; and so in an indirect way this thesis relates to all of them. However for the sake of discursive precision, I delimit the immediate and direct scope of this discussion to the writings of the critical urban theorists and their postcolonial critics.

This is because while most other schools of writing have occupied themselves with particular aspects of the urban experience in different parts of the world, it is critical urban studies and its postcolonial critics who have engaged with the task of theorizing the urban as a whole, taking it upon themselves to produce what might legitimately be called “urban theory”.

Urbanization as Capitalism

Urbanization as a socio-spatial phenomenon has been traditionally seen in association with the economic notion of structural transformation (Harris & Todaro 1970, Timmer 2009 etc.). The idea of the urban in much of critical urban studies today is drawn from the Euro-American (Western advanced capitalist) historical experience of the spread of capitalism, although the phenomenon of urbanization itself predates that by several centuries. Evidence of this Eurocentrism is found in both explicit and implicit claims made within the field of urban geography and the logic of urban theory that follows.

As Merrifield (2014: 1) summarizes, the interest of critical social scientists in the phenomenon of urbanization is rooted in the “obvious rejoinder” that “the city plays a special role under capitalism – indeed it was important in the birth of capitalism itself. The city assumes a twin role: an engine for capital accumulation, on the one hand, and a site for social/class struggle, on the other.”

In his seminal contribution to critical urban studies, Castells (1977) opened with an expression of “astonishment” that “urban problems” had come to be treated as autonomous topics of engagement in public and policy discourse (1977: 1). He went on to formulate “the urban question” in terms of the problems of capitalism, assumedly the foundational process to urbanization. Similar formulations were presented by Lefebvre (1991[1969]) that came to form the bedrock of present-day critical urban theory (Harvey 1989, 2001, 2008; Marcuse 2012; Brenner 2012 etc.). In this model, urbanization is the material manifestation of the “production of space” (Lefebvre 2003[1970]) which in turn is the outcome of the “spatio-temporal fix” (Harvey 2001, 2006) that is demanded by the sustenance of the capitalist system of production.

The process starts with the problem of over-accumulation of capital that faces the risk of loss of value over time or outright destruction unless profitably re-invested. This is accomplished through the search for newer frontiers of production and profit-making and bringing newer regions into the fold of the capitalist system. While the urban represents such frontiers, the creation of urban physical and social landscapes also acts as barriers to the further development of capitalism within the same spatial territory, leading it to eventually move out. This explains not only urbanization within capitalist economies but also the eventual extension of such economies to territories beyond their borders in the form of colonialism. Thus the urban is created and maintained through capitalist reproduction, often leading to “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005, 2008) i.e. privatization of capital through the dislocation of prevailing systems of resource use. In this model not only is urbanization an inevitable outcome of capitalism but also so is colonization. This is said to have manifested itself in different forms over the

decades, from imperialism under mercantile capitalism to globalization under finance capitalism. Given this formulation, the task of a critical urban theory is to contest the modes of operation of capitalism. This is made evident in the critical urbanist take on issues of social justice.

The prolific literature on “the right to the city” (Lefebvre 1991[1969], Harvey 2008, Marcuse 2009, Bhan 2009 etc.) bears evidence to this. The term has come to signify not only the right to all resources embodied in the city but also a right to the making of the city itself. It is understood as the right to have a say in shaping the process of urbanization. In the context of capitalist urbanization this implies a right to the process of economic production i.e. the creation and use of capital. Social justice in this urban context then has to be imagined in terms of class justice. In this imagination the urban universe coincides with the universe of capitalist production. For instance, this understanding of the right to the city propels Mitchell’s (2003:3) call for the right to public spaces based on the notion that urban public space in American cities had “suffered major onslaughts” from “increasing privatization” that created an urban scene “whereby only the largest consumer outlets survive”. It is this imagination of a global capitalism led urbanization that enables Marcuse (2009: 190-191) to answer the question of “whose right” in terms of the following actors: the *excluded*, the *working class*, the *small business people*, the *gentry*, the *capitalists*, the *establishment intelligentsia*, and the *politically powerful*. I will not elaborate on his definition of each of these categories, but suffice to mention here that they are all derived from the framework of seeing multi-national corporations and large business enterprises as the dominant actors in the urbanization process. These randomly selected examples give us an insight into which actors and institutions inhabit and animate this imagination of the urban universe. And following from that, who the actors and institutions are that are absent from this imagination. This is taken up in the critique of critical urban theory by postcolonial scholars. The critique has both substantive and positional aspects to it- i.e. critique based on what urban theory consists of and critique based on where it is produced from. As most geographers are wont to vouch for, the two are inextricably connected. I elaborate on this below.

One of the substantive critiques of the theory of capitalist urbanization is that in this historical imagination, colonialism is reduced to a mere signifier that is brought into the picture to take the story of capitalism forward and then discarded when that need is met (Chakrabarty 1992, 2000; Chattopadhyay 2012). Colonialism is given a peripheral role in the narrative of global urbanization, while capitalism and therefore the capitalists remain the “sovereign subjects” (following Chakrabarty 2000) of their own history. This is problematic because clearly this is a narrative flowing from the perspective of the imperialist, even if it is a critical one. It treats the South as a vacant, passive, silent space on the map to which

Western capitalism is able to lay claim for furthering its own story. Selected spots from the South (such as “megacities” like Mumbai or Johannesburg) emerge in this narrative as central and active agents when they embody the role of a bourgeois capitalist state or corporate institutions. But for the most part, the South is relegated to the “waiting room” (Chakrabarty 2000) of historical development, in anticipation of its capitalist history and anti-capitalist struggles to be fully formed. The model carries within itself an assumption that the futures of all urbanizations are knowable only through the narrative of capitalism and is therefore foretold. One is merely to wait for them to play out according to this script or make note of deviations by way of failures or aberrations in what Roy (2009a: 820) has called “that last and compulsory chapter on ‘Third World Urbanization’”. As this phrasing suggests, the deviations from the script of this capitalist history are often made sense of through the lens of “underdevelopment”. This brings in another aspect to this historicist narrative of capitalist urbanization—that of modernity. What might we learn about urbanization if we were to not take capitalism as an inevitable starting point and enquire instead after the actual historical experiences of the South, from a Southern perspective, critically interrogating the attached notions of modernity?

This question has been raised and tackled by successive postcolonial scholars. It is essentially what Chakrabarty (2000: 63-64) describes as “History 2”, which is the narrative of pasts that does not involve culmination into a single all-encompassing universal capitalism across the globe (which in the classical Marxist telling is “History 1”). History 2 is the possibility created by the consideration that places had histories, communities, social formations, and economic organizations from before they came in the path of capitalist expansion. Colonialism may have taken off as an arm of capitalism but in the way it is experienced by the colonized, it is a beast of its own. It requires the overthrow of existing social forms in order to make them amenable to the ways of capital. But this is rarely fully accomplished and original forms of social and economic organization persist through the violence of colonization and even after decolonization (Gidwani 2008). Chakrabarty (2000: 66) insists that we learn to see these forms as not “external” to capitalism, since such a way of seeing merely reinforces the Eurocentric idea of capitalism as the core narrative of all histories. These forms don’t exist merely to be either subsumed into or destroyed by capitalism. He insists that we see them as “existing in a relationship of difference to capitalist social organizations in plural and intimate ways, ranging from opposition to neutrality”.

Chattopadhyay (2012) further notes that the specific idea of difference that sustained the spread of colonialism was not based on class but rather on race. This means that urbanization in postcolonial contexts cannot be seen only as the material-spatial manifestation of global capitalism and urban justice in the post-colony entails more than just class struggle. Such an imagination in turn allows us

to take note of and attend to “the modes of economic and social organization, the creativity and resistance that are not fully theorized by capitalist histories of urbanization” (Chattopadhyay 2012: 85).

I turn now to the positionality aspect of the postcolonial critique. This has been articulated in the form of the question “from where on the map is urban theory produced?” (Roy 2009b, 2011, 2016) The positional aspect of the critique has to do with throwing light upon the points that lie outside the visual field of a capitalist/historicist theory of urbanization. This critique is also relevant to the second predominant theme within urban theorization – that of the “global city” as a territorial unit of urbanization. In the discussion of this thematic, the idea of modernity also comes into relief.

Urbanization as a collection of “global city” units

From the inception of urban studies, the terms “urban” and “the city” have been used more or less synonymously, making explicit the assumption that the city is the territorial unit of the process of capitalist urbanization. This usage has been pervasive despite there also being references from the beginning to images of urbanization that are not territorially bounded. For instance Lefebvre (1991[1969]) spoke of “the complete urbanization society” and “planetary urbanization”, an idea that has been appropriated and applied in various forms by subsequent scholars including most recently, Brenner and Schmid (2015). However, the fact remains that the mainstay of critical urban theory has been streams of scholarship originating in and dealing with the social reality of select metropolises of Euro-America- Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, Paris – and masquerading as having universal valence (Robinson 2002, 2006; Roy 2009a).

Following scholars like Sassen (1991, 2000) the “global city” paradigm has come to dominate urban theory. Global cities are seen as nodes or command-centers in the network of global finance capital and are unsurprisingly located predominantly in the West. They are in fact seen as the territorial units of the overall world economy (Robinson 2002, Roy 2009a, 2009b). The urban experience within this limited geographical arena is what largely forms the basis for urban theorization. This is made possible by the conceptualization of the notional other of the global city- the “megacity” (Robinson 2002, 2006). These are metropolises of the South which are deemed “big but powerless” (Roy 2009a: 820) because they are not quite there yet. They are the aspirational lesser cousins of global cities, held back by their poor physical infrastructure, lack of civic amenities, and high levels of poverty among other factors (Robinson 2002). This is where the questions of developmentalism and modernity assume importance.

Robinson (2006: 16-17) has documented that despite recurrent surfacing of ideas such as “planetary urbanization”, the urban has steadfastly been identified by defining an external other – characterized as “rural” at best and “primitive” at worst. This is corroborated by Merrifield (2014: 9-10) who notes that democracy, political consciousness, and urbanization have gone hand in hand since the time of Greek philosophy and that even Lefebvre (2003[1970]) has surmised that “the revolution will be urban”. Thus urbanity like modernity is achieved by signifying a certain other as not modern. This opens up the possibility for the hierarchical ranking of places and people as more or less urban and therefore more or less modern. It is this ideological framing that allows for the classification of some cities as global cities and others as megacities and yet others as “second-tier cities” and so forth; and the representation of the latter categories as in need of “development” and therefore incapable of bringing forth theory. Increasing numbers of postcolonial theorists have deconstructed this dominant form of modernity and built convincing cases for alternative forms where multiple ways of being and becoming modern can share space (e.g. Chakrabarty 2002a, Chatterjee & Ghosh 2006, Robinson 2006 etc.) I will not repeat these arguments here but will go directly to the critique of the global cities paradigm and its implications for urban theory instead.

As Robinson (2002, 2006) has pointed out, global cities as the places of theory making are the points on the map that are privileged by the dominant narrative of modernity. She concludes that such a theory is bound to be intellectually deficient in terms of being representative of the concerns of the contemporary times, when a majority of urban experiences take place in geographies outside of Euro-America. However she further argues, along with Roy (2009a, 2009b) and Parnell (2007) that it is not enough to include case studies from the South and make them fit into the existing framework. The clamor is not for adding the experiences of the South to an already established pro-forma of “predictable forms and hierarchical rankings” (Roy 2009a: 804). The call instead is to dislocate the center and therefore treat the South as a sovereign subject of its own urban history. Such an exercise would lead to what Roy (*ibid*: 806) describes as “not the mapping of bounded and located city-regions but rather an analysis of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities”.

In taking up this task, the postcolonial theorists are met with a challenge that urban theorists of the North were never made to contend with. This is the paradoxical challenge of producing theory that is simultaneously located and generalizable – the problem of studying cities “in a world of cities”. Robinson (2006) has suggested that this can be accomplished by thinking of all cities as “ordinary cities” and equally capable of dynamism and inventiveness. This then opens up the possibility for wealthier cities of the North to find lessons to learn from poorer cities of the South. The idea of “process geographies” has also been proposed

(Appadurai 2000) which entails studying processes in place of traits or characteristics and tracing these processes across geographies. Successful theorizations of urban informality across the Global South (see Roy & AlSayyad 2003, Roy 2009b, Roy 2011) have led to insightful accounts of the urban experience in the South. Following Spivak (2005) Roy (2009b) has also proposed that we identify the limits of our archival and canonical knowledge to find the entry point to the subaltern. In the context of Asian cities Ong and Roy (2011) have used “worlding” as a strategy to write historicized accounts of existing world systems that the global cities paradigm recognizes but cannot explain.

Many of these accounts challenge the proclaimed universality of the capitalist history of urbanization. King (1991:8 cited in Edensor and Jayne 2012) has observed that although globalization is located in those cities deemed to be at the apex of the world order, such an urban culture has not existed in these locations before the 1950s i.e. the period of decolonization. Thus a study of globalization is necessarily also a study of the postcolonial condition of the world. Diouf (2000: 680) in his study of traders in Senegal has noted “specific circuits of accumulation that do not conform to Western global capitalism” but exemplify “innovative modalities of dealing with acquisitions of wealth” in adaptation of the concurrent cultural traditions. In the same vein Kothari (2008: 502) calls for the foregrounding of “creativity involved in the slow and shrewd deployment of the local in global space and time”. Simone (2010) has described the multiplicity of types of economic units and manners of economic production that constitute the urban experience in the South from “Jakarta to Dakar” and how they are kept simultaneously operational through ties of trust and belonging at the family and community levels. Mbembe and Nuttall (2004: 351) write of African cities as “as much nodal points in multiple circuits of movement of goods, services, ideas and people, as they are anchor points for livelihood practices that are more settled, more locally embedded and oriented.”

The struggle to reconcile specificity with generalizability may be very much ongoing for the postcolonial theorists of the urban, but what is already evident from this growing body of work is that it continues to bring to light, valuable aspects of the urban experience from around the globe, that were lost in the totalizing narrative of capitalist urbanization. This makes it possible to reimagine the world as “radically heterogeneous” (Chakrabarty 2000) even as Eurocentrism continues to exist. It is important to bear in mind, as reminded by Chakrabarty (2002), that the mere identification, naming, and calling out of Eurocentrism as such do not make it disappear. Its deconstruction and dismantling is a long drawn and incremental process.

It is however, not the metropolises of the South alone that are implicated in the narrative of underdevelopment spawned by the global city centric theory of

capitalist urbanization. Small towns, especially in the South, but also in the North are subject to the same implications. This has given rise to a parallel stream of scholarship that seeks a fuller representation for the small town in urban theory.

Towns and small cities have been traditionally seen through the lens of functionality. Given the wide variability in how they are defined (e.g. population of 200 in Denmark and 5000 in India) it is their role in relation to other entities that has motivated the majority of scholarship around them. In the words of Rondinelli (1983: 382) “the value of small urban centers is not so much in their population sizes as in their functional characteristics.” The question most commonly asked of small towns is *what can they do for the national economy/rural development?* Thus they have been imagined as instruments to further the narrative of growth and modernity rather than as sovereign subjects of study in their own right. This has led to normative discussions around whether or not small towns should be cultivated and if so then what their optimal level of population should be. Within this academic construction of small towns, the narrative has been divided between those who deem all urban centers as inherently exploitative of their hinterlands (e.g. Lipton 1971) and those who make a case for the potential of small towns to act as local/regional growth and service centers (Tacoli 1998, 2003, 2006; Rigg 2006; Satterthwaite 2006). Part of the justification of the latter position has been drawn from the submission that a large section of the world’s low-income population actually resides in such locations. It has also been noted that the vast diversity in the economic bases of small towns globally, defies any ready generalizations about their role within the broader economy (Satterthwaite 2006). There have also been calls to extend our understanding of urbanity “beyond metro-centricity” (Bunnell & Maringanti 2010, Bell & Jayne 2009) by shifting focus to the field of influence and embodied politics of small towns instead of the smallness of their population size and how this might be fixed. Nevertheless our knowledge of small towns in the South, especially in the form of situated qualitative accounts remains scarce.

One of the assertions that has been made intermittently and is of relevance here is the point that the neat binaries of urban and rural do not stand on closer scrutiny and might obscure more than they enable in terms of analysis. Tacoli and Satterthwaite (2003) have submitted that researchers forego strict urban-rural categories superimposed by governments and see all settlements as variously positioned on a rural-urban continuum. Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) in the light of the “urban age” thesis from agencies such as UN-Habitat have reminded us that “urban” is after all a theoretical category – a name given to an idea that is fluid and subject to revision. Taking this line of logic further, Roy (2015) has argued that the urban is a governmental category that comes into being through interactions between state and subject and therefore needs to be seen in political rather than neutral epistemological terms. Thus the theorization of the urban can

no longer afford to restrict itself to bounded territories in positions of privilege. These lines of argument together point to a void within mainstream urban theory and open up the space for a detailed discussion of small towns in the South in all their territorial and conceptual messiness.

Following the postcolonial project of creating a cosmopolitan urban theory, this research has taken census towns in India as a point of entry into the study of small towns in the South as locations and subjects of theorization. What socio-economic and political processes go into the making of everyday life in these places? How do these places see themselves in relation to the post-colonial state apparatus and its modes of knowledge production? How do they relate to the dominant discourse on urbanization and the categories through which it has been articulated? To answer these questions I adopt an analytical framework inspired by and developed from the core ideas of Subaltern Studies, which I elaborate on in the upcoming chapter.

3. Subalternity: An Analytical Framework

In the previous chapter I summarized some of the arguments of the critics of hegemonic urban theory, many of who identify with a postcolonial standpoint. Several of them base their critique on the work of the Subaltern Studies collective in India. For the purpose of this research project I seek to employ an analytical framework that is directly influenced by and derived from the conceptual foundation of Subaltern Studies. In this section I will outline the core contentions of Subaltern Studies which form the premise of how such an outlook is to be employed for social analysis. In doing this I also respond to recent critiques of some of the principle protagonists of Subaltern Studies. This will be followed by a discussion of how subalternity as an analytical tool can be useful for geographers and urbanists.

Subaltern Studies as the politics of epistemology

Subaltern Studies⁹ started out as an intellectual enterprise to democratize historiography by intervening into what Chakrabarty (2000: 7) calls a “first in Europe, then elsewhere” model of history writing that had been the norm until the 1980s. Terming this structure of historiography as “historicist”, Chakrabarty (1992, 2000) argues that it is the pervasive historicism within the social sciences that has allowed a singular vision and form of modernity to be seen as the only legitimate way to be modern. Historicism, according to Chakrabarty (1992, 2000), is also the reason why every Indian historian is expected to have detailed knowledge of Euro-American history while their Anglo-American counterparts feel no intellectual obligation to make a reciprocal gesture. The same observation can be easily extended to the field of geography and urban studies.

⁹ I use ‘Subaltern Studies’ to refer to the original collective of the same name and their eponymous journal series; and ‘subaltern studies’ to refer to conceptual and analytical positions that followed in their aftermath and came to be applied in fields of study not directly connected to those of the members of the collective.

The notion of a grand narrative- a history as ‘theory’ – is challenged by postcolonialism. That is not to say that categories devised in the Euro-American contexts are summarily rejected by postcolonial scholars. The call instead is for their application and resulting analysis to take place in a spirit of vigilance against easy generalizations and misleading reductions. This is the case for both Marxian theory that envisages history as unfolding in stages, and neo-classical concepts of history as progress. Chakrabarty (2000: 13) argues that a blanket imposition of a historicist outlook allows “non-Western” experiences to be placed in the “waiting room” of history because they are “not yet there”. In this process, the histories of these contexts are no longer “sovereign subjects” in their own right but are made into instruments for narrating the purported historical (and geographical) variations of the same story – that of Europe and European history. In this sense, Subaltern Studies is an epistemological position that seeks to cull out the “non-West” as a sovereign subject of its own history which can be narrated through structures and categories that depart from the established norm of historiography. I place “non-West” within quotation marks to demarcate it as a conceptual category precipitated by the hegemonic historiography rather than as an actually existing subject of Subaltern Studies itself. Subalternists, or indeed any postcolonialist, would write in terms of specific places and not in terms of the “East” or the “non-West”.

Such an epistemological position can be quite revealing to a geographer and urbanist. Gregory (1994) has argued that our shared “geographical imagination” is a product of colonial discourse and needs critical examination. The very ways in which we think of places as near and distant, as familiar and mysterious is a result of how our perception of the world has been shaped by colonial geographical representations. Robinson (2006) and Ong (2011) amongst others have discussed the imprint of this received geographical imagination on urban theory. Along with Roy (2009a, 2009b, 2011) they are at the forefront of urban scholarship that demands that instead of case studies from the South being brought into the picture as empirical variants of the global city narrative of urbanization, the urban experiences unfolding in these locations be seen as deserving of a narrative in their own right – as sovereign subjects of their own history of urbanization. This is what I seek to do in this research project. Such an ambition demands that I spell out the particular elements from Subaltern Studies that I wish to adapt into an analytical framework and respond to critique levelled against them in recent times.

Subalternity as “a position without identity”¹⁰

The project of Subaltern Studies took off in the 1980s with a professed aim to counter the elitist (both colonialist and nationalist) prejudice in the writing of Indian history. It sought to acknowledge the contributions made by the “people on their own, independently of the elite” towards the making of Indian national identity and the idea of the Indian nation state (Guha 1982). It selected the peasant uprisings of the 1800s as its first site of exploration. In later years, the scope of the work of historians from the Subaltern Studies collective expanded to include contemporary Indian socio-politics, while the tradition itself went on to become influential in other academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism.

Gramsci and the Idea of the Subaltern

The Subaltern Studies collective, took as its point of departure, the writings of Antonio Gramsci. Spivak (2010) has argued that Gramsci’s use of the term “subaltern” in his *Prison Notebooks* was a strategy to escape censorship from the fascist Italian state of his times. Nonetheless, she demonstrates that the term was used by Gramsci to distinguish the Italian working class, with its geographical proximity and social interactions with Africa, from the working classes in England, France or Germany. The subaltern therefore is not the international proletariat and this is a conceptual separation that Gramsci insisted on (Spivak 2014). The term gained currency in academic circles with the translation and wider circulation of his work and lent itself to interpretations and appropriations. On the whole, the term subaltern came to be identified largely with the notion of a peasantry or a component/variant of an oppressed agrarian community.

Arnold (2012 [2000]) claims that there is no cohesive analysis of the peasantry in Gramsci’s work although it is mentioned intermittently, often in opposition to the urban working class bred as a result of the spread of the capitalist system of production. He further emphasizes that Gramsci’s analysis of what constitutes the positive or negative attributes of the subaltern was necessarily governed by his essential commitment to revolutionary Marxism i.e. the extent to which the elements of the peasantry, in his view, contributed to or militated against the attainment of a revolutionary class consciousness that could eventually overthrow the capitalist system.

Thus according to Arnold (2012[2000]) Gramsci’s use of the idea of what has been translated as “common sense” of the subaltern was pejorative and intended to encapsulate the “rag-bag of assumptions, beliefs with little internal consistency or cohesion- fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential” (2012: 29) that he

¹⁰ I borrow the expression from Spivak (2005). For more see Article 3.

believed existed in the historically specific subaltern consciousness of the Italian peasantry. It seems that the biggest takeaway from Gramsci's work for the Subaltern Studies collective has been the attention he paid to consciousness, culture, ideology and the view of a community as part of a larger socio-political order, which was a marked departure from the economic determinism of classical Marxism. It was the idea that popular culture has as much historical weight and energy as purely material forces.

For Guha (1982), the founder of the Subaltern Studies collective and the synonymous series of publications, the subaltern was definitely endowed with a political consciousness and the fragmentary and elusive nature of its expression had more to do with how it had been studied rather than how it really was. Thus within the Subaltern Studies stream of thought, at least in the initial phase, there was certainly greater enthusiasm and optimism for the political potential of the subaltern consciousness as compared to Gramsci. This is an important point of difference as it constituted the basis for identifying and countering the elite prejudice in history writing that emanated from seeing rulers, administrators, policies, individual leaders and elite organizations as the main – if not only – actors and driving forces of history.

Conceptual and Thematic Foundation

The starting point of Guha's (1982) formulation of a subaltern studies approach is the idea of "structural dichotomy" or the simultaneous existence of two streams of political consciousness. Each of these streams is contained within an "autonomous domain". Chatterjee (1993, 1998, 2000) has elaborated on these ideas by defining these notional domains in more concrete terms. For him the elite domain consists of "formally organized political parties moving within the institutionalized processes of the bourgeois state" while the subaltern domain consists of "peasant politics where beliefs and actions did not fit into the grid of interests that constituted the basis of bourgeois representative politics" (2000: 9).

Given this parallel of the elite-subaltern dichotomy with the bourgeoisie-peasantry dichotomy, it becomes imperative to dwell in some detail on these latter categories too. The main point of difference identified by Chatterjee (1998) in this regard is that within the bourgeoisie, collective action flows from a contract among individuals based on shared material and political interests. Within the subaltern domain, collective action flows from a sense of identity that the individuals derive from a sense of membership in a community. This leads us to a deliberation on what constitutes a community.

Chatterjee (1993, 1998) draws on earlier writings of Guha and calls for the formulation of a concept of community within a set of systematic relationships signifying the mutual identity and difference of social groups. To this end, he

suggests that we isolate the ideological invariants of the peasant consciousness i.e. their paradigmatic form. While a number of socio-cultural factors such as caste, religious community, language, kinship group etc. may be easily identified as the paradigmatic form of the subaltern community in the Indian context, Chatterjee and Guha both note that the separation of ‘we’ from ‘them’ takes place within frameworks of several more kinds of antagonistic power relations. Thus instead of restricting the idea of the subaltern to any one particular paradigmatic form, it is better to recognize that these forms are transient and malleable and take on different shapes under different contexts. However, if one is to forge ahead with the assumption that a subaltern political consciousness exists and that its form varies from struggle to struggle, the question emerges as to how this consciousness is to be defined and differentiated from an elite political consciousness.

To this, Guha (1982) and Chatterjee (1993, 2000) propose the idea of “resistance” as the core invariant of the subaltern consciousness that acts to maintain its identity and existence by culling out its autonomous domain and preventing it from getting subsumed within the domain of elite politics. If the two domains of political consciousness are imagined to exist in antagonism to each other, then the relationship between them can be seen as domination exerted by the elite domain and subordination experienced by the subaltern domain which it resists. This resistance may not be consistent, cohesive or within the legal parameters provided by state and law. It may not even be successful at all points of time. But simply by being there in its fragmented, sporadic, unorganized and uncoordinated forms it ensures the continuity of a subaltern political consciousness and thereby a subaltern autonomous domain. Thus the academic challenge in studying history through this prism was in recognizing the context specific paradigmatic form of the subaltern community, demarcating the exact line between the subaltern and the elite, and tracing the fluidity of this line. This gave rise to the question of how the subaltern consciousness in its authentic form could be retrieved.

Spivak’s (1988) famous interjection in the form of the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* influenced the tackling of this question and subsequent direction assumed by the project of Subaltern Studies. As Chatterjee (2010) surmised in a review of the impact of this essay on the collective’s work, it initiated a change in the core question from “What is the paradigmatic form of the subaltern consciousness” to “How can the subaltern be represented?” It has now become commonplace to assume that Spivak’s answer to the question she posed in the title of her seminal essay was an unqualified “no” and that this was reason enough to reject a subalternist approach altogether. However as she has herself later clarified¹¹, her critique of the subaltern school of historiography was centered on the claim that

¹¹ See this public lecture titled “The Trajectory of the Subaltern in my work” here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZHH4ALRFHw>

the subaltern had been silenced in particular instances because of the inability of the elite scholar to learn the vocabulary or speak the register of the subaltern. This silencing was neither absolute nor permanent. Picking up on this critique, different members of the collective have re-oriented their work towards this new question of representation and come to redefine what it means to adopt a subaltern studies perspective.

Contemporary perspectives in subaltern studies

The subaltern studies approach as it stands today, much like postcolonialism on the whole is an epistemological standpoint that informs the choice of method and shapes the defining of analytical categories and apparatuses. The claim is not that the subalternist, be it a historian or a geographer, is able to truly and fully “represent” the subaltern either in the sense of “making them present again” or “standing in for them” (Chatterjee 2010). Rather the idea is to acknowledge that for an elite academy, subaltern narratives are fragmentary and difficult to grasp in coherent forms but still important to pursue and bring to the forefront of analysis by positioning oneself away from the dominant locations from where the world has been mapped so far. Along with this comes the recognition that resistance, which is integral to the existence of a subaltern consciousness, can come in varying forms and is easily obfuscated by our received notions of what constitutes resistance. The job of the subalternist then, is to unlearn these received knowledges and bring a fresh analytical stance to the everyday experiences of social reality.

One of the outcomes of this evolving trajectory of Subaltern Studies has been the shift in emphasis from the agency of subaltern groups to the idea of subalternity itself. This has far-reaching implications for how the subaltern autonomous domain is conceptualized and in what kinds of analysis it can be deployed. As Chatterjee (2012) and Chakrabarty (2013) have argued, the initial concept of a domain of politics that is structurally exterior to the functioning of state, law, and formal governance is no longer a valid construct in contemporary India. This means that the search for a subaltern consciousness in its pure form is not only essentialist but also futile. Spivak’s (1999) formulation of subalternity, as necessarily a position of having been silenced, on the other hand runs into the risk of the constantly “disappearing subaltern” (Green 2002) as soon as there are signs of formal political mobilization. As an attempt to break out of this impasse, Nilsen and Roy (2015) have re-conceptualized the subaltern as not autonomous of elite discourse but as an “effect of the discursive systems”. In this conceptualization, political struggle is intrinsic to subalternity and takes place “in and through the institutions and relations through which hegemony is constituted” (2015: 15). This ties their idea of subalternity closely to the idea of resistance developed below, but before moving on to that a concluding word on the idea of autonomous domain

has to be spelt out. In contemporary imaginations of subalternity in general, and for the purpose of this study in specific, the autonomous domain is not a hyper-real notional space that is untouched by formal institutional apparatuses and therefore bereft of influences of the elite discourse. Instead, it encompasses all activities and articulations that follow an autonomous logic that is undocumented in the annals—the forms of ordering, meaning-making and navigation that are not reflected in the official archives and therefore constitute an autonomous object of study at the limits of our archives.

In recent times the idea of resistance has come to be seen as ambiguous, indeterminate, and enmeshed in the machinations of power to such an extent that it can be barely recognized in definitive terms. This is articulated by Ortner (1995: 175 cited in Chandra 2015:564) as “the subjective ambivalence of the acts for those who engage in them.” In other words, it pointed to the inability of the subaltern subject to fully comprehend and/or articulate the political intentions and implications of their resistance. Such an understanding of resistance even led to questions about whether it would ever be possible to represent it as an operationalized concept in academia. In response to such doubts, Chandra (2015) has sought to theorize resistance as “negotiation”. I find this formulation especially suitable for the purpose of this project.

Chandra (2015: 566) has identified three qualitative aspects to this idea of resistance as negotiation. The first is that resistance might fail to alter existing social arrangements but the “failure of resistance” is to be separated from the “failure to resist”. The second is that there is no teleological end implied in the idea of resistance. In other words, resistance can bring about changes in the everyday life experiences of individuals or communities without signifying an imminent revolutionary upheaval of the entire social order. The third is that the Marxist notion of class is integral to the conceptualization of subalternity and so the material bases of subalternity in each empirical context are to be made explicit for a thorough understanding of resistance in that context. Thus within this conceptualization of resistance as negotiation, the subaltern subject is able to recognize the structures of power and domination and act within them to push forward “subaltern political agendas”. It is also possible for the subaltern subject to adopt “the use of legal means for political and economic ends” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 23 cited in Chandra 2015: 568) and to make strategic use of electoral democracy. I find this conceptualization of resistance to be broad enough to encompass the various different modes of political expression available to subaltern groups; and yet not too wide so as to lose all meaning and applicability. I will return to this idea of resistance as negotiation in the synthesis of arguments while discussing the three autonomous domains of elite-subaltern dynamics that are of relevance to the contemporary urban condition of the census towns.

Subaltern Studies and its Critics

On the Spectre of Capital

In his recent book *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Vivek Chibber (2013a) has sought to “displace” postcolonial theory by proving “wrong” (2014: 622) the seminal works of Subaltern Studies by Guha (1997), Chakrabarty (2000), and Chatterjee (1998). While his book has been received with much enthusiasm in some sections, its core logic has been countered on many broad and specific counts by several subalternists and postcolonial scholars. In this section I take up first, some of the broad conceptual arguments and counter-arguments initiated Chibber (2013a), and then discuss in some detail his specific critique of Chakrabarty (2000) whose *Provincializing Europe* has been influential for geographers like Robinson (2002, 2006), Gidwani (2008) and Roy (2009, 2011, 2015, 2016) and is central to the analytical framework of this project.

To begin with, Chibber (2013a, 2013b, 2014) positions his book as a defense for Enlightenment rationalism and an assault on what his reviewer (Hung 2014: 281) describes as the “anti-universalism core of Subaltern Studies and the postcolonial enterprise”, defining his point of entry as “the gigantic wall separating East from West” supposedly constructed by Subaltern Studies (Chibber 2013b). This perception at its core is reminiscent of the accusations of ‘essentialism’, ‘nativism’, and ‘indigenism’ in the mid-1990s that Subaltern Studies faced from its own compatriots, and successfully refuted (see for e.g. Chakrabarty 2002a, 2002b; Kaviraj 2010). If one looked beyond the three long essays that Chibber (2013a) engages with, he would find that subalternists (those he writes against as well as others) have in no uncertain terms denounced “anti-universalism”.

Skaria (2009) in his review of Chakrabarty’s work in terms of its relationship with Enlightenment inheritances observes that the end-goal of his scholarship is to invent an alternative relationship between the postcolonial thinker and European thought since the latter is found by the former to be both indispensable and inadequate at the same time. Thus far from building walls, a subaltern studies approach is animated by the very desire to find new ways of reconciliation.

Chibber’s (2013a: 150) argument also has to do with the perceived postcolonial critique of the universalizing tendency of capital. He writes:

The universalization of capital is perfectly compatible with the persistence of social, cultural, and political differentiation between East and West. Capital does not have to obliterate difference in order to universalize itself.

Spivak (2014) has responded to this in detail and I summarize her argument here. She notes that Chibber (2013a) writes interchangeably of the ‘universalization of capital’ and the ‘universalization of capitalism’, thereby obscuring the crucial

difference in meaning. In his response to Spivak's critique, Chibber (2014: 621) has ascribed this to "established convention" in the use of the terms. However, Spivak's (2014) elaboration of their difference in meaning is illuminating. Capital, she notes, is the abstract concept while capitalism is the concrete system implemented by deliberate human action, enacted through policy and discourse. The "universal logic of capital" – understood as the desire to replicate the same system of exchange everywhere – is a logic that has evidently penetrated global space. However the nature of capitalisms through which this logic is played out in action is not uniform everywhere and therefore not "universal". While Chibber (2013a) is concerned with the empirical details of how capitalism unfolded in Britain, France, and India, the imperative for Subaltern Studies was never geared towards "getting the empirical story right" (Roy 2016: 6). As Chatterjee (2013: 69) writes in his response to Chibber (2013a), "the historical problem confronted by Subaltern Studies is not intrinsically a difference between west and east" as Chibber makes it out to be. The historical problem that Subaltern Studies addressed instead was the lack of democracy in liberal historiography. What Chibber (2014: 618) writes of as "Eurocentric bias" was in fact not merely a bias but a foundational element and entrenched characteristic of Enlightenment historiography for Subaltern Studies. Thus Subaltern Studies was and subaltern studies continue to be a project about epistemology – about how, through what categories and concepts, may we make sense of social reality in particular locations. Chibber, argues Spivak (2014), misunderstands it to be an ontological project of trying to describe what is – what exists. Universal capitalism? Europe? Non-West?

Here I turn to the specific argument of Chakrabarty (2000) in *Provincializing Europe*. Chibber (2013a) takes Chakrabarty's (2000: 63) idea of History 1 to mean capitalism itself. As Spivak points out (2014: 187), Chakrabarty's (2000) History 1 is not the actual experience of British capitalism but rather the ideal type – the narrative of a paradigmatic Capitalism – constructed under liberal historiography. Therefore, History 2 is not the "residual category" of "everything but capitalism" as Steinmetz (2014: 281) makes it out to be, in his review of Chibber (2013a) but rather the narratives of history, the possible pasts that exist outside of the hegemonic historiographical practices. Chakrabarty (2000: 69) sees History 2s as constantly interrupting History 1 and thereby giving rise to particular historical trajectories of capitalism at various sites¹². Chibber (2013a, 2013b) interprets this interruption to mean a complete blockage of the paradigmatic Capitalism, which was never implied in the first place. Spivak (2014) in her critique has also pointed out the conflation of the colonizing bourgeoisie with the colonized bourgeoisie in

¹² For analytical application of this see Gidwani, V. (2008) *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India*, Minnesota University Press

Chibber's (2013a) book. I do not wish to re-produce these arguments here, but would like to turn instead to the implications of Chibber's (2013a) thesis for this research project.

The basic contention here is, in what terms should one interpret and describe the social reality of present day India? In short, if one is to ask "is there capitalism in India?" the answer would be "yes, there are *capitalisms* in India". There is the global capitalism of Posco and Coca-Cola. There is also the crony capitalism of Tata and Ambani, alongside the "socially regulated", "small-scale capitalism" (Harriss-White 2004, 2005), the "fraternal" capitalism of subaltern groups (Chari 2004), as also many forms of production that may variously be described as "pre-capitalist", "feudal", "traditional", "informal", or "locally embedded" depending on one's frame of reference. According to Chibber, all of this can be understood as "part of the same basic story" (2013a: 128). If that is indeed so, then what might that basic story be? In Chibber's words (2013b: 9), that is the story of "the struggles of subaltern classes" understood in terms of "basic human nature" and its concerns with "physical well-being", "self-determination" and such to name a few. I believe as social scientists we can all agree that we are concerned with the physical well-being of all people. But the question is how far can that analytical position take us? Critical social science is after all not merely concerned with 'well-being' but rather with justice. And to articulate a road map for justice one has to identify and name the systems of oppression. As Spivak (2014: 189) asks "whose physical well-being by what permissible narrative?"¹

On the question of caste

Another substantive critique of Subaltern Studies has come from the quarters of Ambedkarite¹³ scholarship and practitioners of Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi (henceforth DBA) politics. One line of critique has to do with the subject-position of the members of the Subaltern Studies collective and their academic successors (most are "upper caste" and/or members of privileged Savarna Hindu society). The claim is that they have failed to engage meaningfully or at any considerable length with the works of DBA ideologues like Ambedkar, Periyar, and Phule and the role they played in the Indian anti-colonial struggle (see e.g. Bhagavan & Feldhaus 2008). While this is a popular line of argument with many DBA activists, Das (2015) has found it to be not only a limiting critique but also not entirely factually accurate. On the contrary Das (2015) claims that founding members of the collective like Chatterjee (2004), Chakrabarty (2009), and Pandey (2013) have in fact engaged with the philosophical foundations of Dalit politics and come to an impasse over how the state is viewed in the respective political philosophies. While one of the cornerstones of the Subaltern Studies discourse has been a critique of the dominant

¹³ See Chapter 4 for detailed explanation.

'statist' approach towards modernity in post-colonial India, in their reading the Dalit political project has been strongly informed by the very "liberal view of the state" that they sought to problematize. Thus, according to Das (2015), the question of how Dalit politics perceives the state is central to the question of whether or not subaltern studies and Dalit assertion are mutually compatible. Through a brief but systematic review of recent Dalit cultural activism and Dalit political narratives, Das (2015) demonstrates that even if Dalit political ideology was consumed by a faith in the values and institutions of liberal modernity at its onset, this has not been a historical fixity. In course of their political interactions with the post-independence state in India, the class of Dalit intellectuals and activists have adopted a range of heterogeneous positions from a highly critical stance to a strategically ambivalent one, all of which are far-removed from the naive 'statism' that they were suspected of. This has simultaneously proved erroneous the claims of the subalternists about the nature of Dalit political consciousness, while also bringing the two schools of thought closer in terms of analytical coherence. Concerns still remain over the politics of naming and the valency of the self-descriptive term 'Dalit' over the label 'subaltern' (e.g. see Rao 2009). Individual DBA scholars have also countered specific arguments on social-historical interpretations of various members of the collective (see e.g. Guru 2012). However on the whole, there seems to be no fundamental incompatibility between subaltern studies and a DBA project of political assertion through narrative, historiography, and discourse. As acknowledged by Das (2015: 65), it is the intellectual inheritance of Subaltern Studies as well as the limitations and silences of the project that are of instrumental value to the idea of what he calls "a Dalit historiography".

Subalternity in Geography

The concept of subalternity has been employed in multiple ways and on multiple occasions by geographers (e.g. Gidwani 2009 presents a comprehensive overview). Chari (2011: 2-3) has interpreted it as a manner of using theory, a way of doing analysis rather than as a label or a category with a fixed form within which to place people – "a meta-concept that tells us how to use concepts while building solidarities through social and spatial difference". This stance resonates with Spivak's (2005) interpretation of subalternity as a position without a fixed identity, which has been adopted and applied by Roy (2009b, 2016) amongst others. Adopting a subaltern position, argues Chari (2011: 7), "presumes the complexity that actually exists, and also, presumes the possibility that everyone can critically renovate their consciousness of everyday relations of oppression." Thus a subaltern studies approach in a geographical project would take as its starting point, the "radical heterogeneity" (Chakrabarty 2000) of the social realities

surrounding us and develop a form of analysis that tends to this complexity. The presumption embedded in such a position is that not all realities can be modelled or adequately analyzed using the same set of concepts. This project follows this presumption.

Jazeel (2014: 89) has argued that employing the concept of subalternity as an analytical tool in the field of geography would mean “teasing out geographies that are subaltern in the context of the discipline’s hegemonic theorizations and concept-metaphors.” In the context of this study, that would imply critically questioning the given conceptual categories of urban and rural, agrarian and non-agrarian, formal and informal, and state and market. It would imply understanding in detail the everyday experiences of space and place; pitting this understanding against the doctrines of established theory and rejecting those doctrines that do not resonate. It would mean recording and interpreting the processes of place-making not from the perspective of meta-concepts like structural transformation, urban bias or global capitalism; but instead from the perspective of ethnographic insights into people’s everyday navigations of micro-geographies. In this quest the study itself assumes a subaltern position with respect to the dominant disciplinary order.

However that is not all. Subalternity in geography also implies a methodological stance rather than solely the creation of a new theoretical paradigm. Borrowing Spivak’s (1985:345) terms, Jazeel (2014: 89) describes this as the “interventionist value” of the subaltern studies approach. Instead of trying to reconstitute the existing disciplinary order into a “correct theoretical practice”, it focuses on developing “contingent methodologies” that can make visible the flows of power in the given context. This understanding of subalternity has been valuable for this study. The participatory mapping exercises (see Article 3) have been one of the areas where a subaltern studies approach has been the guiding principle. The adoption of oral history interviews as a methodological tool for a geographical study is another such instance. Adopting these subaltern “strategies” (Jazeel 2014: 90) has led to the discovery of sites and spheres within which the theoretical concept of subalternity may be found to be operational. For instance the domain of local collective organization of traders and business owners in the towns emerges as an autonomous domain of subaltern politics that is in a relation of difference with the elite sphere of the politics of industrial and commercial policy. At the same time, the domain of identity formation and place-making by subaltern groups such as Dalits and Adivasis¹⁴ within the towns constitutes itself as autonomous

¹⁴ I use ‘subaltern groups’ here in the sense of a position of subalternity with respect to the dominant socio-political order and policy-making structures. It is not to equate Dalit, Adivasi or Bahujan identities as ‘subaltern identities’ and thereby fall into the tropes of ‘identity politics’. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the label ‘subaltern’ has been rejected by some Ambedkarite scholars in favour of a more definitive and historically-experientially embedded ‘Dalit’/‘Bahujan’/‘Adivasi’.

from the domain of elite narratives of town history from dominant groups. (see Articles 3 and 4)

Thus in the field of human geography, and for the purpose of this study, subalternity is both an epistemological position and a methodological intervention. In the following figure I have attempted to schematically represent core components and logical flows of a subaltern studies inspired analytical framework. The circles represent coherent corpuses of scholarship while the rectangles represent fundamental concepts that are elementary to these corpuses. The identification of elite and subaltern spheres of political consciousness is at the starting point of this analysis. The relationship of resistance between these spheres constitutes an autonomous domain of study. The knowledge generated around this autonomous domain reifies the fundamental idea of creating a sovereign subject of study where none existed before.

In the following figure, postcolonial theory is imagined as a body of work within which the concept of a sovereign subject is an elementary one. To use Chakrabarty's (2000) terminology, a sovereign subject is all the possible History 2s when they are written as histories in their own right, rather than as non-History 1 (capitalist or otherwise). To arrive at this sovereign subject and attempt to write its history, I turn to the body of work within postcolonial studies, that is known as Subaltern Studies – the collective, their work, and the eponymous publication. Within this body, I locate another foundational concept – that of spheres of political consciousness. The task of this project then is to identify the elite and subaltern spheres of consciousness within the context of census towns as sites of subaltern urbanization. This identification is dependent on recognizing and naming the forms of resistance that maintain the dichotomy between the elite and the subaltern spheres. To do this, I use the concept of resistance as negotiation. On identifying resistance through this construction, I treat it as an autonomous domain for which a historical trajectory can be traced. This historical trajectory then becomes the particular History 2 of that particular sovereign subject. This is what constitutes the analytical apparatus of my study.

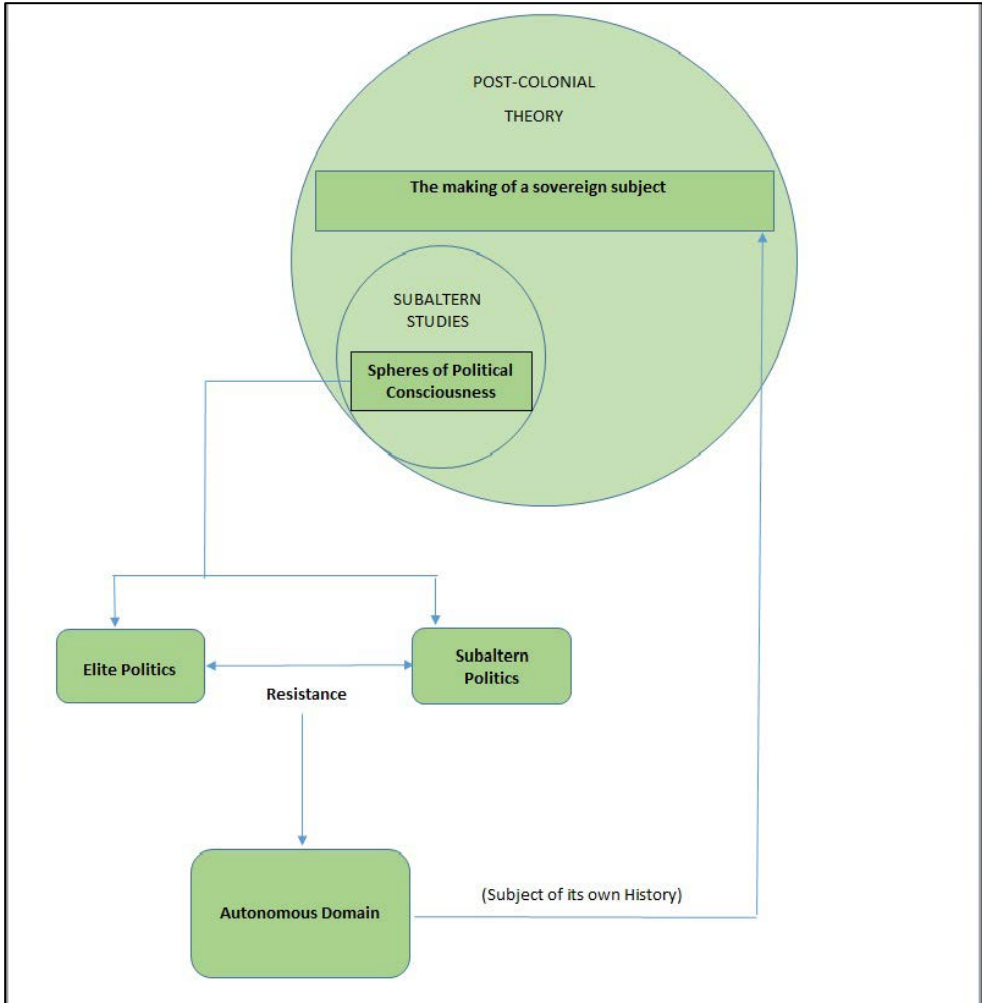


Figure 1.
Schematic representation of the analytical framework

4. India and West Bengal: An Introduction to the Political Setting

The analytical framework outlined above lays emphasis on the contextual, the local and the everyday. For this reason the project merits a detailed description of the themes that frame the setting of the study. In this chapter I attempt to summarize relevant literature around themes that assist in the reading of the articles ahead. I start with a discussion of the nature of the state in post-colonial India. This is closely related to debates around the nature of capitalist development in India, which I take up in the second section. This is followed by a discussion of DBA as a category of analysis, which occupies an important place in the articles. The final section in this chapter is an introduction to the state of West Bengal. I comment on its position with regard to federal relations within the Indian polity and establish its location within the preceding thematic discussions.

State, polity, and society in post-colonial India

It has been argued that the establishment of political modernity in India in the form of democratic institutions of governance was marked by an inherent contradiction (Chatterjee 1998, Chakrabarty 2002, Kaviraj 2010). On one hand the adoption of universal adult suffrage indicated the readiness of the ruling elite to extend the same standards of political citizenship, to the larger society, which it held for itself. On the other hand, the perceived absence of a mature and well-defined ‘civil society’ (in the bourgeois sense) implied that the state was constructed by the elite as an entity external to the society it governed and took it upon itself to regulate every aspect of it.

Kaviraj (2010) has argued that this externality that the post-colonial Indian state ascribed to itself was a direct consequence of the uncritical acceptance, of the colonial discourse on Indian society, by the post-colonial ruling class. Not only did the colonial regime “impose on social action a completely different picture of what the social world was really like” (2010: 18) but also it “forgot to explain itself” to

“the world of India’s lower orders” (2010: 37). What is implied by this is that the colossal efforts at enumeration and legislation undertaken by the colonial apparatus were intended for the architects and engineers of the colonial regime to make sense of the landscape they were meant to govern. This includes amongst other things, the census operations and classifications of all manners such as that of communities into lists of ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Schedules Tribes’ and of physical territory into police-station units, sub-divisions, presidencies etc. These classifications did not necessarily correspond to the ways in which people themselves had been organizing their social relations and the space in which they were enacted. Kaviraj (2010: 39) further argues that even after the end of colonial rule this particular idea of the state continued its “triumphant career”, making the post-colonial state not only post-colonial in terms of chronology but also in terms of arising from the particular history of colonization. This is not an observation to be taken lightly, since its implications are described by him in the following terms:

“...if Indian politics becomes genuinely democratic in the sense of coming into line with what the majority of ordinary Indians would consider reasonable, it will become less democratic in the sense of conforming to the principles of a secular, democratic state....”

The most recent evidence of this was played out at the Haryana state legislative assembly where the Minister of Education invited Jain monk, Tarun Sagar, of the Digambar sect to deliver a lecture on the importance of religious values for politics¹⁵. The event was supported by members of the ruling and opposition parties alike. Tarun Sagar proceeded to make an appearance in the nude, as per the prescriptions of his faith, and delivered an hour-long discourse mired in misogynistic metaphors. While the mainstream urban media vacillated between outrage and ridicule over the incident, the members of the state legislative assembly celebrated the success of what they hoped would form precedent for political and legislative practice in the state. This incident is symptomatic of the obvious disconnect between the logic of a secular democracy captured in the constitution of India, and the logic of popular politics and mobilization that formed the subject of Subaltern Studies in its nascent years. This element of incompatibility is important to flag for this study.

Kaviraj (2010), following Chatterjee (1998, 2006), has argued that this incompatibility is the result of an impersonal state apparatus being imposed on a society organized on the principle of a religious order based on caste. This religious order is further marked by asymmetric hierarchies along the lines of ritual, material, and political entitlements. By this is meant that the ranking order

¹⁵ See <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/haryana-monsoon-session-laced-with-humour-jain-monk-drives-bitter-messages-home/story-kkOSVc2ZHf0hUR1BsEYEMN.html>

of caste groups is different based on different criteria such as access to education, ownership of land and other productive resources, and inheritance of political status. This gives rise to parallel, incumbent, and intersecting ways in which groups are ordered – “fuzzy communities” in the words of Kaviraj – in relationships of interdependence, vertical hierarchy, and horizontal segmentation. The inability of the state mandated epistemological approach to adequately describe this complex social formation is illustrated by the reduction of thousands of different caste groups existing in asymmetric hierarchies to only three governmental categories of ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Other Backward Classes’, and the residual ‘general category’.

In the post-independence period, the state in India “became ubiquitous, but also universally unreliable” (Kaviraj 2010: 224). It arguably emerged as the largest dispenser of injustice despite its proclaimed role as benevolent social reformer. Building on this contradictory nature of the post-colonial Indian state, Chatterjee (2006, 2009) put forth his now famous formulation of the ‘political society’ – an ontological other to the ‘civil society’. The ‘political society’ was said to be composed of those groups of people who simultaneously demand welfare rights of the state while also challenging its incongruent, exclusionary forms through extra-judicial means. They are groups that don’t fit into the neat official order of formal institutions and activities – the slum-dwellers, street hawkers, informal sector workers – who navigate the state apparatus to make the most of it, without falling into the trappings of what is deemed legal and therefore acceptable by the civil society. While the stark conceptual divide between ‘civil’ and ‘political’ society has been challenged and modified by subsequent authors¹⁶, the important analytical feature that persists is the idea of group-based rights and demands as opposed to a politics based on individual citizenship. Chatterjee identified this as a key feature of the political society and according to Kaviraj it continues to be the defining feature of “most major radical demands in Indian politics” (2010: 224).

The ongoing Dalit movement in Gujarat¹⁷, with its demand for land redistribution and an end to dehumanizing occupations like cattle scavenging, is the current, most articulate expression of this tendency. Other prominent examples include the steady rise in power since the 1980s of political parties representing interests of particular caste groups such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD); and the persisting centrality of caste as a factor in the electoral fate of political parties across the spectrum. Without going into normative debates around the implications of such politics, the main take-away for the purpose of this study is that there exists in India a dissonance between the logic of the formal state

¹⁶ See e.g. Sarkar (2011)

¹⁷ See <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dalit-asmita-yatra-from-ahmedabad-to-una-a-journey-for-liberty/article8991385.ece>

apparatus as mandated by the idea of liberal democracy and the domain of everyday actions on the part of those being governed; and that the paradigmatic form of such actions is that of group-based identity politics. This implies that such politics must be centered in any social analysis from a subaltern perspective.

Capitalist development in post-colonial India

The trajectory of the Indian economy in the post-colonial period has not adhered to the script of a clean structural transformation with labor and capital moving from agriculture to non-agriculture. Although the share of agriculture in GDP has fallen consistently over time, the fall in its share in employment has been neither proportional nor consistent. The manufacturing sector has been largely stagnant with services emerging as the dominant sector in employment. This sectoral re-configuration of the economy has been marked by the presence of a growing workforce that is estimated to be up to 95 per cent “informal” or “unorganized” (Breman 1996, Harriss-White 2002, NCEUS 2008 etc.)¹⁸ Another defining feature of this vast informal workforce is that it is highly mobile in the form of seasonal and circular migration for multi-local livelihoods in different parts of the country (Deshingkar & Akter 2009).

Given this broad overview, one of the central debates around the state of the Indian economy has been over its relationship with the notion of capitalist development. Harriss-White and Hayer (2015:1-2) insist that “India’s transition to capitalism is well and truly over” while maintaining that this has taken place through “a diversity of capitalist trajectories” rather than in adherence to a single universal form of capitalism. Sanyal (2006) on the other hand points to the same heterogeneity in the existing forms of economic production to argue that a “capitalocentric” (Gibson-Graham 1996 cited in Sanyal 2006: 5) description of the economy serves to obscure more than it illuminates. The conflict of interpretation here seems to be based on the question of what exactly constitutes capitalist development. Among the various features that have been highlighted by different groups of scholars are- the presence and proliferation of market based commodity exchange, the emergence and growth of a capitalist class that is driven by the need to accumulate, a differentiation of classes based on production and use of surplus, and the hegemonic status of private property. Thus the debate tends to veer towards a nitpicking over terms and definitions, even as successive scholars have stressed on the need to focus on empirical aspects, especially based on in-depth field based descriptive studies.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of these concepts see this report from the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector http://nceuis.nic.in/Final_Booklet_Working_Paper_2.pdf

Small towns and sites of subaltern urbanization are the least represented in such studies. A majority of studies (see for e.g. Banerjee-Guha 2010, Baviskar 2011, and Sundar 2016) are interested in the machinations of global and corporate capital concentrated either in big metropolitan centers or on the sites of extraction such as mining interests on Adivasi forest land. Another significant share of studies deal with agrarian transformations and are interested in the question of whether and to what extent Indian agriculture is capitalist (see for e.g. Lerche 2013, Harriss-White & Heyer 2014, Mohanty 2016, Djurfeldt 2016). Nondescript small towns fall through the cracks of this fractured academic agenda. There is also no reliable verdict on the overall position of the Indian economy in this regard. Lerche (2015: 48) in his long-term statistical data based discussion of regional patterns in agrarian accumulation states that “there is clearly not a straightforward relationship between agrarian surplus and industrialization”. He further argues that “whether the over-all inter-sectoral economy in India is organized in such a way that value is transferred from agriculture to industry or vice-versa is impossible to establish”.

There is however the semblance of a consensus on the lack of viability of depending on a simplistic capital versus labor dynamic to fully or adequately describe the unfolding socio-economic reality in India. Chari (2004, 2015) found in his ethnographic exploration of a small manufacturing center- Tiruppur- in south India that the accumulation of capital had assumed a dispersed socio-spatial form that did away with the differentiation between labor and capital. Basile and Harriss-White (2000) in their study of civil society and the politics of accumulation in another small town in south India found that the differentiation within the “rural capitalist class” was markedly more than the differentiation between capital and labor. They further argued that social institutions such as those of caste, community, and gender were mobilized to rally state, capital, and labor in favor of the interest of the rural capitalists. They call this “corporative capitalism” as opposed to the statist capitalism of the metropolitan centers. Chari (2004) termed the small-unit based, “self-made” accumulation by backward caste entrepreneurs as “fraternal capital” which thrived on a more firm articulation of the matrix of patriarchal, capitalist, and caste-based power.

Bearing in mind the widespread emergence and proliferation of own-account workers, single member firms, and small traders, Harriss-White (2012: 115-118) has identified “petty commodity production” (henceforth PCP) as the defining form of economic activity in contemporary India. Defining PCP as “a form of independent productive activity for the market in the spheres of manufacturing, trade, and services” she describes it as standing between “labor-hiring capital on the one hand and hired labor on the other, though it may be merged with both”. For Harriss-White, PCP has “no single distinctive internal logic” (ibid: 144) and is

most markedly characterized by the oppressive conditions under which it takes place.

While accounts such as these are obviously valuable attempts towards a more full and adequate understanding of the socio-economic conditions in locales away from the spotlight, one might ask from a subaltern studies perspective- what the sovereign subject of such analyses is. The sheer volume and visibility of different forms of economic practice that are not canonically 'capitalist' have placed social studies in post-colonial India under analytical duress. The response has often been to tell new empirical stories, but through the vocabulary of pre-existing conceptual categories. It is this quest to rehash existing conceptual frameworks that has led to everything from "all forms of non-market exchanges" to "wages/profits earned by own-account workers" (Basile 2011) to be categorized as "accumulation". In the process, "relations of caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, locality, and generation" have been "reworked as social structures of modern capitalism" (Harriss-White 2012:124). This implies that despite the acknowledgment of a highly heterogeneous socio-economic reality that is shaped by the intersections of multiple relations and institutions, the sovereign subject of social analysis continues to be the story of capitalism.

The institutional specificities such as those of caste and gender are seen as one of many empirical details that constitute the Indian variant of the universal narrative of capitalist development. Apart from the fact that it reflects the very Eurocentric historicist approach that Chakrabarty (2000) has called 'History 1', this line of analysis also has its limits in its potential to imagine justice. In this study, I depart from this line of analysis and take the empirical inputs rather than the pre-existing conceptual framework as a point of entry. I attempt to describe the forms of socio-economic developments taking place at the sites of subaltern urbanization and the politics of social relations that make those particular forms possible. In doing this I foreground narratives and derive conceptual categories from them instead of trying to dismember and fit them into pre-existing categories. This also means that categories and meanings that are locally in circulation and are used on an everyday basis to make sense of social reality are incorporated into the analysis even if they do not resonate with existing social theory.

As a concluding word on capitalist development in India, I would like to flag Sanyal's (2006: 64) concept of the "need economy". Constituting this as the ontological other of capitalist production, Sanyal (2006) distinguishes it as "commodity production with the purpose of acquiring money that enables access to a bundle of goods and services." What this means is that even if returns within the need economy can be categorized as accumulation, such accumulation does not abide by the logic of capital but is utilized in a need-based manner. Building on this argument, Chatterjee (2008) has argued that the canonical understanding of

transition under capitalism can no longer be applied to the agrarian and informal sectors of India. Extending Sanyal's (2006) core contention that the part of the society and economy labelled as developing or backward is now a structural necessity, a constitutive other to the developed corporate capitalism of metropolitan India, Chatterjee (2008) predicts that primitive accumulation on the part of elite India will continue to take place at the expense of the primary producers of subaltern India. At the same time, increasing governmental efforts to reverse the impact of this primitive accumulation will be inevitable, given the political potential of a "passive revolution" by the subaltern groups. In short, there will be a "hegemony of the logic of corporate capital among urban middle classes", but "bulk of India" – the small towns, villages, and in-between places – live "outside that zone" (2008: 62). Therefore, the story of the bulk of India has to be told in registers that depart from the established narrative format of capitalist development.

'Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi' as social and analytical category

The centrality of caste in any discussion of a topic related to India can hardly be overstated. Of all the different kinds of group-based identity politics, the ones based on caste are both the most pervasive and the most polarizing. It is not however caste alone that features in the construction of such group identities but also tribal-ness or indigeneity¹⁹ which is embroiled in the imagination of caste as a social order and an organizing principle for social life. The issue of caste has been broached in academic scholarship from many different angles. At times it is seen as a purely demographic category based on the official classifications of 'Scheduled Caste', 'Scheduled Tribe', 'Other Backward Classes' and 'general category'. In this kind of analysis the emphasis is usually on measuring the incidence of various indicators – per capita income, literacy rate, infant mortality rate etc. – in particular demographic groups. On other occasions caste is treated as a neutral cultural category, secondary in importance and relevance to the economic categories of income, wealth, and class. The connection between the materiality of caste and its implications for social relations in terms of power, status, and justice has been explored to a limited extent. Most of the critical scholarship on caste relations is rooted in Ambedkarite thought. In this thesis I adopt the Ambedkarite vocabulary of 'Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi'. This implies that I use 'caste' as shorthand for a whole gamut of social relations that emerge from the Hindu philosophy of a society based on intersecting systems of hierarchies.

¹⁹ I use 'indigeneity' to cater to an international audience, although the Indian state disputes the indigenous status of such groups while acknowledging their right to affirmative action.

Thorat and Newman (2010) identify caste as a system of social and economic governance that divides people into social groups wherein, the social and economic rights and entitlements of each individual is pre-determined and prescribed at birth and made hereditary. Thus, they argue that exclusion in the civil, educational and economic spheres is internal to the caste system and a necessary outcome of its governing principles. They further observe that the system also provides for a community based regulatory mechanism to enforce the system through social penalties and ostracism. Hence the rights and privileges of an individual are on account of her membership to a caste group. Therefore, in the market economy framework, levels of occupational mobility would be separate for different caste groups, through restrictions in various markets such as land, labor, capital credit and other inputs and services necessary for pursuing any business or educational activity.

Building on these theoretical deductions on the nature of economic exclusion within the institution of caste, Thorat, Mahamallik and Sadana (2010) designed a study in which they operationalized the idea of caste-based economic exclusion through the following four indicators:

- complete denial of certain groups in hiring or sale of factors of production like land, capital assets, services and inputs as also from social provisioning like education, healthcare, housing etc. based on factors which are unrelated to productivity and other economic attributes
- selective inclusion but with differential treatment to excluded groups such as differential fees charged for public services, price manipulation etc.
- unfavourable inclusion bound by caste obligations and duties resulting in overworking, forced attachment and differential treatment at work place
- exclusion from certain categories of jobs and services

The study was carried out in 2003, covering 664 households from three villages of Odisha, Maharashtra and Gujarat, representing the three officially recognized caste groups i.e. general category (“upper castes”), Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and the Other Backwards Castes (OBCs/Bahujan). In the analysis of their findings, the authors report a small but significant shift in the traditional patterns of farm land ownership and fixed capital assets ownership. While according to customary rules these markets were completely out of bounds for the Dalit communities, the authors found twenty two per cent of the studied Dalit households to be either owning marginal tracts of farm land or be engaged in some form of non-farm

production and business. However the authors also found continuation of customary restrictions within these markets and hence the evidence for caste based economic discrimination. This was especially true for the employment market in both farm and non-farm sectors, as spelt out both in the narratives of Dalit employment seekers and in the measurement of average number of days employed in a year, for agricultural workers from different caste groups. Dalits were especially found to be excluded from activities like harvesting of fruits and vegetables and in the employment for domestic work (2010a: 174). In the land market discrimination was detected in the unwillingness of general category sellers to sell land to Dalit buyers that was located adjacent to “upper caste” neighborhoods or in the vicinity of temples etc.

Alongside these market restrictions, there was also evidence for wage discrimination against Dalit communities in terms of absolute wage paid, time intervals in payment of wages and wage to work ratio. While some forms of exclusion were documented as differences in the annual wages earned and average days of employment per year between the different caste groups, other forms of “unfavourable inclusion” (2010a: 170) were documented in Dalit women’s narratives of feeling obligated to perform cleaning duties during festivals and social events in “upper caste” households.

In another study based on data from the Fourth Economic Census (GoI 2005), Thorat, Kundu and Sadana (2010) found that the representation of Dalits in ownership of private enterprises and businesses in rural and urban areas across all sectors was meagre. It further emerged in their analysis that most of the enterprises owned by individuals from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were run by family labor within the household. These groups were also massively over-represented in the labor hired by private enterprises under the ownership of “upper caste” and OBC individuals. Some of the sectors where the “upper caste” ownership of private enterprises was entirely dominant were public administration, defense, compulsory social security, education and financial intermediation.

While the results of these studies are along expected lines and have almost been part of popular wisdom for decades, what marks these academic interventions is the attempt to crystallize the notion of caste based economic exclusion through practical indicators and conceptual constructs that make the phenomenon both identifiable and measurable. Within this academic context there has been a growing acknowledgment of the need for intensive qualitative enquiries into the experience of caste in the contemporary Indian socio-economic scene.

In recent years, Jodhka (2012, 2015) has launched a systematic deconstruction of the textbook understandings of caste in India – one based on a sense of exceptionalism that depoliticizes the aspect of entrenched inequality and injustice. Such an understanding, prevalent and popular among the elite urban sections as

also academics of various persuasions, upholds the view that caste as an institution of relevance would have withered away if not for its opportunistic revival on the part of political parties through affirmative action policies. The view encapsulates both the colonial inheritance of a particular idea of modernity and its ensuing disdain for popular politics. Writing against the tendency to distill all inequalities into the economic register of incomes and Gini coefficients, Jodhka (2015) aims to understand the changing nature of caste in contemporary India. Based on extensive empirically oriented work in Punjab – a state celebrated for its successful Green Revolution and agrarian prosperity – Jodhka (2015) argues that a qualitatively oriented framework of prejudice and discrimination with violence and humiliation as its operationalizing instruments is more appropriate for furthering our understanding of how caste operates in contemporary India. He also draws attention to the internal differentiation within DBA political communities, pointing to the need to pay greater attention to the differentiated forms of agency that are emerging and to confront intersecting forms of oppression such as patriarchy and communalism within the DBA activist circles. His arguments are yet to be applied in geographical analysis.

Based on the above discussion I would like to posit two arguments. The first is that caste in general and DBA experiences in specific have not come to constitute the sovereign subject of research at any appreciable scale in geography or urban studies. It is therefore that we continue to see a vast majority of studies approaching the question of caste through the lens of exclusion and focusing on the income inequality aspect of caste experiences rather than on the political question of justice. The second is that the sphere of DBA political consciousness and action exists as a subaltern sphere with respect to both the overall politics of India and the narrower sphere of progressive and/or radical politics within that. The first argument has been addressed to some extent in the discussion so far. I now attempt to elaborate on the second.

It is difficult to locate the sphere of DBA political consciousness within the confines of any singular organization or political party. The claim for continued affirmative action in the form of proportional reservations in public sector jobs and higher education has been one of the persistent rallying cries of DBA political mobilization. In electoral politics the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has been at the forefront of representing DBA interests and has continued to remain electorally relevant despite widespread accusations of corruption against many of its leading members. In recent months, a strong Dalit movement based on strikes, protest marches, and demands for land rights has emerged independent of political patronage from any established parties at local or national levels. While there may be differences of opinion amongst DBA thinkers on the most viable strategy and degrees of alliance with other progressive forces, there is a clear claim here to a

sovereign DBA politics that needs no patronage from the organized Left or any other political force.

It is this aspect of DBA subalternity – the resistance to being co-opted into other metanarratives of democratic and progressive struggles – that is of relevance to my analytical position in this project. In my analysis I treat DBA as not merely a demographic category or as one of the sub-categories within the broader category of caste, but also as a subject position from which narratives can flow. The following chapter will elaborate on the difficulties of accessing such narratives. However the ones that could be accessed (in whatever fractional measure) have been placed at the center of analysis in articles 2, 3, and 4. Article 5 aligns itself with the epistemological position of feminist geography, which brings us to another important aspect of subalternity in India – that of feminist politics.

Feminist Scholarship in India

Feminist scholarship in and about the gender experiences in India is vast and rich (see for e.g. Chakravarti 2002; Chakravarti & Sangari 1999; Rege 2004, 2006, 2013; Menon 2004, 2012; Phadke 2011 etc.) Much of this work relates to the fields of history, sociology and rural development. Within the fields of geography and urban studies, the feminist contribution has been fairly restricted to accounts of gendered experiences of large metropolitan centers. The inextricability of caste and gender as analytical categories was made explicit by Rege (2006) in her exposition of how caste hierarchies are maintained through patriarchal control over women's sexual autonomy. Overall, Indian feminist scholarship is a complex terrain characterized by nuanced debate.

For this particular project, the focus on gender was sporadic and strategic. It was employed as an analytical lens only in cases that lent themselves easily to such analysis. This approach was not entirely intentional but was imposed upon me by the circumstances in the field. As Article 5 will elaborate, the difficulties in finding, approaching, and including women as participants in the interviews were many. For the most part the women from elite sections of the local communities were restricted in their everyday movements and interactions with the public sphere. This made it difficult to find avenues into their private spaces which were also heavily guarded by the men in their communities. Women from DBA groups could usually be approached in groups and were more forthright in articulating group interests and positions than in sharing individual narratives. The limited use of feminist analysis in this project is also due to lack of time and restrictions of word and page count. A few extensive narratives from men, of their personal relationships with place, remain unanalyzed. These narratives could have proved to be rich minefields for feminist excavation but did not further the over-arching

project of building a subaltern understanding of urbanization processes. For these reasons, Article 5 is the sole short contribution to feminist geography that this thesis has to offer.

West Bengal

With a population of more than 90 million, West Bengal is one of the fifteen big states in India. In 2001 it emerged as the most densely populated state, a characteristic that is attributed to its large tracts of fertile agricultural land and abundant water resources. West Bengal is considered to be a middle income state with a Per Capita State Domestic Product that was above the national average in the late 1990s (GoWB 2004). However the Per Capita State Consumption Expenditure was below the national average and the percentage of population below the poverty line (27 per cent) was marginally higher than the national average. Poverty in the state was rurally concentrated with 84 per cent of the absolutely poor living in rural areas. Human development in the state is marked by vast inter-district disparities. The capital city of Kolkata holds the highest HDI rank by a large margin. The economy of West Bengal has been predominantly agrarian, but has undergone significant structural change since the 1990s (GoI 2010). In keeping with the national trend, the share of unregistered manufacturing activity and unorganized services has risen in terms of employment, while it has not been matched by a commensurate change in share of income (GoWB 2004, GoI 2010). Thus the overall trend has been of increasing casualization of labor with growth of non-agricultural production.

As the first point of contact in the sub-continent for the British colonial empire, Bengal has historically been at the heart of both colonial policy and academic scholarship. But this changed in the post-independence period. The state of West Bengal has shared a complicated relationship with successive central governments in terms of both fiscal federalism (the distribution of tax proceeds and grants-in-aid between center and states) and resource federalism (the distribution of rents on natural resources). A detailed discussion of this relationship is beyond the scope of this project, but I briefly outline the most relevant aspects. As Biswas, Marjit, and Marimoutou (2010) found in their analysis of panel data covering 29 years and 14 major states, the distribution of revenues between center and states in India is deeply affected by the political alignment of the states with regard to the government at the center and is susceptible to what the authors have termed “subliminal” forms of lobbying. West Bengal was one of the only three states (out

of thirty) to have a Left Front²⁰ government for more than thirty years from 1977 to 2011. During this time, the center saw various non-left parties and alliances including the Hindu nationalist National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from 1999 to 2004. It was only during the first five-year term of the centrist United Progressive Alliance (UPA) from 2004 to 2009 that the Left had a prominent presence in the ruling alliance. Thus, within the federal political system in the post-colonial period, West Bengal has occupied a largely marginal position, wavering between outrightly oppositional and strategically allied stances.

The other major force in West Bengal's electoral politics has been the current ruling party All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). This party came into being in 1998 as the chief oppositional force to the Left Front. The party has shifted allegiance a number of times with the leader Mamata Banerjee (current Chief Minister of West Bengal) serving in the NDA government as a cabinet minister, followed by her support for the UPA during its first five-year term and eventual withdrawal of support from the UPA during its second five-year term. The relative marginality of the Left at the national level coupled with the fluid political positioning of the AITC has meant that West Bengal has never featured as a favored state with priority in revenue allocation during any central regime. At present the AITC and the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are oppositional forces. At the time of writing the two parties are locked in a tussle over the impending state elections, marked by severe political violence amongst their cadre. The polarization of electoral allegiance in West Bengal between the Left Front and the AITC is of extreme proportions and is firmly entrenched in all walks of life including local governance, education, and grassroots level social movements²¹. This is an important factor in understanding the dynamics of power in West Bengal, but once again escapes the scope of this project. For now it would suffice to note that despite having the highest share of new census towns, West Bengal accounts for only two out of the 100 proposed smart cities identified by the central government for targeted investment. Taking this to be an act of slighting the state government, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has rejected the center's proposed smart city plans and launched her own project of creating "Green Cities" with the help of private investments that she seeks to raise through her own lobbying. Thus, urban policy in West Bengal, is a function of this tussle for preeminence between the state government and the central government.

Ghosh (in GoWB 2004) has identified two key features that distinguish West Bengal from most other Indian states. The first is the relative success of land reforms in West Bengal, both in terms of redistribution and tenancy reforms. This

²⁰ A coalition of Left parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and including the Communist Party of India and Forward Block among others.

²¹ For more on this see the work of Monobina Gupta (2010, 2013).

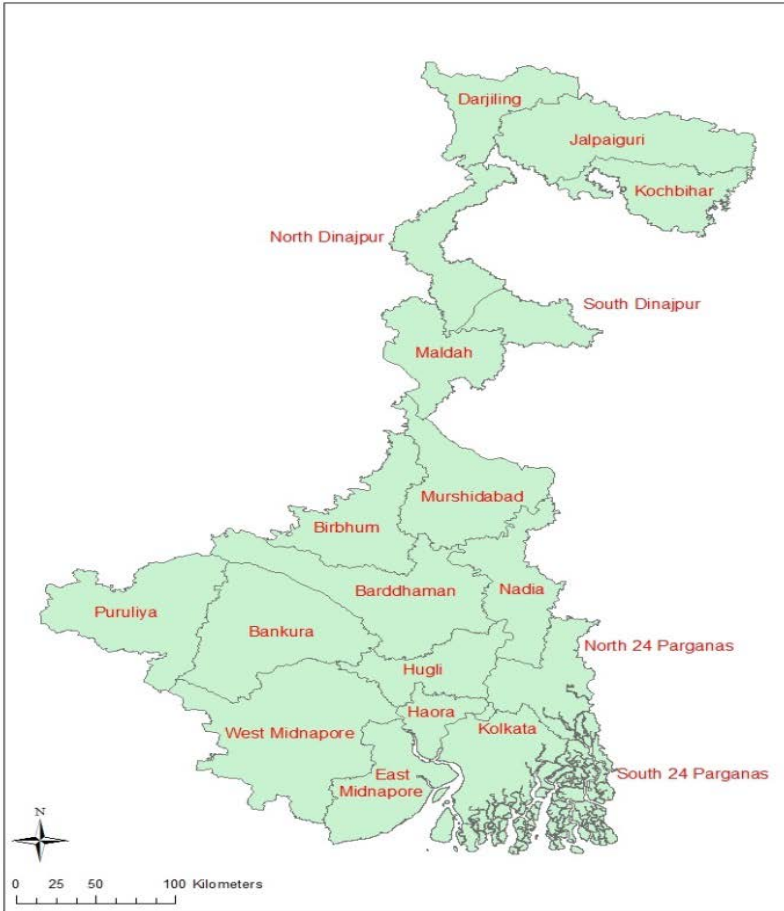
has led to a proliferation of marginal cultivators while improving the terms of tenancy and the condition of agricultural labor (more on this in article 4). The second is the relative strengthening and success of institutions of local self-governance, especially in rural areas. Regular elections to the Panchayats have been taking place in West Bengal from the 1980s, much prior to their formalization through national legislation in 1992. Ghosh has argued that these institutions have served as nodal points for governance and service delivery, and irrespective of their efficiency, have emerged as stakeholders of some consequence in the political-economy of the state. As the articles in the compilation will show, the Village Panchayats served as the first point of contact and important sources of background information at the selected field sites.

However, Bandyopadhyay (2009, 2011, 2014) has argued that the twin success of land-reforms and self-governance has bolstered the Left regime's claim that the discourse of class has effectively displaced the discourse of caste in West Bengal. While this is certainly true at the level of official discourse (the urban Bengal elite takes pride in the absence of "caste politics" in the state as opposed to neighboring Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where DBA mobilization is strong), it has proved to be untenable at the level of grassroots politics. For instance in the early 1990s, the question of affirmative action policies for OBCs took public discourse in India by storm, polarizing it to the extent of widespread violence, self-immolations, and mass strikes by medical professionals among others on both sides of the line. During this period the CPI(M) led Left Front government in West Bengal asserted vehemently that there were no backward castes in Bengal because caste did not matter there. The affirmative action legislations eventually came through despite political opposition from across the spectrum, thanks to the burgeoning backward caste mobilization in northern states and their ascending political bargaining prowess. What is of great relevance to this thesis is the fact that despite the party line of the Left Front on the matter of caste, successive qualitative and ethnographic studies (Chandra & Nielsen 2012, Roy 2012, Samaddar 2013, Bandyopadhyay 2014 etc.) have shown that all forms of manual labor in agrarian and non-agrarian production in Bengal come from DBA communities. In addition, stark elements of the system of untouchability persist in Bengal, under various tropes of hygiene and class. This includes having separate serving utensils for DBA customers at eateries, having to wash the place before leaving if asked to sit down in an "upper caste" backyard, and having separate entrances or staircases in public buildings for DBA visitors. In the light of these observations, Bandyopadhyay (2014: 35-36) argues that,

“...an interesting mixture of the languages of caste, class and hygiene has given rise to a modern discourse of hierarchy and discrimination which is not fundamentally different from the traditional discourse of caste. It acts as a metaphor of power that

is invoked to remind the Dalits of their proper place, particularly when they try to assert themselves or show collective initiative.”

Roy (2012) has drawn attention to the paradox of rural West Bengal- that of largely successful land reforms accompanied by widespread agricultural stagnation, which implies that despite some amount of reversal to the traditional landholding order, the opportunities for employment and income generation within agriculture continued to be limited for the marginalized sections. In keeping with findings stated above, Roy (2012) finds Dalits to be grossly over-represented among the landless and the marginal farmers. Her study also corroborates the presence of caste based divisions of labor as seen in hiring of labor for various farm and non-farm activities. The core of Roy’s (2012) argument lies in identifying and describing the subterranean operation of caste dynamics as seen through the everyday vocabulary, forms of address and linguistic expressions used within the local community, that was loaded in implications of caste hierarchy, and notions of ritual purity and pollution. In specific, Roy studies structures and functioning of the local political outfits (branches of the organized Left), to argue that within the dominant ideology of the community, the categories of caste continue to “provide basic signifying terms through which collective identities and social relations are forged and perceived” (2012: 973). As we will see in the upcoming articles, the question of caste and especially of justice for the DBA communities in Bengal and elsewhere has been largely missing from discussions of urbanization in India. I take this thesis as an opportune moment to address this absence by bringing the issue of caste justice into the analysis of agrarian change and urbanization processes.



Map 2: Districts of West Bengal

Source: GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/f.dl.html>), Licensed under Creative Commons, Accessed through Wikimedia Commons on 26.04.2016

Table I. Districts of West Bengal and their HDI rank in 2004

| Serial No. | Name | HDI Rank in 2004 |
|------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Darjiling | 4. |
| 2 | Jalpaiguri | 10. |
| 3 | KochBihar | 11. |
| 4 | North Dinajur | 13. |
| 5 | South Dinajpur | 13. |
| 6 | Maldah | 17. |
| 7 | Murshidabad | 15. |
| 8 | Birbhum | 14. |
| 9 | Barddhaman | 5. |
| 10 | Nadia | 9. |
| 11 | North 24 Parganas | 3. |
| 12 | South 24 Parganas | 8. |
| 13 | Kolkata (Capital City) | 1. |
| 14 | Hugli | 6. |
| 15 | Haora | 2. |
| 16 | Puruliya | 16. |
| 17 | Bankura | 11. |
| 18 | West Medinipur (Midnapore) | 7. |
| 19 | East Medinipur (Midnapore) | 7. |

5. Urbanization in India: In figures and in discourse

The literature on the Indian experience of urbanization is vast but highly dispersed both thematically and methodologically. This chapter will summarize key aspects that are most relevant to this thesis. While scholarship on individual metropolitan centers like Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, and Kolkata is substantial and well-balanced in terms of qualitative and quantitative insights, at the pan-national level the literature is scarce and highly dependent on official statistical data. Within this canvas, Kundu's (2011b) is one of the most updated and intensive contributions and therefore serves as the key reference point in this section.

Urban Growth Trends

According to Kundu (2011b: 2) there exist two alternative view points on urban growth in India. The first is that rapid urbanization has led to greater employment opportunities in the cities and boosted rural-urban migration. The second is that most of the new employment has been in the informal sector which coupled with lower public investment in infrastructure has meant no real reduction in poverty levels. However, both of these view-points acknowledge that rapid urban growth has indeed taken place. Kundu (2011b) seeks to deconstruct this in his contribution and argues that urban growth in India has been more sluggish than it is purported to be and that this staggered rate of urban growth has in fact contributed to the persistent inequalities that are by now well documented.

From a historical perspective, Kundu (2011b: 5) observes that in pre-colonial 'India' there existed an intricate network of "interdependent urban centers organized in a hierarchy of goods and labor exchange, driven by localized manufacturing". This eco-system was disrupted by the colonial regime with the superimposition of port cities (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras²²) which emerged not through the organic development of industry but to serve the socio-political

²² Colonial names for Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai respectively

motivations of extraction, export and import. He further argues that this led to the eventual decline of the existing system of towns.

There were unsuccessful attempts to address this in the five-year plans immediately following independence. It failed because the trickle down of growth did not take place as presumed and in the absence of a hierarchy of different sizes of urban settlements, all impacts of growth remained restricted within the large urban agglomerations.

Kundu's (2011b) analysis of the size distribution of urban population up to 2001 reveals that the pattern of urban growth in India has been top heavy, with 5000,000 plus cities growing at a higher rate than comparable countries and also compared to other urban centers within India. The metro cities (above 1000,000) have grown at a higher rate (3.5%) than the other Class I cities (100,000 plus) which grew at 2.96%. The "common towns" (Kundu's term for all other urban centers) have grown at 2.8% during 1981-1991. These growth rates slowed down across the board and the difference between the growth rates also fell during 1991-2001. But the overall pattern remained the same. Class V and Class VI towns (5000 and below) even experienced negative rates of growth.

This brings us to a feature of urban epistemology that is ubiquitous in all studies of urbanization so far. This is the ranking of settlements by size which implicitly corresponds to how academic attention and public resources are to be distributed among different urban centers. This relates directly to the metro-centricity of all prominent schools of writing on the urban (more on this in articles 1& 2). In the census urban centers are classified into three categories- Statutory Towns (STs), Outgrowths (OGs) and Census Towns (CTs).²³ The category of STs includes all urban centers that are recognized by a state legislation, and are under the jurisdiction of an urban local body of governance such as municipal corporations, municipalities, and town Panchayats. Outgrowths (OGs) refer to all urban units that emerge adjacent to but outside the boundaries of STs. The focus of urban studies in India so far has been predominantly on these two kinds of urban centers.

The third kind of urban center – the Census Towns – refer to settlement units that are recognized as "urban" for the purposes of the Census, but continue to be administered within the rural governance framework of institutions, as discussed in the introductory section. Although there is no explicit reference in the Census handbook to the upper limit of population for CTs, traditionally urban centers with a population of 10,000 and above have been categorized as Class IV towns rather than as CTs (Kundu 2011b). It is therefore to be assumed that all CTs are meant to have a population between 5000 and 10,000. However, as upcoming chapters will reveal, the business of classifying urban centers remains murky and erratic. This is

²³ See <http://censusindia.gov.in/> for detailed description

taken up in detail in article 1 but to understand the underlying ideology behind the politics of classification, it is imperative to understand the policy discourse around urbanization in India.

Table II. Size-class ranks of urban settlements in India

| Size-Rank | Population Threshold |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Class I | 100,000 and more |
| Class II | 50,000-100,000 |
| Class III | 20,000-50,000 |
| Class IV | 10,000-20,000 |
| Class V | 5000-10,000 |
| Class VI | Less than 5000 |

Urban Policy

In the immediate aftermath of independence from colonial rule, the Indian nation building project was predicated upon the understanding that this was an essentially rural nation with the peasantry as its core constituency. Although Gandhi and Nehru, the two leading ideologues of the Indian state, differed considerably in their opinion on the path forward, they both envisioned India as a country of peasants and farmers rather than one of city dwelling workers and an urban bourgeois-capitalist class. While Gandhi's model revolved around autonomous, self-sustaining village republics, Nehru's was a Soviet inspired vision of capital and technology intensive heavy industrialization. But the notional and physical landscape on which these visions were to be played out and that they each sought to transform, were undeniably rural and agrarian. Thus, at the onset of the Indian nation building project, urbanization was deemed to be residual – a default outcome of interventions made into the rural landscape.

Mahadevia (2003) and Batra (2009) have written two of the most comprehensive reviews of Indian urban policy in the post-colonial period. Both have divided the period into distinct phases based on the underlying ontological position adopted by the state. Following Shaw (1999) and Mahadevia (2003), Batra (2009) has divided his appraisal of Indian urban policy into three phases. The first phase covers the period of the first three five-year plans from 1951 to 1966. The second phase covers the fourth to the sixth five-year plans from 1967 to 1989. The third phase covers the seventh to the eleventh five-year plans from 1990 to 2005. I add here, an appraisal of the decade ensuing from 2005, concluding with the 100 smart cities agenda which currently forms the crux of Indian national urban policy.

From the first to sixth five-year plans (1951-1989)

Batra has described the first phase of urban policy in India as “ad-hoc” and “piecemeal” (ibid: 9). This period was characterized by concern for the living conditions, especially of the urban poor, in particular prominent metro cities such as Delhi and Bombay. The proliferation of ‘slums’ was seen as the key problem to be addressed. This was to be done through the adoption of Master Plans. The plans were instruments to implement a “strict spatial segregation of functions such as housing, commerce, industries etc.” (ibid: 8) and were a direct replica of similar policy instruments from the west. However, as Batra argues, this approach failed to recognize the existing mode of organization of urban life in the Indian metropolises. In the central walled city of old Delhi for instance, residential, industrial, and commercial practice had spatially co-existed historically and continued to do so, at odds with the newly imposed Master Plan. Thus, despite the state’s explicit socialist commitment to providing low cost and dignified housing to the working class, the plans as policy interventions failed to take into account the existing morphology and everyday geographies of the cities in question and in turn rendered most of the existing city life “illegal”.

Batra notes that the first phase also embarked on conceptualizing ‘regions’ and ‘regional development’. This assumed greater importance in the second phase, which focused on dispersing populations to smaller urban centers, thereby aspiring to achieve ‘balanced urban growth’. Thus during this phase the state started to rise above individual urban centers and shift its gaze onto the larger urbanization patterns. The attempt to cultivate small and medium towns was evident during this phase, in the form of strategic placement of industries and new economic activities. Due to this, the question of land assumed central importance within the urban planning scenario. Some of the forms in which this manifested were the implementation of urban land ceilings in metro cities²⁴, higher taxation of vacant plots in peri-urban areas to prevent speculative pricing, and taxes on land use conversion. At the same time, the focus on “high modernization” (Scott 1999 in Batra 2009: 14) dwindled and the Nehruvian efforts to radically re-make cities gave way to a milder tendency to “manage” cities in their existing forms. Thus ‘slum removal’ turned into ‘slum redevelopment’ and deviations from the stringent Master Plans came to be better tolerated.

²⁴ This refers to limits placed by law on the area of land that can be owned, left vacant, or built upon in urban areas. For more see http://www.archive.india.gov.in/business/land/urban_land_ceiling.php

Since the seventh five-year plan (1990 onwards)

The third phase is marked by two main developments – the introduction of private players in the housing finance market and housing provisioning, and the explicit acknowledgment of a link between macro-economic development and urban growth. Hence the focus shifted from trying to disperse urban concentration through regional development and the rhetoric returned to boosting economic activity where it was already concentrated i.e. the metro cities or the “engines of growth” (GoI 7th Plan). Following recommendations from the National Council on Urbanization the future of urban growth was planned to take place along nodes and corridors identified from among the existing urban centers. Although the line of regional development and balanced growth recurred from time to time, this responsibility was largely relegated to the state governments while the center returned to the previous piecemeal approach. The state framed its own liability in terms of its commitment to the poorest and the most vulnerable. For the remaining income groups it sought to be merely a facilitator, relinquishing further responsibility to private players (Batra 2009). In keeping with this policy position the period witnessed a rollback on several erstwhile policy instruments, among which was the repeal of the Urban Land Ceilings and Regulations Act in 1999.

Two prominent manifestations of this change in spirit of urban policy were the 74th Amendment Act of 1992 and the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched in 2005. The creation of ULBs under the 74th Amendment, in all settlements with population above 0.3 million, was meant to decentralize urban governance. The bigger ULBs were expected to raise their own finances for infrastructure development, in collaboration with the private sector. The smaller ULBs were expected to work towards building capacity for the same. The underlying wisdom was that the center did not possess the financial or administrative capacity to support the kind of infrastructure overhaul that the urban situation of the time demanded (India Infrastructure Report 1996).

The JNNURM was the program under which all these streams of action came to be consolidated. Implemented in sixty three selected cities (including million plus cities, state capitals and tourism centers) the program sought to impose mandatory reforms on state and municipal bodies in exchange for which they were to receive funding for infrastructure development targeted at essential features like water and sanitation, transport, housing and other amenities. The provisioning of funds was to be shared between the center, the state and the ULB in varying proportions depending on the size-class of the urban center. However the funds received from the center and the state were meant to act as seed money to generate further financing from capital markets and private actors. The reforms had an explicit emphasis on promoting public-private partnerships, cost recovery through pricing of basic amenities, and a commitment to making land available to both domestic and foreign private developers. With this the urban policy came to be aligned

completely with the larger macro-economic policy of liberalization. The JNNURM remained the dominant feature of Indian urban policy for nearly a decade and has come to be seen as the culmination of the economic liberalization project that had been in action since the late 1980s. Mahadevia (2003) has described the shifts in the ideological underpinnings of Indian urban policy as a journey “from Utopia to Pragmatism”, reflecting the change in disposition of the state from desiring total control to relinquishing much of it to the market and private players.

On Smart Cities

Since the mid-2000s the narrative of ‘global cities’ and ‘megacities’ has come to shape both urban policy and urban studies in India. In 2005 the Chief Minister of the state of Maharashtra, Late Vilasrao Deshmukh stated in his election manifesto, his intention to convert Mumbai from “Slumbai” to “Shanghai”. The statement immediately gained rhetorical currency in policy and development circles, with both supporters and detractors, and has continued to provoke responses in the form of opinion pieces, academic articles and even a 2012 feature film in Hindi. Under Deshmukh’s regime Bombay witnessed some of the most rapid and drastic slum demolition endeavors while he continued to legitimize them on various forums under the narrative of “ensuring quality of life comparable to the best of the international cities in order to put Mumbai on the world map as a global financial center”²⁵. This outlook may be seen as symptomatic of millennial thinking on urban policy across political party lines in India. It is reflected in the fund allocations of both central and state level urban planning.

Within the literature on globalization, ‘global cities’ have been understood as “servicing the globe rather than their geographical hinterland” (Sassen 1994 in Shaw 1999: 969). They are centers of concentration of economic activities that have an impact on the globalized economy; control centers or “nodes of command” of a system of production and consumption that spreads across nation states and continents. It follows from this logic that the best of infrastructure and amenities have to be made available to these cities, even if at the cost of the rest. As Shaw (1999) describes, the idea of the global city gives rise to “new geographies of centrality and marginality” (ibid: 969). The argument is extended by Robinson (2002) who understands the ‘megacity’ as the notional other of the ‘global city’. It is the aspirational big city from the Global South that has not quite reached the goal, being held back by its overcrowded and underserviced slums and overall poor quality of life. Indeed, Roy (2009, 2011) has argued that the slum has

²⁵ See <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/vote-bank-politics-cm-vilasrao-deshmukh-halts-mumbai-slum-demolition-drive/1/194322.html>

become the recurring metonym for megacities and urbanization in the Global South in general.

One of the outcomes of this dominant narrative is the rendering of cities as market entities that need to promote and sell themselves as viable destinations of capital investment. This is recorded to have widened and accentuated pre-existing regional inequalities in terms of economic growth. Shaw (1999) has recorded the steady economic stagnation and eventual downfall of Calcutta in the post reform period, mainly due to its failure to attract private capital for infrastructure development and industrial growth. Ironically, for the Trinamool Congress led government of West Bengal that came to power in 2011, (riding on a popular unrest against the incumbent left party coalition, involving acquisition of agrarian land for industrialization) making the state into an industrial and economic hub by attracting private investment, has been a top agenda.

This apparent contradiction is symptomatic of the prevailing climate in urban policy at the national level. In the same vein, I argue, it is possible to see the 100 smart cities project as a logical extension of this narrative, even though it is ostensibly meant to accommodate the “burgeoning number of people” (GoI 2014) migrating from rural areas. In December 2014 the Ministry of Urban Development released a draft concept note for developing one hundred “new cities” as “smart cities”. ‘Smartness’ is defined here in terms of competitiveness, which in turn is based on quality of life, employment and investment opportunities “comparable with any developed European city” (GoI 2014: 4). In March 2015, Business Today published a cover story on the smart cities project in which Venkaiah Naidu, the Minister of Urban Development was quoted on how these ‘new cities’ are to be selected for imparting smartness. It would be on the basis of the “willingness of the city to be reformed and the willingness of the leadership to undertake reforms and bold action”, he is quoted to have said (Das & Kaushik, 2015). Thus, as an extension of the ‘global cities’ narrative, the smart cities project constructs some cities as more deserving of infrastructure investment and better quality of life, based on their commitment to cater to the demands of the global and private capital market. For instance the concept note available on the Ministry’s website states that “A Smart City cannot have only a few hours of water supply a day or electricity that goes off for several hours or the streets littered with garbage” (GoI 2014: 9). The emerging implication is that services and amenities like water supply, electricity and sanitation which were once seen as the basic and universal constituents of urban provisioning are now rendered exclusive and conditional. This also gives license to the state to withdraw from the remaining urban centers while playing up the selected one hundred.

One of the recurrent themes in the concept note is that of addressing “unplanned development and urban sprawl” (ibid: 12). However, the features of smart cities

outlined in the Business Today cover story reveal a complete reversal of the core features of the original Master Plans based approach to urban development. While the Master Plans were premised on segregating land use, in the new smart cities “95 per cent of residences should have retail, parks, schools etc. within 400 meters” (Das & Kaushik 2014: 40). I argue therefore, that the 100 smart cities project is an ideological continuation of the post-reform global cities logic, but in material terms posits a paradigm shift in how the Indian state conceptualizes its urban areas. I further argue that this vision is far removed from the lived realities of how urbanization has played out in the country. This will be made evident in the upcoming articles of this compilation. But before that a few words need to be said about the phenomenon of informality and its place within the global city or in this case, the smart city narrative.

Shaw (1999) defined the “formal city” as “the built-up portions of the city utilized predominantly for formal sector economic activities” (ibid: 973). This is the physical as well as the notional sphere where state and private development interventions are enacted. However, as any study of the Indian informal sector would vouch for the existence and functioning of the formal city is hinged on the supply of labor, goods and services from the informal city which houses the urban poor, working classes and itinerant workers from rural areas. The narrative of the global city and by extension, that of the smart city fosters an increasing intolerance for the urban poor and the informal city which results in constant attempts to sanitize it (Shaw 1999, Bhan 2009, etc.). In his analysis of intensified slum evictions in Delhi, resulting from Public Interest Litigations (PILs), Bhan (2009) has located this intolerance in the “larger political, economic and aesthetic transformations” since the 1990s. Growing from the slum evictions of Bombay and Delhi, the ‘100 smart cities’ are therefore, the matured and full-blown expressions of these transformations that seek to imagine urban India as elite and exclusive while the question of inequality remains unresolved. We turn now to the non-elite forms of urbanization that are excluded from the dominant state narrative and imagination.

On Small Towns

The above section makes evident the overwhelming metro-centricity in both policy and research on the urban. This trend is indeed global and not restricted to India by any means. In the recent times, several critics of metro-centricity have come forth and the call for attention to small and medium urban centers is becoming stronger. Mayer and Knox (2010 cited in Scrase et al. 2015: 217) write:

“Different kinds of small towns, in different settings,...(are) often critical to not only their inhabitants but also to the economic and social cohesion of metropolitan regions and deep rural areas. Yet they are very often neglected in national policy...”

The statement is of extreme relevance to India, especially at this particular moment of Indian urban history. The concept note on smart cities from the Ministry of Urban Development would have readers believe that no urban centers exist in India outside of the sprawling metropolitan regions of the megacities. Indeed, that is why it calls for the creation of ‘new’ cities through state planning and private-public partnership. Scrase et al. (2015) have raised crucial questions regarding the nature of urbanization in India ‘beyond the metropolis’ and the relationship between the ‘global modernity’ of cities included in the global neoliberal project, and the ‘regional modernity’ of other urban centers outside of this economic network (ibid: 218). And yet, the two case studies they explore to answer these questions, are of Anand in Gujarat and Darjeeling in West Bengal. Both of these urban centers, although second tier in terms of population, have had a long history of statutory status and municipal governance. The point here is not to find fault with the selection of these cases but to draw attention to the limits of how ‘small town’ India is imagined. Frequently, a population threshold of 100,000 to 500,000 is used to define and identify ‘medium towns’, ‘second tier cities’, or ‘Class II towns’ (Scrase et al. 2015, Kundu 2011b etc.) However, the Census criteria for being classified as ‘urban’ – as mentioned before – is 5000 population, 400 per square kilometer population density, and 75 per cent or more of the male workforce employed in non-agriculture. Thus, ‘small towns’ in India can be much smaller than 100,000 or even 50,000 strong urban settlements and they seem to have fallen completely off the grid as far as national or even regional policy is concerned. As analysis from the SUBURBIN project has revealed²⁶, a vast majority of new census towns are situated away from Class I cities and close to 85 per cent of the newly categorized urban population lives away from such large urban centers. However, our knowledge of the material conditions of life in these places is negligible. The Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns program was announced in 1979-80 and was supposedly in effect until it got

²⁶ See Denis & Zerah eds. (2017) *Subaltern Urbanisation in India: An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns*, Springer.

integrated into the Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns in 2005-06, which was ancillary to the JNNURM. How these schemes have fared is impossible to tell because they have never been evaluated or their impact assessed (Batra 2009, Scrase et al. 2015).

Therefore a project such as this one occupies a subaltern position as opposed to the elite, metro-centric policy discourse of urbanization in India. By this I mean that small urban centers, especially those exemplifying subaltern urbanization, are structurally relegated to a position from where their access to power in terms of discursive relevance and influence in planning and policy-making is obstructed. A study that centers these locations and tries to map the universe of urban issues from that vantage position therefore lies at the limits of the existing archive- a position that is arguably the domain of subalternity.

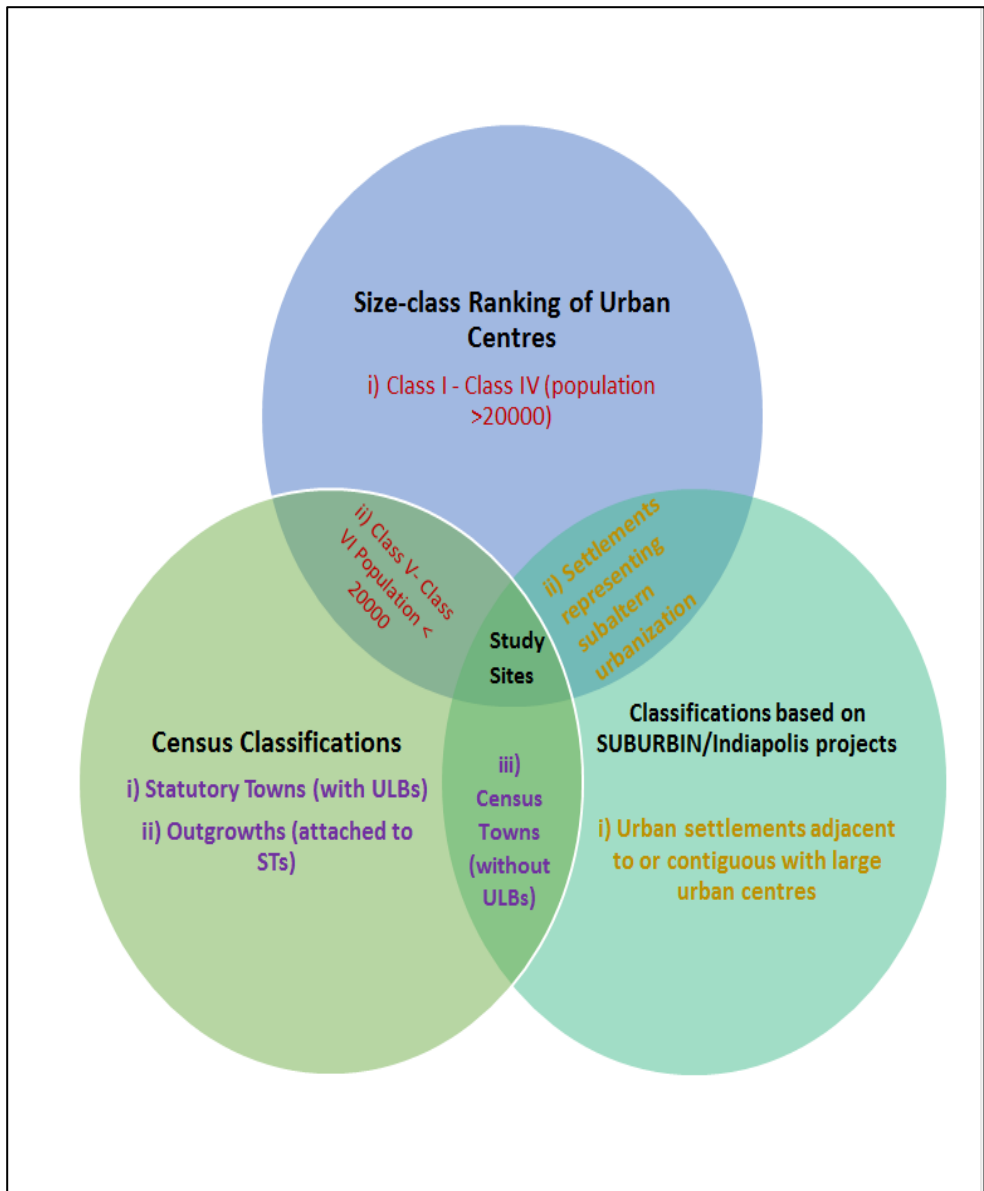


Figure II. Locating the sites of the study within parallel systems of urban classification

6. Methodology: Empirical Explorations from Spreadsheet to Transcript

This study has been carried out as a mixed methods project, within a consistent ontological and epistemological framework motivating the choice of methods. The ontological starting point of the study is embedded in the assumption that subaltern agency exists, as do subaltern knowledge systems and forms of resistance. These ideas of agency, knowledge, and resistance are of course socially constructed and would have little meaning outside of human thought and language. In that sense the broader grounding of the study is in a constructivist approach. Epistemologically, the underlying assumption is that the challenge of complete knowledge and transparent representation is an elusive one. Therefore it is never possible for an external researcher to perfectly access the subject experience of participants and thereby truly reproduce it. The challenge is nonetheless an important one. Bearing this in mind, I have devised methodological tools to address each research question as fully and adequately as possible. These include both quantitative and qualitative tools. In the paragraphs below I will describe and justify these choices in chronological sequence.

Navigating the official knowledges of the urban

My very first encounter with the census towns was through an Excel spreadsheet downloaded from the website of the census of India²⁷. This spreadsheet symbolized the first empirical domain that I had to navigate in order to make sense of the path forward. One of the defining features of this domain is its implicit claim to authoritativeness and ensuing epistemological legitimacy, by virtue of its apparent objectivity. For instance, when the census website presents me with an Excel sheet containing the names of 2532 census towns, each town occupying one row of the sheet and divided up into numerous columns signifying different kinds

²⁷ See <http://censusindia.gov.in/>

of information about the town, I am expected to have no doubts that each of those names is indeed a discrete spatial entity that now goes by “census town”. I am also expected to treat the columns of data as the objective truth about various aspects of life in those census towns. This claim to authority is not only rooted in the fact that this data is published by the state. It is also embedded in the intrinsic truth value attached to data that comes to us in the form of numbers. This is something that I encountered at various stages of the study. Often when I mentioned census towns the imminent questions that came up had to do with numbers – how many towns were they, how many were they ten years ago, how big were they in terms of population, how many were they in each state, how big were they expected to be in ten years and so on. However, before attempting to understand what it was that I could learn about the new CTs from these numbers, I wanted to find out how these numbers came about and how they were received in the official echelons of urban knowledge production.

For this I carried out discourse analysis on a set of “text and talk” (Dijk 1995) that I put together through online searches and interviews with experts and key-informants. The aim behind this exercise was twofold – to trace the process behind identification of new CTs and to critically understand the perception of this phenomenon of proliferation of CTs among the elite producers of knowledge about the urban in India. The interviews were carried out in September 2013 and October 2014. They were unstructured and exploratory and accompanied by participant observation of the office spaces and social interactions therein. Interviewees included urban planners and bureaucrats at the Ministry of Urban Development in Delhi, academics studying macro-level urban trends and processes at public research institutes in Delhi and Kolkata, officials at the Census Directorate in Kolkata, public sector employees involved in the actual collection and compilation of census data in Garbeta town and Medinipur town, and a state-level bureaucrat in West Medinipur district collectorate. The texts used in the analysis were accessed through online searches on official websites including the website of the Census of India, the Ministry of Urban Development, and the Department of Urban Development in West Bengal. Appendix I carries a list of all the material included in this discourse analysis.

My access to the interviewees was facilitated by several gatekeeping organizations. A friend and former class-mate who then worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) – a key stakeholder in urban development projects under the public-private-partnership model – facilitated my contact with planners and bureaucrats in Delhi. The Center for Policy Research, a publicly funded research institute in Delhi, facilitated my contact with senior researchers. Due to this unorthodox method of selection, and thanks to the infamously closed and secretive environment of Indian bureaucracy, I could not practice much agency in choosing the interviewees. Nonetheless, they were all representative of the

discursive field around new CTs. The results of this discourse analysis exercise have informed the argument presented in Article 1 and been used to frame the subsequent articles.

Site Selection

The Excel spreadsheet available on the census website was a collection of the names of all new census towns recognized as such in 2011, categorized by the states and districts where they were located. This list revealed that the largest share of the new census towns were in the state of West Bengal. Of the 2532 new census towns 526 were in West Bengal, with Kerala and Andhra Pradesh as the other states with significant shares. This paved the way for selecting the locations for primary data collection. Coupled with the fact that West Bengal happens to be my home state, this became a sound logical and practical basis for focusing on census towns in this particular state. The next step was to find more statistical data pertaining to these census towns. This arrived to me in the form of what is called “household amenities data” from the census. In collaboration with researchers at the Center for Policy Research in Delhi, I was able to locate further Excel spreadsheets containing data on how many households had been enumerated in each of these census towns and what kinds of amenities they had access to. Some of the aspects covered under amenities included households' access to and source of drinking water, the nature of their dwellings (material used in construction of walls, floors, and roofs), access to electricity, ownership of electrical gadgets, and ownership of means of transport.

The data was aggregated at the town level and was available for all new census towns, all older census towns (from 2001 or before) and all statutory towns. The first step was to map the shares of the different districts within each of the categories of old and new census towns to detect any visible spatial trends. The result showed a concentration of new CTs in districts surrounding the capital city of Kolkata (shown in red in Map 3). Following this mapping exercise, I proceeded to explore the household amenities data in search of descriptions of the material conditions of life in the new CTs. One of the outcomes of this exploration was the creation of two indices based on the premise that the listed amenities were of two different kinds. While some of the amenities reflected the situation of publicly provisioned services such as electricity and drinking water supply, others reflected investments made by private individuals towards improving their quality of life. I defined the two indices thus:

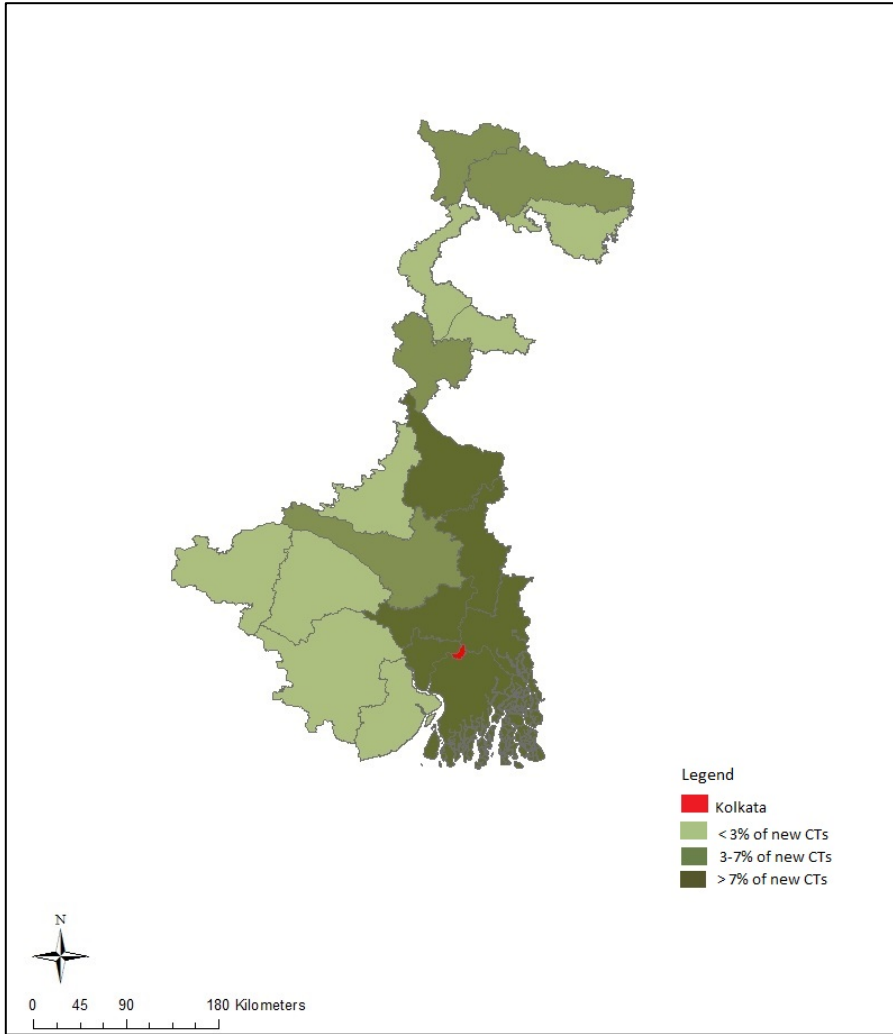
Index 1 (Publicly funded amenities): Mean of percentages of households in the CT with access to i) electricity ii) drainage iii) tap water

Index 2 (Privately funded consumption): Mean of percentages of households in the CT with ownership of i) a four-wheeler vehicle ii) a television set or computer iii) a LPG or CNG subscription for cooking fuel²⁸

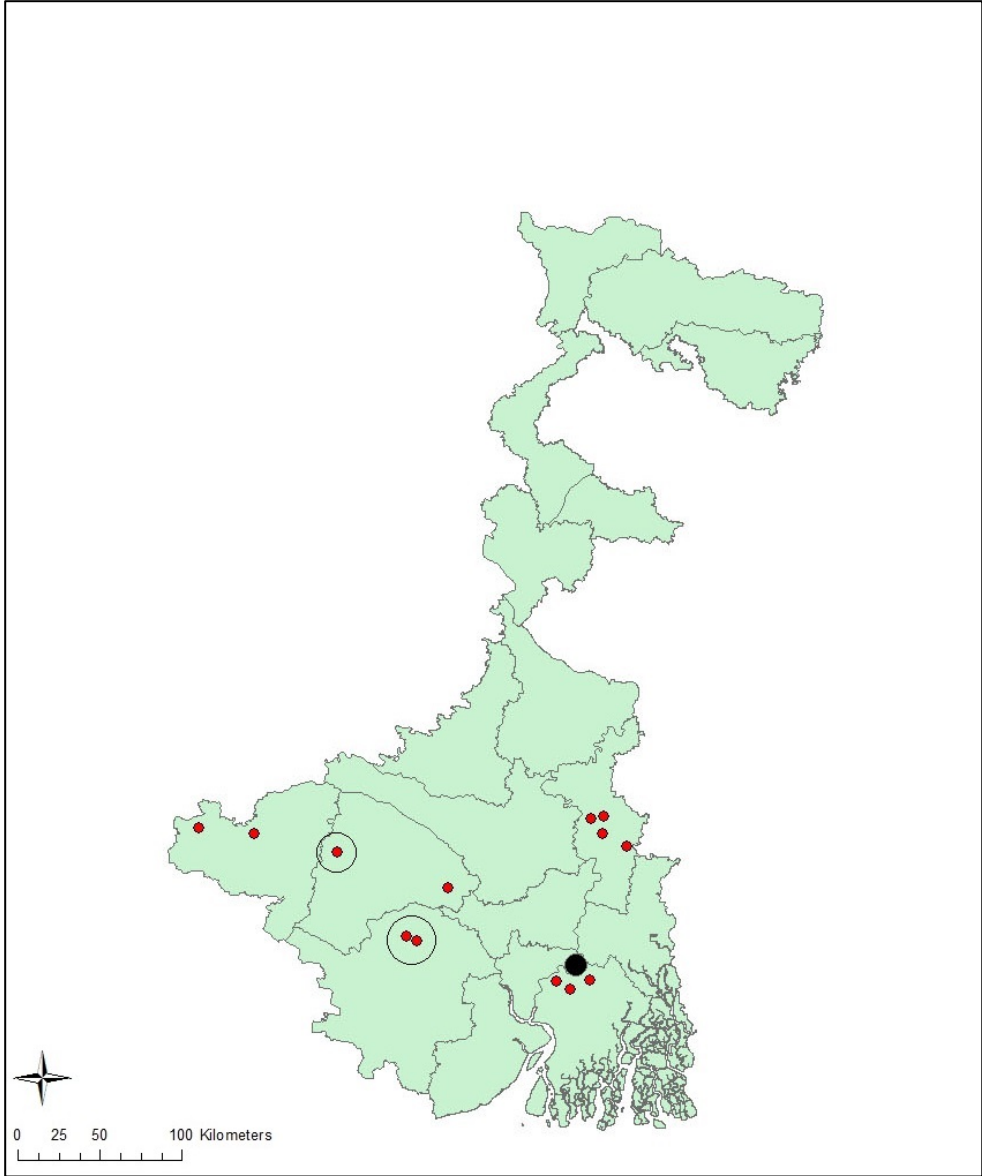
Based on this conceptual distinction, I mapped the scores for each of these indices for new CTs. Two categories emerged readily from this distribution – i) new CTs in districts close to Kolkata with a high score in privately funded consumption and ii) new CTs in districts away from Kolkata with a high score in publicly funded amenities. This formed the basis for shortlisting districts for pilot field visits during October-November 2013. I visited seven new CTs in two districts from the first category and six new CTs in three districts from the second category. Map III shows the locations of the thirteen new CTs that I visited during this period (see Appendix II for full list of names).

At each of these CTs I carried out unstructured, exploratory interviews with key-informants to understand the socio-economic character of the town and to assess the logistical possibilities for carrying out a longer spell of fieldwork at that site. The process is discussed in the following section.

²⁸ According to the census of 2011, 84% of rural households in India are dependent on biomass fuels. LPG cylinders are supplied by private agencies, mainly in urban areas, through subscriptions for which formal employment status and address proof are often sought. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas provides a subsidy on LPG cylinders for households with annual income below 1000,000 INR (approx. 15000 USD). Each 14kg cylinder is priced at 400 INR (approx. 6 USD) and is reported to sell for up to three times that amount in the informal markets.



Map 3. Distribution of new CTs amongst districts of West Bengal and their location with respect to Kolkata



Map 4. Location of new CTs for pilot visits.
The black dot represents Kolkata and the thin black circles demarcate CTs where the fieldwork was eventually carried out.

Gatekeepers and Pilot Visits

What became quickly apparent to me, about accessing the new CTs was the tremendous importance of embedded knowledge. It is the kind of knowledge that is not stated expressly in the reports published by the census bureau or advertised on web pages and policy documents. It is the knowledge that is not spelt out for outsiders but is passed on from one generation of insiders to another through personal interactions and everyday experiences. Due to this subterranean nature of these knowledge transfers, I define this category of participants as gatekeepers. It is inhabited by many actors and institutions but here I outline my interactions with a few of them.

The gatekeepers I would particularly like to mention are the facilitators whose informal knowledge and social networks shaped this study as much as my own textbook driven process of site selection. Looking at the spreadsheets full of names of towns, there was no way to tell exactly where they were located or how to reach them. Very few of the towns could be found on Google Maps and even for those their precise location could not be verified. Under these circumstances there was no option but to find locals who could guide me to these towns and put me in touch with residents. This is what constituted much of my pilot field visits.

Various people acted as facilitators – students from the districts who were known to researchers at the Calcutta Research Group, friends of these students who covered the district beat for various local newspapers, and people employed by my parents and their peers as cooks, chauffeurs, and plumbers. Each of these people tapped into their social networks to facilitate meetings for me. Some put me in touch with friends or colleagues who came from a particular block where a new census town had been identified. Some told me which train to take, which bus route to follow, which alleys to walk down in order to reach the office of the Village Panchayat whose name matched the name of a new census town. Yet others directed me to politically engaged citizens in their own localities who could introduce me to public school employees who had been delegated “census duty”²⁹.

At each of the thirteen census towns that I visited during these pilot visits, and the three census towns where I eventually carried out the longer spells of fieldwork, such facilitators directed and shaped the course of the study. This gave me a wide exposure to not only the built-environment of the new CTs, but also to the local bureaucracies – the Village Panchayat offices and Block Panchayat offices – which would eventually become invaluable to the cause of the study. At each of

²⁹ Public employees such as school teachers and health workers are called upon by the state in India to perform various duties during census operations, elections, and other events of national importance.

the thirteen towns, I met with local administrators and community leaders such as Panchayat workers, prominent business owners, and public school teachers.

An important thing to note is that this engagement with the gatekeepers brought up more questions than it offered answers to. Although the process of categorization of census towns was made clearer to me during these visits, it became increasingly evident that the towns were extremely diverse in terms of their economic base, demographic composition, and morphological features. Instead of giving rise to any evident criteria for selecting sites, it gave rise to an image of unfathomable complexity.

In due course, I decided to focus on towns that stood out as hospitable for further fieldwork while also having interesting characteristics in their own right in terms of a well-defined economic base and the presence of a numerically substantial DBA community. This meant that all towns in close proximity to the city of Kolkata had to be dropped as possible sites because they were to various extents a continuation of the urban agglomeration of Kolkata. What remained were towns that had a seemingly important role to play in their local economies while being isolated to a large extent from big urban centers like Kolkata. Appendix II carries the list of all new CTs visited during the pilot phase and details of key-informant interviews conducted. Garbeta and Amlagora in West Medinipur district and Jhantipahari in Bankura districts were the selected towns.

Fieldwork

The longer spells of fieldwork for this project were carried out between September 2014 and February 2015. The initial weeks were spent scouring the New Secretariat building and the Directorate of Census Operations in Kolkata for the latest updates on census data and appointments for interviews with whoever was willing to make the time. From September 22 to November 23, 2014 I lived in Garbeta town. Thereafter I moved to Bankura town, the district headquarter of Bankura district, and stayed there until January 18, 2015; traveling everyday by local train to Jhantipahari town. It was not possible to make living arrangements within Jhantipahari town. There were no hotels or guest houses available and local residents were sceptical about accommodating a young and unaccompanied female researcher. I returned to Jhantipahari and its surrounding villages to conduct the household survey from February 1-6, 2015.

In the following paragraphs I list the various methodological tools I deployed in course of my stay and describe the experience of implementing each of these at the sites in concern.

Participant Observation

As any qualitative researcher would vouch for, participant observation is an invaluable tool for an immersive experiential insight into the everyday life at a site of study. In this case, both the towns I visited had built environments that had developed along arterial roadways. One of the first things I did in each town was to take slow and observant walks along these roads at different times of the day. I kept a field journal and made entries after each walk, taking note of new landmarks that had caught my sight- a medical shop, a photocopying shop, a board advertising shared housing for students, an electronics shop that opened only twice a week. I also made note of which demographic group was most visible at what time of the day – school students, groups of college students, groups of young married women out for an evening snack, groups of men playing cards over evening tea.

Another important site for participant observation were the Panchayat offices at various levels. In Garbeta both the village and block level Panchayat offices were within the town center and hosted large crowds of people throughout the working hours. I spent several hours at each office, sitting on the bench in the waiting section and observing the ongoing social interactions. I paid attention to the kinds of pursuits that brought people there and their general attitude towards the administrative apparatus. In Jhantipahari, I visited two different Village Panchayat offices (Arrah and Khorbona – each with jurisdiction over different parts of the town), each for the duration of a working day. In these places participant observation was accompanied by semi-structured interviews with the employees and elected representatives. Here too I took field notes and consolidated them into a journal entry at the end of the trip.

Participant observation was also carried out in shops and eateries. In Garbeta, I spent several evenings sitting and drinking tea at Subhendu Dey's tea-stall across the road from the Village Panchayat office. After the working hours, the employees thronged to his tea-stall and sat around for hours discussing what had gone down through day or other matters of the town. Next to the tea stall was a "club" – a one-room structure owned by the ruling party (AITC) where the local party leaders and workers congregated frequently. The time of my visit coincided with the planning period for Kali Pujo – one of the important Hindu festivals in Bengal, celebrated with pomp and splendor. I overheard several conversations around the organization of this festival, while also trying to follow the dynamics between the different groups of residents represented in the congregation. I also gained insights into the gender norms and gender relations prevalent in the town through these evenings of observation at the tea-stall. Until about 9 pm every evening several women, young and old, came by to purchase mobile recharge coupons or a little snack, and stayed about for a chat among themselves or with

Subhendu and me. After 9 pm they stopped coming and the men became increasingly anxious about my short walk back to the lodge.

In Jhantipahari, I spent three mornings observing the proceedings at the daily vegetable market. The field notes from these visits were used to frame the semi-structured interview guide used for business history interviews with the brokers. I also spent several afternoons in home-based eateries and sweet shops close to the station, observing the flow of people and conversations and engaging in some of my own with the owners and managers of the establishments. I also visited two rice mills and one oil mill where I was given a tour inside, to understand the stages and processes involved in the work done. I accompanied the mill-workers on their walk back home, and observed the shift in material conditions of life between the town and its immediate rural surrounding.

Participatory Mapping Exercises

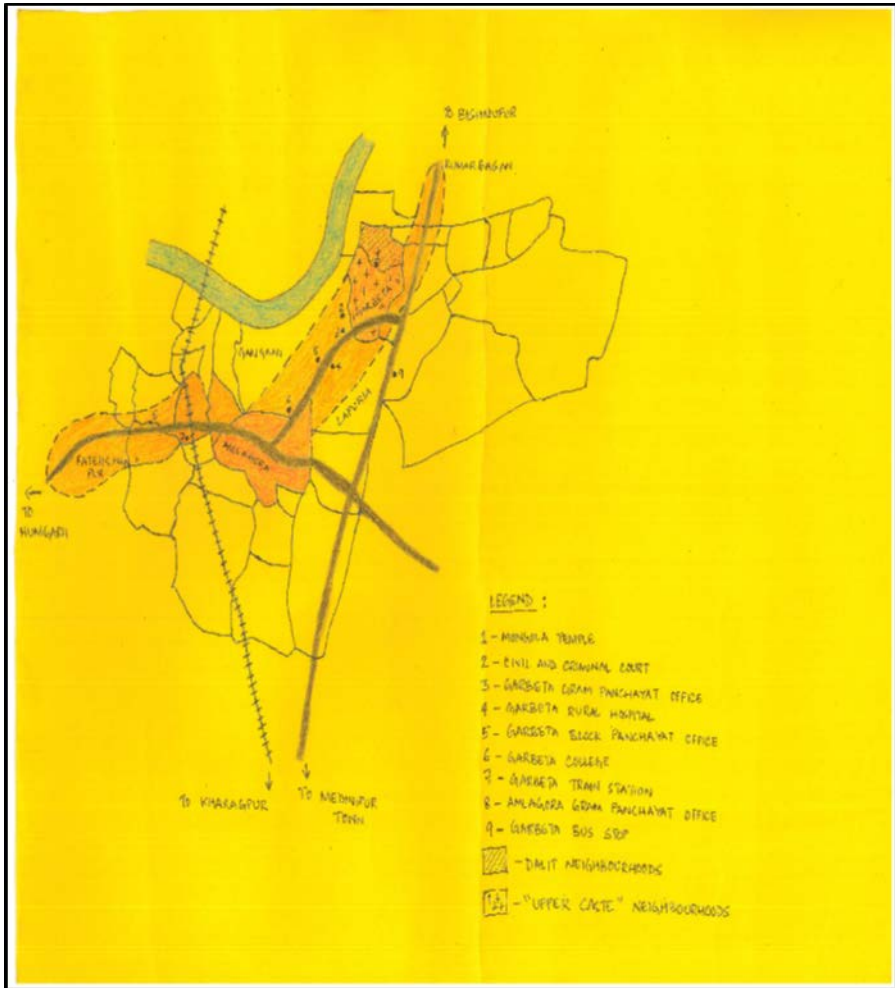
Quite early into the project, at the time of the pilot visits to be precise, the gap between official data and lived experiences at the ground became starkly evident. This meant that before further questions about the towns could be explored, a grounded mapping of the town needed to be done. What was the town to the people who lived there? Where did it start and how far did it stretch out? What were its central morphological features? What were the landmarks around which the growth of the town could be plotted? What were its distinct neighborhoods? With these questions in mind, I set out to find maps of Garbeta town, to quickly realize that none existed on paper.

I then devised a method for participatory mapping of the town. With the help of the hand-drawn maps of the Panchayat *moujas* available in the Village Panchayat office I created approximate outlines of the *moujas* and key physical features such as train lines, highways, fields, rivers etc. I then made several photocopies of these outlines and took them to each interview and FGD. On these approximate outlines I asked people to point out what they considered the boundaries of the town to be, along with important features that the town could be plotted around, such as schools, colleges, and Panchayat offices. This was then followed-up by similarly mapping neighborhoods and land-use. Once an overall consensus emerged over the perceived morphology of the town, I collated the findings into a composite map of the built-up area of the town. This map was then taken back to the participants for verification. This exercise was conducted at both the towns and all interviewees were part of this participatory mapping.

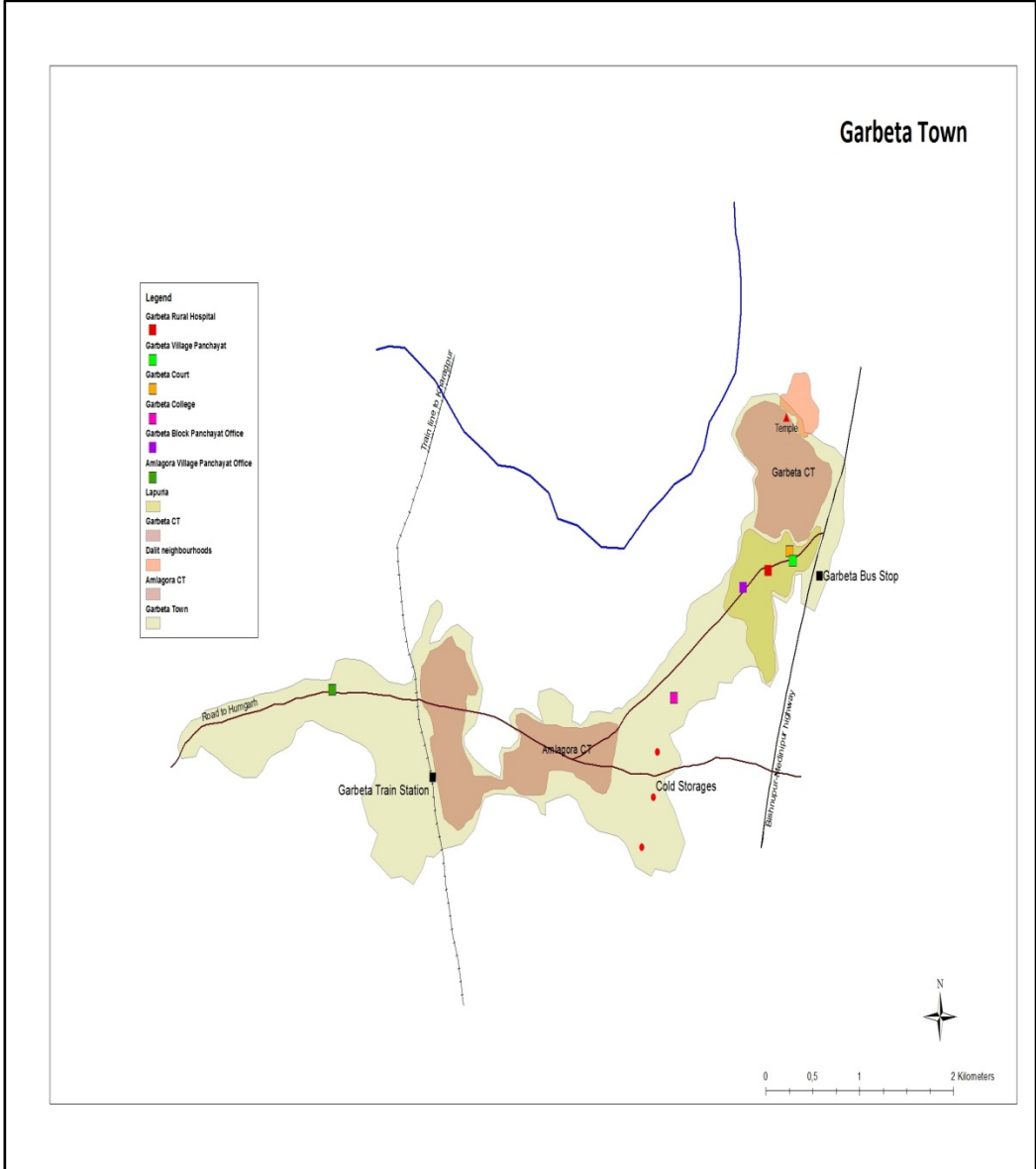
After returning from the fieldwork trip, I used aerial images of the town areas from Google Earth Pro to digitize the participatorily generated maps on Arc Map. Maps 5, 6, and 7 illustrate the outcomes of this.



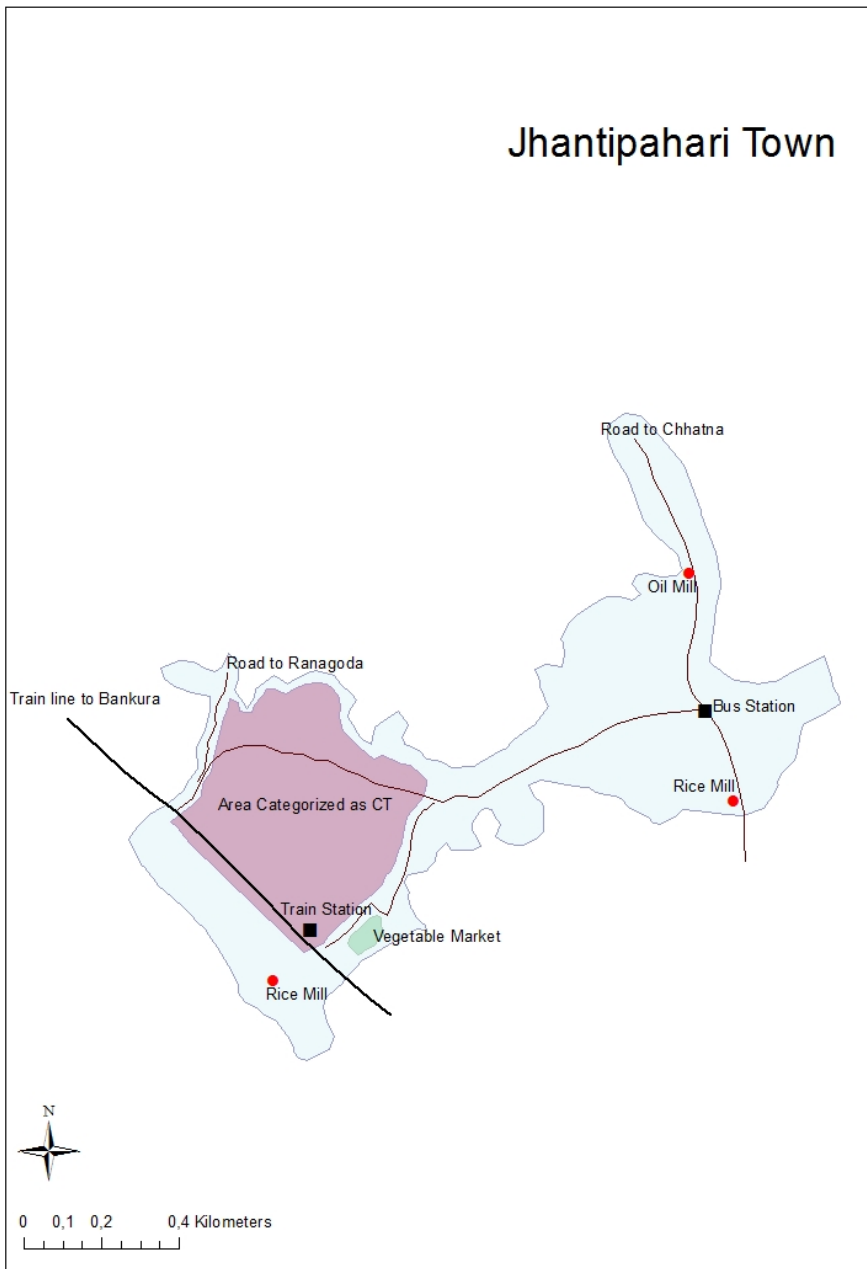
Map 5. Hand-drawn map of moujas in Garbeta Village Panchayat office



Map 6. Map of Garbeta town collated through participatory mapping exercises



Map 7a). Digitized version of map of Garbeta town collated through participatory mapping exercises



Map 7b) Digitized version of map of Jhantipahari town collated through participatory mapping exercises

Interviews

I conducted three different kinds of interviews at each town – oral histories of place, life stories, and business histories. The full list of interviews conducted is attached in Appendix II. The interviewees were selected both purposively and through snowball sampling. At each town, the Village Panchayat office was the first point of contact, from where I was directed to different residents who were considered knowledgeable in their own fields. While this was a reliable way of finding interviewees who could convey rich narratives on various aspects of life in the town, it also carried an implicit elitist bias. I was inevitably directed towards elderly men from a privileged class-caste background. After conducting these interviews with the recommended interviewees, I sought out more unlikely candidates whose voices lifeworlds lay at the margins of the elite imagination of the town, but who were at the core of the everyday production of the town. This proved to be challenging on many occasions but especially so in the case of women. As the list of interviewees in the appendices will demonstrate, the representation of women in the selection of participants is extremely skewed and this limits the extent to which gender can be used as an analytical lens in this study. Nonetheless, the narratives constitute the core of the arguments presented in the articles and I wish to elaborate here on the methods of analysis used.

Narrative Analysis

All interviews were transcribed in Bangla and translated to English. A combination of three different methods of narrative analysis was used.

Structural Approach

The key feature of this approach is that it is focused on the text of the transcript itself and attempts to identify and make meaning of the stories being told. The most prominent contribution within this approach has been from Labov & Waletzky (1967). Analyzing transcripts using what has come to be known as the Labovian approach, would mean looking for “a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered” (Labov 1972: 360 cited in Patterson 2008: 24). These clauses are then to be assigned one of the six elementary constituents of a narrative recognized by Labov- the abstract, the orientation, the complicating action, the result, the evaluation, the coda. This structural interpretation of what constitutes a coherent narrative is useful to apply to many of the interview transcripts I have. It helps to isolate events from larger streams of conversation and to place the narrator’s own interpretation of the events at the core of the analysis.

However, despite its prevalent popularity, the Labovian approach has been critiqued from many perspectives. Mishler (1995) for instance has pointed out that the Labovian model can easily lead to personal re-constructions of the past being mistaken for the objective sequence of events. The underlying ontological assumption of the Labovian approach is that the narratives contain within them an “essential self” or an essential story as the case may be; and that these can be extracted through structural deconstruction. In this process of reconstructing the past, is involved the use of memory and imagination, both of which have been crucial points of engagement for oral historians (Chowdhury 2014 etc.). The strict use of a Labovian analytical approach would undermine the role of the present circumstances contingent upon the telling of the past, which would be a critical exclusion when it comes to understanding what is an ongoing process rather than an event decidedly in the past.

Other critics like Langellier (1989) argue that the structural coherence in Labovian terms may be misconstrued for ‘competency’ of storytelling which in turn will lead to the exclusion of marginalized storytellers lacking narrative privilege. This critique makes it clear that the Labovian approach of structural analysis is not adequate, even if it is instructive in its results. To make the analysis more textured and comprehensive, I turned to the other approaches within the genre of narrative analysis.

Dialogical approach

Departing significantly from Labov’s ontological understanding of what a narrative is, Riessman (1993, 2001) seeks to expand the scope of narrative analysis from the story itself to include the story-teller as well as the act of storytelling. She recognizes that the structural approach serves well to make manageable segments out of a long text and organize them according to a thematic logic. However, this often means that parts of the text that do not fit into the given structural mould are left aside either as irrelevant digressions or as less important phrases and utterances. Riessman (2000) found this to be a substantial loss to the project of meaning making and well-rounded analysis. Hence, she argues that “not all narratives in interviews are stories in the linguistic sense of the term” (1993: 18). She further lists a range of other genres or formats through which the tellers may want to express themselves – “habitual narratives” (when events happen repetitively and there is no clear complicating action), “hypothetical narratives” (when events that did not take place are related) and “topic-centered narratives” (when past events are represented as snap-shots).

Taking into account this ontological understanding of narratives as not windows to pre-existing stories, but rather as actively produced representations in which “narrators indicate the terms on which they request to be interpreted by the styles they choose” (ibid: 19), this mode of analysis shifts focus from the structural to the

performative aspect of narratives. As stated by Plummer (1995:87 in Riessman 2001) “for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear”. Thus the relational aspect of storytelling is brought to the surface in this approach and the discrete story of the Labovian approach gives way to “an evolving series of stories that are framed in and through interaction” (Riessman 2001). Langellier (1999) describe this as “a reciprocal event between a teller and an audience” in course of which the narrator performs their “preferred identity”. This understanding has been very valuable to the analysis I have carried out

‘Stories in Society’ approach

This is an analytical position that takes into account the specific historical and social context within which a story is narrated and treats the narrative as both a product of and a comment on that context. Harre and Langenhove (1999: 17 in Riessman 2001) write of the “social positioning in stories – how narrators chose to position audience, characters, and themselves” as a useful point of entry. Asking these questions of the narrative can lead to useful insights into the social and historical processes within which the stories are located. The focus on the particularity of time and place as significant to the making of the narrative makes this approach especially applicable to my case. The larger aim of the project is to arrive at a historical understanding of place-making. This cannot be accomplished without taking the context into account for interpretation and analysis. Following closely on the assertion of scholars from the dialogical approach, Gubrium and Holstein (2009: 11) argue that “stories and assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, for different purposes, and with a variety of consequences”. If the dialogical approach was concerned with the ‘someone’ in this assortment of factors, the stories in society approach attends to all the others, adopting an ontological position that sees narratives as situated in and sensitive to circumstances. This means that for a thorough analysis and interpretation, the researcher will have to look at sources outside of the spoken word and transcribed text.

One of the most important lessons from this experience has been what Reissman (2001) describes as participants’ resistance to “our efforts to fragment their lived experience into thematic (code-able) categories – our attempts to control meaning.” It has most often been the case that in response to a straight-forward question of “how would you say this place has changed in the last ten years”, participants have narrated entire life histories encompassing several stories and episodes that were not necessarily connected to the experience of ‘place’. On the other hand there have been cases of participants responding to the same query with a brief, monosyllabic “nothing”. When these narratives were put into transcript format, the challenge of ‘analyzing’ them in order to glean out ‘meaning’ was quite a daunting task. After a few unsuccessful efforts, the usual methodology of

identifying ‘themes’ and ‘coding’ the text into discrete sections had to be abandoned.

Another important lesson has been the confrontation with narrative privilege brought about by the subaltern stance of the study. On the one hand, the best narratives in terms of their richness, fullness, coherence, and logical structure inevitably came from the most elite and privileged participants in the given context. Most often they were elderly, upper caste, affluent men who had held positions of authority as teachers or political leaders. This is what I understand to be narrative privilege – the ability to narrate persuasively and authoritatively one’s own life experiences. On the other hand, the subaltern stance of the study mandated that those without narrative privilege be included in the project. This meant first reaching out to and then requesting participation from members of the subaltern groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and women within these communities. This was not only difficult to accomplish, but also the few narratives derived from such participants were far more fragmented, incoherent, and staggered from the perspective of narrative analysis. This points to a problem of elitist bias within the subaltern methodological strategy of this study – the inevitable challenge of fragmented representations.

Household Survey

The household survey was one of the ways to ensure some representation of those who did not enjoy narrative privilege and/or those who could not be reached for narrative based interviews. The purpose of the survey was to impart numerical heft to the arguments constructed through the narrative analysis. This is why the survey was conducted in the format of a census, covering all households of three smaller settlements in the immediate vicinity of Jhantipahari town. The questions in the survey were arrived at through an understanding of the incumbent socio-political and economic power differentials, derived from the narratives. (full questionnaire attached in Appendix IV)

These settlements being homogeneous in terms of caste/community represented different positions within the local hierarchy. The broad aim of the survey was to make explicit the disparity of landholding, livelihood opportunities, and engagement with the lived space among actors from different social positions. The data from the survey was entered into SPSS. After cleaning the data and eliminating cases where full informed consent could not be established, two kinds of statistical analysis were carried out – i) univariate analysis of selected variables to understand the nature of their distribution and ii) bivariate analysis wherein particular variables were cross-tabulated by caste/community. In keeping with the

overall ontological and epistemological disposition of the study, the quantitative data has been used for purely descriptive purposes rather than for prescriptive or predictive analysis. The findings of the survey have been used in Article 4.

Ethical Considerations

A Note on the Identity of Participants

It is the norm in Sweden to anonymize all participants in surveys and studies of all natures. However in India it is customary to acknowledge participants by name especially in the case of direct quotations from interviews and in the case of key-informants and gatekeepers who are indispensable to the central argument. In the articles I have used real names of participants in all cases where I was assured of full and informed consent for publication of identity. In all other cases I have anonymized the participants. The participants of the survey are not named anywhere in the article or kappa since all discussions of the results are in aggregate terms. In the case of interviews given in official capacity, I have named the interviewees along with their post they hold (in the appendix) except in one case, where the information and opinion shared was deemed to be sensitive. On the whole I have followed the principle of publishing the identity only when I am sure of full and informed consent and that no harm whatsoever will be caused by such publication.

A Note on Self-reflexivity: Who am I and Why am I doing this?

Jazeel and McFarlane (2010:110) have written of the “emotional, social and political demand” that is incumbent on researchers such as myself, working between the Global North and South. In his retrospective reminiscence of Subaltern Studies, Chakrabarty (2015) has dwelled at length on the personal involvement of himself and his peers in building this academic project. Taking cue from these scholars, I wish to outline here some of the personal aspects of my motivations and justifications in carrying out this project in the manner it has been carried out.

I was born and raised in the heart of metropolitan Kolkata, in a privileged middle-class family. I received my formal education at elite private and public institutions in Kolkata, Delhi, and Mumbai before arriving at my current position in Lund, Sweden. My parents are college-educated public sector employees. They were both born into different but privileged castes, which meant that I have been

endowed with Savarna privilege all my life despite not having a definitive caste identity. I was also born and raised a woman in a social context where most women's life trajectories are pre-determined by their gender identity. At the college I attended, one of the best-ranked in India, women began to be admitted only in 1975 and it is still part of the rulebook to lock women students up in their hostel rooms at 10 pm every night for their own "safety and security".

All of this information is of tremendous relevance to the research work I do. One of my primary motivations behind selecting census towns as the site for my doctoral project was the desire to explore small town India, after having had some prior fieldwork experience in the purely rural context. This is simultaneously reflective of two things – my privilege in being able to pick and choose places on the map to study, and the emancipatory value I attached to field-work as a means to be mobile in my own country. It ascribes a legitimate 'purpose' to the kind of travel that is socially and morally forbidden for most Indian women. My metropolitan feminized self was not lost on the participants I interacted with in course of the study. This was evident in more ways than one. Learnings from the dialogical analysis of several interviews revealed that responses were being directed to this female, metropolitan other by the self-aware male, *mufassil* resident. At the same time the weight of a foreign university affiliation and city-based upbringing made fixing appointments and extracting 'data' easier.

I grew up blissfully unaware of my Savarna privilege, as most people of my social background are wont to. It was only during my years in Mumbai at a higher education campus teeming with anti-caste DBA activists that I was made aware of my privileged position on the caste ladder. The years were both traumatic and transformative – a transformation that was bound to impact all my work henceforth. I emerged from that education an avowed feminist and anti-caste activist. My personal political loyalties are deeply committed to an intersectional feminism that places greater premium on an informed "identity politics" rather than on the notion of a "universal class struggle". In the ongoing ideological battle between the organized Left in India and the DBA political formations my position is unqualifiedly in favor of the latter. This of course has implications for the kind of analysis I engage in. The choice of developing a Subaltern Studies inspired analytical framework is one such.

In course of the study I have made a conscious and concerted effort to seek out individuals and groups whose voices are most easily silenced. This has been accomplished to a limited extent and surely there is much for me to learn in making my analytical lens more perceptive to the subaltern. There has also been a conscious effort to not be prescriptive towards people and their politics, especially those occupying the subaltern realm. Thus the preoccupation of this study is not with what DBA politics can or should do to improve its lot or what trajectory

subaltern urbanization should adopt to make itself competitive with mainstream metro-centricity. The critical gaze instead is turned onto the dominant structures and systems. The preoccupation therefore is with throwing light on the silences, exclusions, and violence meted out by the dominant worldview and its epistemology.

However this is not enough in terms of addressing the responsibility of producing knowledge across the global line of privilege. As Jazeel and McFarlane (2007) point out, the need to speak to research sites without reducing people and places to 'case studies' in the language of Euro-American academia, is both urgent and tricky. In this study I attempt to address this issue by writing a synopsis of the arguments in Bangla – my native language and the language in which all interviews were conducted. The thesis along with this synopsis will be circulated amongst the participants and made available to others from the sites of study who may show interest in engaging with it. This is a small step towards attaining the kind of epistemic justice that the thesis seeks to advocate for.

7.Synthesis of Arguments

I return now to the research questions I formulated in Chapter 1. Before turning directly to the task of answering them, I wish to briefly recapitulate the fundamental aspects of the conceptual and empirical base from which they have been launched. The point of entry of this thesis is the geographical phenomenon of subaltern urbanization, understood as the growth and proliferation of small urban centers, independent of large metropolitan areas and state planning. In contemporary India there is substantial evidence of subaltern urbanization, specifically in the form of 2532 new ‘census towns’ – a category of settlements deemed ‘urban’ in the national census but governed through institutions of the Panchayati Raj. The state of West Bengal is home to the largest share of new census towns which together account for 66 per cent of urban growth in the state between 2001 and 2011. A few of these new census towns are located in the less urbanized, economically weaker, and politically conflicted districts of Bankura and West Medinipur. It is in three such census towns – Garbeta (West Medinipur), Amlagora (West Medinipur) and Jhantipahari (Bankura) that the field-work for this thesis was conducted.

In trying to understand the urban character of these census towns, this thesis adopts an analytical framework developed from a subaltern studies perspective. This entails taking the actually existing complexity of social reality as the starting point and foregoing established categories of analysis in favor of categories that resonate with the everyday experiences and forms of meaning-making prevalent in the sites of study. Modifying the notion of an autonomous domain of subaltern politics as a sphere that is insulated from the workings of formal institutions, I conceptualize subalternity as a position from which access to formally institutionalized forms of power is obstructed and therefore also the power to create canonical forms of knowledge. The autonomous domain in this thesis is constituted by actions and articulations undertaken by individuals and groups, which follow a logic that is undocumented in the archives of official knowledge. These individuals might otherwise be parts of or participants in the functioning of formal institutions of governance and politics. The actions and articulations in question are seen through the prism of resistance as negotiation, to detect ways in which they limit domination and extend a politics that may be characterized as subaltern.

We also know from existing scholarship that the nature of the post-colonial state in India is such that there is a dissonance between the operation of the formal state apparatus and the everyday lives of those being governed by it. The externality of the state as not only a moral arbiter in all matters but also as a perceived agent of injustice is an important feature in the social life of the country. The sphere of economic activities in contemporary India also defies neat classification within the vocabulary of types of economic production. Any analysis from the perspective of subalternity therefore needs to take into careful consideration the myriad forms of economic practices in existence. Within this scheme of things, the current position of West Bengal with regard to federal relations is one of oppositional assertion. Against this conceptual and empirical background, this thesis tries to locate subaltern urbanization within the matrix of official knowledges of the urban, dominant discourses around urbanization, and the everyday politics of the urban.

Summary of Articles

The first research question is addressed in Article 1 which was written in the aftermath of the first phase of pilot visits to twelve census towns. It was born out of an imperative to reconcile the observations from analyzing the available census data and the lessons from interviews with gatekeepers at various levels. It seemed that the only way such reconciliation was possible was through an acknowledgment of ‘competing epistemologies’ – different ways of ordering and understanding the idea of the urban that were competing for space in public and policy discourse.

The article starts with an overview of the official epistemology as presented through official webpages, reviews of policy documents, and analysis of census data over the decades. It points to the implicit metro-centricity of this epistemology while also drawing attention to some of its internal contradictions. These characteristics reveal how the official epistemology of the urban serves an instrumental purpose in the exercise of political power. The article then turns to alternative ways of seeing the urban.

The ‘Indiapolis’ division of the global ‘e-Geopolis’ project is reviewed. Their findings are coupled with the observations of urbanists from the ‘subaltern urbanization’ project, which leads to a picture of the macro level urban condition in India which is vastly different from what the official epistemology would advise. For instance, from the epistemological standpoint of these alternative approaches, West Bengal could be argued to be 46.6 per cent urban as opposed to the official statistic of only 27.2 per cent.

However, both of these epistemological approaches operated from a distant, macro-level position and did not have much to say on the actual lived experience of urbanity. For this I turn to the ‘embedded epistemologies’ operationalized here

in the form of two introductory case studies from the census towns of Garbeta and Phulia. Through a discussion of how the urban was understood by actors in these CTs, I highlight the subjective and constructed nature of these categories. I argue that despite the seemingly straightforward definition put forth in the census, what constitutes a census town and how it is to be understood remain open questions. I further argue that the perceived proliferation of census towns presents us with an opportune moment to question and unsettle our received categories of knowledge on the urban.

The second research question is addressed in Article 2. This article was written after a period of analytical crisis wherein I found myself caught in a loop of identifying new expressions of subaltern consciousness in my transcripts and rejecting the validity of my interpretation based on my personal subject position in academia. The crisis demanded a zooming out, a return to the macro picture, and a reconfiguration of my own position within it. So I found myself returning to the metanarrative of urban theory and approaching it with fresh eyes bearing the lens of a post-colonial perspective.

The article begins with two deeply personal prologues. The first prologue is a thick description from ethnographic observations in Jhantipahari town. The aim of this prologue is to establish the visceral real-ness of the town alongside its smallness which is bound to be privileged in most analyses. The second prologue is an affective response to the debate carried out between Brenner & Schmid (2015) and Walker (2015) in the pages of *CITY*. The debate revolves around the core question of how the urban is to be imagined, wherein Brenner & Schmid (2015) have called for a radical rethinking while Walker (2015) has maintained the adequacy of existing frameworks. My emphasis here is on the underlying logic of Walker's argument which is the logic of the hegemony of Eurocentrism.

Following these prologues, I venture into a review of some key debates that mark recent developments within urban theory. I posit that two separate streams of scholarship- one pertaining to historical difference and the Global South and the other pertaining to small towns- have been speaking to the same edifice of Euro-American and metro-centric metanarrative of the urban. The conceptual formulation of 'planetary urbanization' by Brenner & Schmid (2014, 2015) opens up the possibility for these two streams to merge and give rise to a new paradigm of imagining the urban. As an example I produce the case study of Jhantipahari town which lies within the overlapping category of the small and the South.

What I present in the case study are further thick descriptions and field notes of participant observation. A few key-informant interviews are also analyzed to strengthen the argument. Three learnings emerge strongly from this combined analysis. The first is that the economic trajectory of the town marks a break from the image of rapid structural transformation over the past decade as presented by

the census data. Instead it shows elements of continuity over the several decades. The second is that a plethora of factors have contributed to this experience, not all of which are connected to the universalistic narrative of global capital. The third is that the making of Jhantipahari town is sustained by the long-standing hierarchies of caste-based (and community based) social relations, which again is a shift from the image of radical social change associated with urbanization processes.

Articles 3 and 4 respond to the third research question while also contributing to the discussions initiated in the first two articles. Article 3 brings together the empirical and conceptual elements that lead to an analysis within the subaltern studies prerogative. Employing the case of Garbeta town, I seek to answer the questions – 1) in what ways is it possible to see ‘Garbeta town’ as a case of subaltern urbanization in India and 2) how do the town-making processes in Garbeta fit into the ongoing dialogue on subaltern urbanism? I argue that in the case of Garbeta town, the key hypotheses of subaltern urbanization in India (given by Denis, Mukhopadhyay, & Zerah 2012) are upheld in conditional and qualified ways. I further argue that using subalternity as an analytical lens to view expressions of urbanism in Garbeta town, brings back the social relations of caste and identity based flows of power to the center of academic engagement with the urban. This signifies a need to revisit the question of redistributive justice as a key concern within urban studies in India.

The paper develops an analytical framework drawing from the subaltern urbanization project (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, & Zerah 2012), Roy’s (2011) conceptual intervention into ‘subaltern urbanism’ and Spivak’s (2005) formulation of the subaltern as “a position without identity”. In this framing, the subaltern is that which marks “the limits of archival and ethnographic recognition”. With this formulation in mind, I use oral history interviews, life stories, business histories, and focus group discussions to construct the story of Garbeta town. Some of the core components of this story include mapping the meaning of the town (to its residents) through participatory exercises; land as the basis to identities and neighborhoods; and work as an interaction of entrepreneurship and informality. The story culminates in the assertion that multiple forms of urbanism are thriving in Garbeta town, which indicates the complexity of spatial and social relations that contribute to its making.

The aim of Article 4 is to approach the arguments developed above from a different methodological stance. The sites moved out of the official boundaries of the town, even beyond its popular boundaries, and spilled over into settlements surrounding the town itself. The methods employed were a combination of narrative analysis and bivariate analysis of household survey data. In this article I continue to build on an analytical framework based on Brenner & Schmid’s (2014, 2015) ‘planetary urbanization’ combined with Roy’s (2015, 2016) interventions on

post-colonialism in critical urban theory. This framework lends coherence and legitimacy to my selection of sites and the questions I raise.

In the section based on narrative analysis, I argue that there are two histories of Jhantipahari town – one narrated by the subject from the elite, dominant group and the other narrated by the subject from the subaltern groups. The contrast in these two versions of the history of the same town reflects the contrast in the lived experience of urbanity. However, there are also elements of commonality between these two narratives. I read these shared elements as a subaltern narrative in itself, when juxtaposed against the dominant narrative of urban theory or the state-led narrative of urbanization.

In the following section based on findings from the survey, I make explicit the material forces that sustain the flows of power in this context – the disparities in landownership between dominant and subaltern groups. This is also reflected in the role played by different groups in the organization of agricultural production. Finally, a discussion of changes in primary sources of cash income for households in the different groups and the nature of their relationship with the town itself, leads to the consolidation of the idea of arguments built upon the previous narrative analysis.

The key role of this article in this compilation is to support and substantiate arguments already launched in the previous articles. Linking back to the conceptual framework described above, it argues that the urban in form and content is an imprint of the rural. The rural as an idea is inextricably implicated in the making of the urban. The two are not spatially segregated but are produced as notionally discrete categories in the dominant representation of urbanization. This serves to maintain historical silences, omissions, and erasures around forms of oppressions, not the least of which is based on caste.

Article 5 also responds to the third research question and presents an opportunity to bring up themes and concerns that could not be addressed at a larger scale in the rest of the compilation due to constraints of both time and material. The core question driving this article is – what lessons are there for feminist geographers to glean out of the gendered lived experiences of small-town India. The attempt is to understand small-towns as gendered spaces and to identify feminist concerns specific to these geographies.

The format adopted is that of a case study and I present the observations from conducting narrative analysis on an in-depth business history interview with a woman-entrepreneur in Jhantipahari town. In this analysis I identify three forms of contradictions that frame her experience as an entrepreneur in a small-town. The first of these was the paradoxical understanding of the institution of ‘good family’ presented by the subject in her scathing critique of the same as a deeply patriarchal

family. The second contradiction was the paradoxical role played by her (caste and family based) social network in both enabling and impeding her work as an entrepreneur. The third contradiction is the paradox of spatiality and density of mobilities wherein women from subaltern groups like the Santhals enjoy more dense navigations of a limited amount of space while women from elite groups such as the subject herself experience limited access of navigation but to a quantitatively wider space.

Based on the understanding of these three paradoxes that frame the gendered experience of the small-town, I argue that the feminist political agenda needs to address the question of patriarchal power in a direct way, even in contexts so far seen through prisms of 'development' and 'inclusion'. Recognizing the powerful affective impact of such paradoxes is the first step towards imagining a feminist intervention towards making small-towns into gender just spaces.

I now summarize the arguments developed in response to each research question.

Subaltern Urbanization, Official Epistemology, and the Post-colonial State Apparatus

As described in the opening chapter, my first encounter with the category of census towns was through reports on the demographic findings of the census of 2011. The reports and the notifications sent out by the Office of the Registrar General in the form of a circular³⁰ seemed to outline a relatively straightforward criteria for the identification of census towns. However there remained some confusion over the exact *modus operandi* of this process. While the circular itself and the analysis of census data by Pradhan (2012, 2013) seemed to suggest that the process was carried out entirely in a top-down fashion at the level of Directorates of Census Operations, an older article by Bhagat (2005) suggested that a more bottom-up approach was in practice, starting with inputs from District Magistrates. Had there been a revisal of stance towards urban classification between 2005 and 2011? Surely the people involved in the actual collection of census data would know? With these questions in mind I set out to find census towns in my home-state of West Bengal.

The process of putting name and place together is described in the methodology discussion. However putting name and place together did not translate into putting concept and practice together. The category of census town that was so central to my research project enjoyed neither recognition nor currency at the places whose names on a list had taken me to them. At every Village Panchayat, Block

³⁰ Circular No. 2 issued by the Office of the Registrar General of India dated 23.07.2008 available at <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-Circulars/Circulars/11-31-10-Circular-02.doc>

Panchayat, and key-informant interview the term was met with surprise, speculation, and eventual dissociation. Individuals employed by various PRIs, local cadre of political parties, prominent business owners, and members of the general public seemed to be entirely unacquainted with the term 'census town' let alone identify as residents of the same. Even officials at the district level, who were otherwise knowledgeable about local socio-political and economic affairs, were unaware of this system of urban classification and what it entailed for the places concerned.

The exact process of identification of census towns in the census of 2011 was later delineated to me by a senior official at the Directorate of Census Operations in Kolkata. The problems and pitfalls of this process are discussed in detail in Article 1. The extent to which this process is far-removed from the life-worlds of people inhabiting the census towns is emblematic of both the dissonance between 'data' and its making pointed out by Kundu (2011a) and the externality of the post-colonial state discussed by Kaviraj (2010). Given this dissociation between category and experience, what does it mean to find a census town, to go to a census town, to engage in participant observation in a census town as a researcher with an avowed commitment to the notion of subalternity? In my field-work and subsequent reporting and analysis I have treated locally circulated mental maps of the towns as my points of reference for defining the physical boundaries of the study area. This has led to Garbeta census town and Amlagora census town being merged into a single territorial unit referred to in Article 3 (and the rest of this thesis) as 'Garbeta town'. Along the same lines, 'Jhantipahari town' has turned out to be significantly more expansive than Jhantipahari census town. Figures IV and V demarcate these physical and notional entities on a map. To be clear, 'Garbeta town' and 'Jhantipahari town' – the two geographical entities that I will refer to repeatedly in this thesis – do not exist on paper as such, as administrative, revenue, demographic or cartographical units. They are simply tracts of more-or-less continuous built-up area imagined as coherent urban entities by the people residing in them. Article 3 also carries a map of Garbeta town put together through participatory mapping exercises discussed earlier. This privileging of the local geographical imagination over and above the official narrative of the demarcating of the urban, is a conscious strategy to operationalize a subaltern studies perspective.

Be that as it may, it would be naïve to treat this dissonance as merely incidental. Census towns such as Garbeta, Amlagora, and Jhantipahari have been injected into the margins of the official narrative on urbanization in India by the census of 2011. The picture painted is one of sudden and unforeseen growth, an 'emergence' of a place in a space where none worth reporting existed. This is of course reflective of the tremendous metro-centricity and urban bias in India's public policy. It is only after census towns were classified as such and elevated to the category 'urban' that

the Ministry of Environment announced its plans to extend solid waste management services to some of them and the Ministry of Power extended its Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Program to cover all the new census towns. Measures such as these are sometimes labelled as “rurbanization” or the extension of “urban services” to “rural areas”. Why is it, one may ask, that “rural areas” are assumed to not need power supply or infrastructure for solid waste management? But that is a question for another thesis.

What I seek to highlight here is the fact that census towns, have existed as places with communities, histories, and everyday lives, for far longer than they have been detected by the radar of urban statistics. The practice of looking at individual census villages in isolation and testing them for having fulfilled the ‘urban criteria’ eclipses the socio-spatial continuities between them and eventually leads to this dissonance between how places actually are on the ground and how they are represented in the census and thereafter in policy-making. The process is described in greater detail in Article 1. Articles 3 and 4 delve into the details of how this dissonance is played out in the case of Garbeta town and Jhantipahari town respectively. Suffice to mention here that the census towns I went looking for and the census towns I eventually found were vastly different both in terms of morphological extent and in terms of everyday life. Far from being newly developed small towns, both Garbeta and Jhantipahari were burgeoning business centers with protracted histories of trade, industry, and commerce. They were indeed lacking in the provisions of public amenities as reports from governmental agencies would have one believe³¹, but that was not their most defining feature. On the contrary, the steady flow of innovation and enterprise at these sites had transformed them in the eyes of their own inhabitants while also maintaining the social hierarchies and flows of power that gave the place its historical specificity.

I spent several mornings at the Garbeta Village Panchayat office, observing the flow of activities and the interactions between the officials and the local public. After a few days, I asked the Panchayat President Mr. Lohar – a third generation grassroots politician from a Dalit family – if I could have a tour of the physical infrastructure that had come up in the town over the past decade.

He readily assigned his deputy, Mr. Bajpayee to the task. Over the course of that afternoon Mr. Bajpayee took me around on his motorcycle, stopping every now and then to point out a tube-well, a small foot-bridge over an inundated drain, a lamp-post under repair, and the freshly painted boundary wall of Garbeta High School. Is that all, I asked. What about the real urban expansion? The new houses,

³¹ See for e.g. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/world-population-day-small-towns-in-india-recording-population-boom-recasting-urban-landscape/story-AqhdHASEJ5mSYm2XmAko3O.html>

new shops, new roads that had come up in the recent years. Nothing was new, he said. It has all been there since before he was born. Since before his father was born in fact. To see the new constructions I would have to go outside Garbeta *mouja*, into the other neighborhoods of Garbeta town. But even those were more than ten years old, he insisted. Back at the Panchayat office, I interview³² Mr. Mondol – an employee and life-long resident of Garbeta town. Would he consider the past ten to fifteen years to have been phenomenal in terms of urbanization in the area, I asked.

“Well, you insist on focusing on the urbanization...and that’s fine...I mean, we are here in the middle of the town right now...but this place as such...Garbeta Panchayat, which is what I work for...that Panchayat on the whole is quite rural. Most people here are rural and the way of life is rural. The prevalent mentality is largely rural. It is true of me as much as it is true of the others you have met.”

Later in the same interview, he comments further on the urban character of the place and the Panchayat.

“In a way you are right. If we look at the work we are doing these days...we spent a lot of money setting up the street lighting some years ago...and now we are getting many requests for building extensions. People want to add a floor to their house or build an extra room. Then they get into disputes with their neighbors. The rules are not so strict here...but we have to make sure that everyone is happy. In that sense we function almost like a township Panchayat rather than a Village Panchayat.”

Several weeks later, I interviewed³³ Mr. Patra – an employee at Kharbona Village Panchayat – the administrative office for a section of Jhantipahari town. He echoed the logic of Mr. Mondol in discussing the enmeshed rurality and urbanity of the place.

“This is definitely a rural area because most people are dependent on agriculture. But the town as you can see is urban. There is a school, a press, a station, regular buses and some taxis even. Now there are places to eat lunch and drink tea. Probably we should call it a rural area with an urban town.”

In these accounts the rural and the urban are amalgamated both spatially and notionally. Even for individuals working for formal government institutions, the official rural-urban classification is rendered redundant by their own situated experiences and perceptions. On one hand they are keen to flaunt the state-mandated ‘rural development’ work carried out by the institutions they are a part of – the tube-wells, the embankments, and the street lighting. On the other hand,

³² Interview conducted on October 11-12, 2014.

³³ Interview conducted on January 17, 2015.

the urban character of where they live and what they do is clear to them. They adjust their lives and roles as government functionaries accordingly, to navigate the notional rural and the urban, without waiting for official directives or classifications. In this navigation we find a reversal of the logic followed by the state in its approach towards urbanization. For the key Ministries dealing with infrastructure, the census towns came into relief as spaces for intervention, only after they had been categorized as urban by the census. The infrastructure in this case follows the classification. For the communities living in the towns and their surroundings, the perception of urbanity comes from already existing infrastructure – the schools, the stations, the housing, the transport facilities – even if that infrastructure pre-existed the post-colonial state (e.g. the schools and stations which are from colonial times) or was built by the people themselves independently of the post-colonial state (e.g. private transport facilities). Thus, in the situated logic of urbanity the urban status follows the infrastructure. In fact, the urban status is because of the preceding infrastructure. This reversal of the official logic of urbanization is what constitutes the autonomous subaltern domain of meaning-making and knowledge production about the urban. In this imagination of the urban and this logic of urbanization, the people – their actions and experiences – are centered. In following this logic, the impact of census classifications (which elsewhere result in statistical upheavals and analytical chaos) is muted into mere technicality, thereby limiting the domination of official epistemology over subaltern experience.

Subaltern Urbanization and Dominant Discourses

In the discussion of the analytical gap between critical urban theory and the experiences of subaltern urbanization one of the key questions that emerged was which actors and agents should we imagine as inhabiting and propelling the urban universe. Needless to mention, the two towns of Garbeta and Jhantipahari had no presence of big banks, multinational corporations, or a global capitalist class. In the absence of these key actors who are integral to critical urban theory, it is important to start with a mapping of the socio-economic forces that actually exist and play a role in the urban experience of these towns. In articles 3 and 4 this mapping is done in some detail. Here I reproduce a rough sketch of the main actors in the two towns and their relationships with the place and with each other.

The historical elite: This category consists of individuals and households that have held a prominent and powerful position in the socio-economic and political life of the town for a substantial period of time spanning several generations. The category is certainly a fractured one with rivalries and conflicts of interest superseding any unifying attributes. In the case of Garbeta town the category consists of the ‘upper caste’ groups in Garbeta mouja and their counterparts and

rivals in neighboring Lapuria mouja (see Article 3); in Jhantipahari town it is composed of the Kundus and Rakshits of the Tambuli caste and the Marwari community. As this account suggests the elite is drawn from different Savarna castes of differing ritual and material status. They are nonetheless the dominant castes³⁴ in their respective contexts. The group is not a capitalist class although it is highly represented in firm-ownership and financing of industrial and commercial enterprises. These investments are often dependent on and derived from wages earned by members of the households employed in formal sector jobs in metropolitan areas at national or global levels. The core logic governing this group is also fractured. On one hand their ties to the place and the desire to maintain a way of life that upholds their dominant status motivates economic decisions. On the other hand, the unfeasibility of maintaining such an unequal system under growing political assertions from the underclasses is obvious to them which results in the desire to see future generations secure a place for themselves in metropolitan locations. What cements this category is the historical experience of material and ideological privilege shared by its members. All groups in this category, whether 'general castes' or 'backward castes', have historically enjoyed control over agricultural land and access to education based on their Savarna status.

The laboring underclass: This category is defined by the need to perform manual labor for wages. It consists of individuals and households working in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. In the case of Garbeta and Jhantipahari the category is drawn entirely from the DBA groups. Given the stigma attached to manual labor in India's caste society, it may be a fair generalization to make that this is the case in all places, but further research may or may not uphold that assertion. In any case, the caste underpinnings of this category are inescapable for the two towns studied here. The category is however different from the traditional Marxist category of the labor class. In this category the laboring individuals are not only free to move between employers and enterprises but are also free to invest savings in trade (as in the case of Garbeta) and engage in petty commodity production from time to time (as in the case of Jhantipahari) to boost their income. Members of this category may also be employed in low-paying formal sector jobs. On the whole the discerning criteria for constructing this category has been the willingness to perform manual labor for wages, which in India is very much a function of caste.

The emerging entrepreneurs: This category consists of young business owners, operating through small or single-member firms that have given rise to the emergence of new sectors in the local economy. In Garbeta town the category includes the group of taxi service providers, owners of business ventures such as

³⁴ See Article 4 and Srinivas (1976, 1994) for more on the concept of 'dominant caste'.

'coaching centers' for higher education, mobile phone and computer repair centers etc. In Jhantipahari town the category comprises mainly the vegetable market brokers but also the owners of home-based eateries and other small businesses. The groups may be drawn from different caste groups across the hierarchy as exemplified by the preponderance of Dalit-Adivasi vegetable brokers in Jhantipahari and the Savarna background of most new entrepreneurs in Garbeta. The capital investments for their enterprises are drawn variably from agricultural profits, savings from wages earned by household members, or informal loans. Despite these variabilities I group them into the same category for two main reasons. The first is that these entrepreneurs and the emerging sectors they spawn are responsible for attributing an urban character to the place of their operation. The second is that these entrepreneurs share a common logic that affects their operations at least in some measure. The logic is that of catering to the specific needs of the community and the experiences of gaps in service provisioning – a somewhat expanded version of Sanyal's (2006) "need economy". Thus the experience of a lack of adequate transport facilities led a group of young, high-school educated potato traders to start a private taxi company in Garbeta. The perceived enthusiasm among local students towards higher education in science and technology led an entrepreneur to establish an 'examination center' – a one-stop venue for examinations affiliated to institutions in places as distant and different as peri-urban Hyderabad and metropolitan Agra. This is not to say that profit is not a motive for this category of entrepreneurs. However it is not the only or sometimes even the most important motive.

As the above sketch demonstrates, neither the capital-labor differentiation nor the logic of capital is the central force of urbanization in the two towns of Garbeta and Jhantipahari. On the contrary, the segmentation of the economy and the organization of socio-economic life are built very much on the pre-existing axes of power based on caste and community. In this sense urbanization here is an extension and consolidation of the agrarian social order. Caste here is not merely a "cultural institution" that intercepts neutral economic logic. It is instead the very central organizing principle based on which material decisions and distributions are ordered. Chari (2004), Gidwani (2008), and Damodaran (2008) are amongst those who have documented in detail the inter-related trajectories of capitalism and caste relations in India. In his study of a manufacturing based small town in southern India, Chari (2004) raised the question if the subaltern can accumulate capital. As learnings from Garbeta and Jhantipahari demonstrate, they indeed can and do accumulate capital sporadically or on a sustained basis. However these accumulation processes and their implications require a much more nuanced analytical lens than critical urban theory can provide at the moment. The different logics under which the categories identified above operate are constituents of the

subaltern domain of urban theory. This brings us to the question of everyday politics in the making of subaltern urbanization.

Subaltern Urbanization and Everyday Politics

Having established the centrality of caste in the socio-economic life of the towns, I now turn to the everyday forms in which these social relations play out. The analytical lens here is that of resistance as negotiation. As articles 3 and 4 will show, both Garbeta and Jhantipahari have populations that are numerically skewed in favour of the dominant caste group and geographically segregated into caste-based neighborhoods. The growth and expansion of both towns has been connected to the exodus of dominant caste groups from surrounding rural areas to escape adverse living conditions – political rivalry induced violence in the case of Garbeta and agrarian crisis in the case of Jhantipahari. This demographic character of the towns has not been breached to any significant extent over the decades even though both towns are in close proximity to various DBA settlements. In this sense subaltern urbanization here thrives as a system of privilege and protection for the dominant castes that is maintained by the physical segregation of caste groups.

The idea of caste as social identity and signifier of status finds frequent mention in the everyday life of the towns.

“This pond is a Tambuli pond.” “The Bagdis work as house maids but not the Doms.” “There are no Muslim castes here; only Hindu communities.” “The tribal castes live outside the town.” “We Agarwals are forward castes.” “The Mondols run the potato empire here.”

These are only few of the numerous examples through which the deeply embedded common sense of caste as identifier was communicated to me. Yet every time my questions demanded a conscious analysis of social conditions on the part of the interviewee, the idea of caste was somehow muted into a blurry economically determined category. The term most commonly used was “labor caste” – “*we the people of the labor castes...*”, “*...the labor caste people...*” and so forth. In this formulation, the ‘other’ was defined as “general castes” even if the term was used in reference to a group such as the Tambulis who are officially listed as OBCs. Thus there was a clear presence of two different logics of classification in the minds of my interviewees³⁵. The first one, that was in everyday usage and had specific caste names as signifiers of position, belonged to the local register of shared history and experience. The second one, consisting of two broad categories of “labor castes” and “general castes”, was employed to convey social analysis to

³⁵ Interviews conducted on October 29, 30, and 31, 2014.

an outsider such as myself. This is why a question such as “*how many neighborhoods are there in this town*” was responded to with

“There must be about seven or eight...the Kundu neighborhood, the Rakshit neighborhood, the Agarwal neighborhood, the Kejriwal neighborhood, the Dutta neighborhood...two of them in fact, the Brahmin neighborhood, and then there is the Maal neighborhood on the other side of the tracks.”

In the same interview, the question “how would you describe the relationship between the different castes” got the response

“How do you think it is?...I mean of course the hierarchy and the differentiation between the labor castes and the general castes is present; but the rest is neither too good nor too bad...it’s just about average.”

This dual system of conceptualization and articulation has much to do with the political history of the place. Both Garbeta and Jhantipahari towns and their surrounding hinterlands have been traditional strongholds of the organized Left in West Bengal, which was in power from 1977 to 2011. Part of the grassroots level political mobilization of the Left Front was to inculcate the idea of class consciousness into the cadre. However this seems to have been done without a parallel questioning of or reflection on their own privilege by the agrarian elite which also formed the party leadership. The translation of the bourgeoisie-proletariat dichotomy into Bangla is curiously metaphorical as opposed to literal. Proletariat in Bangla is “shorbohara” which literally means “those who have lost it all”. Bourgeoisie on the other hand is “shorbohara” or “those who have taken it all”. As polarizing as this nomenclature sounds, it also serves to obfuscate the nature of agrarian relations in the places where the terminology was put to use. To largely landless agricultural laborers from DBA communities, the ‘general castes’ were far from ‘those who had taken it all’. They were in fact dependent on and loyal to the generations of landowning elite who had taken to instructing them about class-consciousness with the rise of the Left. In the words of a veteran Communist Party activist from Garbeta town:

“Their core modus operandi- the discipline of the party- was to conduct weekly classes. Classes in political lessons – the way the society was viewed in their opinion, according to the template of Marxism – that was preached in the classes. Stalwarts like Amal Dasgupta, Jyoti Basu and Anil Biswas³⁶ have conducted lectures here in Garbeta. So the communist party has divided society into two

³⁶ These are names of prominent CPI(M) leaders. Jyoti Basu served as Chief Minister of West Bengal under the Left Front regime from 1977 to 2000, Anil Biswas was Secretary and chief strategist of the party until his demise in 2006, and Amal Dasgupta wrote a biography of Lenin in Bangla.

sections- the 'shorbohara' and the 'shorbohara'. This is what the youth and the students were incessantly taught. So this consciousness solidified in them. At the same time, there were incessant meetings and marches. They conducted meetings in every village.”

The idea of the oppressor in this discourse is that of a far-removed entity, external to the immediate setting and everyday interactions of the place. Arguably, the permeation of this discourse is reflected in the analysis of everyday oppression in the towns in terms of dichotomous, veiledly defined categories instead of in the vocabulary of caste-specific accounts. Nonetheless the existence of oppressions in both broad structural terms and incipient everyday forms was frequently referred to. In Jhantipahari for instance, it was common practice amongst Dalit and Adivasi groups to negotiate wages collectively, for informal domestic labor performed during religious and life-cycle festivities. There were also reports of boycotting particular dominant caste employers or moving out en-masse from particular kinds of work such as manual scavenging. DBA community leaders also engaged in negotiations with dominant caste Panchayat members to divert resources towards their neighborhoods within the towns. As Articles 3, 4, and 5 will illustrate, the relations between the different groups are far from static. The following quotes from Dalit women about the dominant castes living in Garbeta are a case in point:

“They are all nice people. If you serve their interests then they are all nice.”

“It used to be worse...but now our children are getting educated...so...; but then even after getting educated ourselves we have to hold them high up. If we don't hold them high up...don't oil their wheels...then nothing is going to come through for us.”

Conversations around gender relations followed a similar memo. As Article 5 demonstrates, “women” as an undifferentiated category was barely of any analytical significance. The life experiences of DBA women as opposed to those of women from dominant caste groups were vastly different even if both experiences were deeply marked by a patriarchal social order. Since the exploration of gender relations is a fringe theme in this study, I risk overstating the argument. However the point remains that the everyday politics of subaltern urbanization, both in terms of the politics of caste and the politics of gender, is understood and articulated through overlapping but logically distinct dual ways of viewing and ordering the immediate social reality. This intersection of dual logics is what constitutes the subaltern domain of everyday politics in subaltern urbanization.

The structuring of the three themes above in terms of elite versus subaltern domains of knowledge and politics is by no means final or definitive. It is one of many ways to make sense of the unfolding flows of power that constitute the

making of subaltern urbanization. Further enquiries into each of the themes deploying inventive analytical and methodological apparatuses are bound to reveal further intricacies that can ultimately lead to rich, nuanced, and non-dogmatic narratives of urbanization in a Global South context. This thesis is meant to be a step in that direction.

8. Conclusion

The arguments developed in this thesis bear implications not only for the cotemporary understanding of the urban condition in the Global South, but also for the historiography of the urban on the whole. From a critical social science perspective this has to do with writing histories of subaltern urbanization in ways that make it possible to clearly imagine a road-map for creating just urban spaces. I return now to the idea of the sovereign subject that has been integral to the analytical approach adopted here.

As the above section demonstrates, elite and subaltern spheres of political consciousness exist in multiple contexts that are relevant to subaltern urbanization. They exist in the epistemology of definitions and classifications; in the academic and policy discourse around which urbanizations are central to our understanding of the urban condition of the world; and in everyday imaginations of what constitutes the urban among communities that are directly involved in its production. I submit that the historical narrative emanating from each of these elite spheres be seen as a History 1. In the sphere of official epistemology, this History 1 would consist of a narrative of urbanization wherein unforeseen and unprecedented explosion in the number of CTs between 2001 and 2011 marks a turn of trend for urbanization in India. In the sphere of dominant discourses around urbanization, the History 1 would consist of a narrative of halted capitalist development marked by a messy agrarian transition gone astray. In the sphere of elite local narratives, the History 1 would be a story of pre-eminence of the elite group. However, none of these elite narratives, in isolation or in combination reflect an adequate and fully representative picture of what this thesis has found to be the lived experience of subaltern urbanization in the census towns.

I submit therefore, that we turn now to the various History 2s that are in interaction with these History 1s. In the case of official epistemology, the scheme of identifying and classifying urban centers is constantly interrupted and moulded by the efforts of citizens' groups lobbying for particular forms of governance (see Article 3), by Panchayats modifying their governance practice to suit the changing demographic profile of their constituencies, and by localized circulations of maps and registers in everyday life that defy these classificatory schemes thereby rendering them redundant. In the case of dominant discourses, the vast multiplicity of socio-economic practices – the creative navigations of formal structures and the

varied logics of decision-making that they deploy – force us to invent newer categories and strategies through which to understand them. In the case of everyday politics, DBA communities and women in both dominant and subaltern groups adopt strategies to negotiate the systems of oppressions, thereby putting into practice everyday forms of resistance. This thesis records only a small cross-section of all the possible History 2s that are unfolding at these sites, not to mention all the History 2s in operation at all the other sites that exist outside of our archives. In imagining subaltern urbanization as an ongoing interruption of History 1s by History 2s, what do we learn about its essential characteristics?

I argue that subaltern urbanization as experienced in the census towns studied in this thesis represents a state of dynamic continuity. While there is an obvious continuity in the narratives put forth by the elite spheres (and these narratives are not necessarily empirically false or unfounded), there is more to the story of urbanization at sites away from the spotlight. That is, the continuity of the discourses of History 1s is propelled by interruptions impinged upon them by the myriad History 2s, and in this is constituted the dynamism of these continuities. It is this feature of subaltern urbanization in the census towns that instate them as sovereign subjects of history.

How in this imagination then should we introduce the question of justice? This is after all the central question of any project within the rubric of postcolonialism. As Hung (2014: 281) points out, the conversation initiated by Chibber's (2013a) attempted denunciation of Subaltern Studies is not only a theoretical predicament but also "closely connected to the future of progressive politics in the Global North and South." If one is to go with Chibber's (2013a: 128) proposition that all histories everywhere can be imagined as "part of the same basic story", then how do we imagine justice in that story? How can we, in analytical terms, reconcile the epistemic gaps and silences of the official urban classifications with the celebratory stance on high rates of urban growth? How do we reconcile the struggles of DBA communities for dignity within the agrarian way of life, with the dominant discourse of capitalist development?

On a broader national scale, how do we reconcile the physical well-being of Dalit sanitation workers who are employed by state agencies for years at end on contracts lasting 179 days (to avoid formalization of status), with the physical well-being of backward caste Jat agitators who go on a killing and raping rampage to express their disenchantment with the regime of caste-based affirmative action? How may we reconcile the physical well-being of Kashmiri women routinely sexually assaulted by occupying Indian armed forces, with the physical well-being of malnourished and bullied women officers in the police force? How do we reconcile the physical well-being of protesting students who are victims of police brutality, with the physical well-being of underpaid and under-resourced teaching

staff? These are only few of the questions that the Indian society, political establishment, and social thinkers are faced with. One can only imagine the vast body of similar questions that people are confronted with on a daily basis the world over and especially in the Global South.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that such reconciliation is not possible. What I am suggesting, and I believe I am in line with subalternists and postcolonialists here, is that the imagination of a justice that attends to all these diverse (at times divergent) concerns has to employ concepts that go beyond the categories of “universal logic of capital” and “basic human well-being”. To arrive at such concepts and categories is what lies at the heart of this project. This thesis is intended as a step towards a more complex but more honest imagination of just urban spaces, starting with a more democratic historiography of urbanization.

Appendix I: Material for Discourse Analysis

| “Talk”: Interviews included in discourse analysis | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee | Affiliation |
| Dinesh Harode (Male, 57) | Lead Urban Planner, Ministry of Urban Development |
| Tushar Kumar Majumdar (Male, 59) | Director, National Urban Renewal Mission |
| Debolina Kundu (Female, 48) | Associate Professor, National Institute of Urban Affairs, Delhi |
| Annapurna Shaw (Female, 61) | Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata |
| P.K. Majumdar (Male, 43) | Deputy Director of Census Operations, Kolkata |
| Anonymous (Female, 35) | District Collectorate, West Medinipur |
| Bhudev Gayen (Male, 51) | Statistics Bureau, Medinipur town |
| Anup Bhanja (Male, 33) | Block Development Officer, Garbeta |
| Atanu Mandal (Male, 29) | Census worker, Garbeta |
| “Text”: Websites and documents included in discourse analysis | |
| Website/Document | Administering Institution |
| http://www.censusindia.gov.in/ | Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India |
| https://data.gov.in/catalog/village-amenities-census-2011 | National Informatics Center, Govt. of India |
| http://moud.gov.in/ | Ministry of Urban Development, Govt. of India |
| http://rural.nic.in/netrural/rural/index.aspx | Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India |
| http://www.wburbandev.gov.in/html/index.html | Dept. of Urban Development, Govt. of West Bengal |
| Draft Concept Note on Smart City Scheme | Ministry of Urban Development, Govt. of India |
| India Infrastructure Report (Urban Infrastructure), 2006 | Infrastructure Development Finance Company Limited |

Appendix II: New CTs visited during pilot phase

| Serial No. | Name of CT | District | Category |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Phulia | Nadia | i) |
| 2 | Char Majdia | Nadia | i) |
| 3 | Char Brahmanagar | Nadia | i) |
| 4 | Matiari | Nadia | i) |
| 5 | Joka | South 24 Parganas | i) |
| 6 | Radhanagar | South 24 Parganas | i) |
| 7 | Kalikapur | South 24 Parganas | i) |
| 8 | Jhalda | Purulia | ii) |
| 9 | Saltor | Purulia | ii) |
| 10 | Kotulpur | Bankura | ii) |
| 11 | Jhantipahari | Bankura | ii) |
| 12 | Garbeta | West Medinipur | ii) |
| 13 | Amlagora | West Medinipur | ii) |

Appendix III: List of Interviewees (in chronological order of interviews)

| Serial No. | Interviewee | Location | Type of Interview |
|------------|---|--------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Buddhadeb Mandal (Male, 35, Panchayat employee) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 2 | Subhendu Dey (Male 30) | Garbeta | Life Story , Business History |
| 3 | Himadri Dey (Male, 35) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 4 | Rupen Rai (Male, 63) | Garbeta | Life Story , Business History |
| 5 | Mr. Mahapatra (Male, 58, Chamber of Commerce) | Garbeta | Business History , Oral History |
| 6 | Raju Lohar (Male, 35, Panchayat President) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 7 | Anony mous (Male, 32) | Garbeta | Oral History , Business History |
| 8 | Anony mous (Male, 66) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 9 | Anony mous (Male, 36) | Garbeta | Life Story , Business History |
| 10 | Mr. Niy ogi (Male, 51) | Garbeta | Business History , Oral History |
| 11 | Mr. Bajpay ee (Male, 55, Association of Potato Traders) | Garbeta | Oral History , Business History |
| 12 | Haradhan Ruidas (Male, 53) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 13 | Mr Bagdi (Male, 34) | Garbeta | Life Story , Oral History |
| 14 | Mrs. Saha (Female, 37) | Garbeta | Business History |
| 15 | Anony mous (Male, 24) | Garbeta | Oral History , Life Story |
| 16 | Anony mous (Male, 42) | Garbeta | Business History |
| 17 | Anony mous (Male, 50) | Garbeta | Business History |
| 18 | Shobha Basu (Female, 67, Panchayat President) | Amlagora | Oral History |
| 19 | Subhas Chattaopadhy ay (Male, 77) | Amlagora | Oral History |
| 20 | Biplab Majumdar (Male, 29) | Amlagora | Oral History |
| 21 | Mr Ray (Male, 55) | Amlagora | Business History |
| 22 | Atanu (Male, 26) | Amlagora | Business History |
| 23 | Anony mous (Male, 22) | Amlagora | Business History , Life Story |
| 24 | Mr Dutta (Male, 60, Panchayat employee) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 25 | Mr Dalmiy a (Male, 57 Oil Mill Owner) | Jhantipahari | Oral History , Business History |
| 26 | Anony mous (Male, 35) | Jhantipahari | Business History , Oral History |
| 27 | Jay anta Kundu (Male, 50, Rice Mill owner) | Jhantipahari | Business History , Oral History |

| | | | |
|----|---|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 28 | Krishnapada Rakshit (Male, 87) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 29 | Sasadhar Bhuiyan (Male, 73) | Jhantipahari | Oral History , Life Story |
| 30 | Anony mous (Male, 58) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 31 | Anony mous (Male, 61) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 32 | Mrs Agarwal (Female, 46) | Jhantipahari | Business History , Life Story |
| 33 | Anony mous (Male, 27) | Jhantipahari | Business History |
| 34 | Gautam Maal (Male, 33, former Panchayat member) | Jhantipahari | Life Story , Oral History |
| 35 | Mrs Hansda (Female, 40) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 36 | Ms Hansda (Female, 19) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |
| 37 | Mr Patra (Male, 52, Panchayat employee) | Jhantipahari | Oral History |

Focus Group Discussions

| Type of Group | No. of Participants | Location |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Taxi Drivers Union | 5 (Male, Age 20 to 45) | Amlagora |
| Bagdi (Dalit) Women | 6 (Female, Age 30 to 50) | Garbeta |
| Dom (Dalit) Women | 5 (Female, Age 30 to 40) | Garbeta |
| Maal (Dalit) Men | 7 (Male, Age 20 to 60) | Jhantipahari |
| Santhal (Adivasi) Men | 4 (Male, Age 30 to 50) | Jhantipahari |

Key-informant Interviews done during pilot visits

| Serial No. | Interviewee | Location |
|------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Mr Basak (Male, 55) | Phulia |
| 2 | Mrs Samaddar (Female, 62) | Char Majdia, Char Brahmanagar |
| 3 | Subhash Chattopadhy ay (Male, 77) | Garbeta, Amlagora |
| 4 | Mr Basu (Male, 35) | Radhanagar, Kalikapur |
| 5 | Annapurna Shaw (Female, 61) | Joka |
| 6 | Anasua Basu Raychaudhuri (Female, 40) | Kotulpur, Jhantipahari |
| 7 | Mr Bandy opadhy ay (Male, 55) | Matiari |
| 8 | Mr Samanta (Male, 65) | Jhalda, Saitor |

Appendix IV : Household Survey Schedule

Doctoral Project- Srilata Sircar

1. a. Name of respondent b. Sex

2. Age:

3. Caste/Community:

4. Location:

5. Household no:

Landholding and Agricultural Activities

6. Did your household purchase the plot of land on which you reside at present?

i) Yes ii) No iii) It was donated iv) It was inherited v) Other (explain)

7. Does your household own any cultivable land?

i) Yes ii) No iii) Not owned but cultivated as *Bargadars*

7A) If yes, then total area of all plots owned/cultivated as *Bargadars*: ____

7B) If yes, then number of years for which it has been held: ____

8. Does your household practice agriculture in the form of

a) wage labor

b) hired labor for consumption

c) *bhaagidar* for consumption

d) *bhaagidar* commercial e) commercial- hired labor f) commercial- combined

9. Does a member of your household work as daily wage laborer in agriculture?

i) yes ii) no

9A) If yes then gender of laborer- M/F/other

10. Has a member of your household purchased a plot of land for residential purposes in the last ten years?

i) yes ii) no

10A) If yes, then total area of land purchased: ____

10B) If yes, then number of years for which plot has been owned: ____

11. Has a member of your household purchased a plot of land for agricultural cultivation in the last twenty years? i) yes ii) no

11A) If yes, then total area of land purchased: ____

11B) If yes, then number of years for which plot has been owned: ____

12. Has a member of your household purchased a plot of land for commercial purposes in the last twenty years? (setting up shop/office/other business) i) yes ii) no

12A) If yes, then total area of land purchased: ____

12B) If yes, then number of years for which plot has been owned: ____

13. Has a member of your household sold land in the last twenty years? i) Yes ii) no
 13A) If yes then nature of land sold: i) agricultural ii) residential iii) commercial iv) other
 13B) If yes then total area of land sold: ____

Livelihoods and Sectoral Change

14. What has been the primary source of cash income for your household in the last ten years/five-years/at present?
 i) agricultural profits ii) informal wage labor iii) business iv) formal service v) other (explain)
15. What has been a second source of income for your household in the last ten/five-years/at present?
 i) agricultural profits ii) informal wage labor iii) business iv) formal service v) other (explain)
16. Has a member of your household started a new business in the past ten years? i) Yes ii) No
17. Has a member of your household received employment in a formal sector service job? i) Yes ii) No
18. Has a member of your household received a loan for starting a new business/expanding a new business in the last ten years? i) Yes ii) No
 18A) If yes, source of loan: i) national bank ii) private bank iii) private financier iv) family
 18B) If yes, what was the collateral against which loan was received: i) land ii) bank deposit iii) other property iv) no collateral v) other (explain)
19. Has the primary source of income for your household changed in the last ten years? i) yes ii) no

Rural-Urban Linkage

- 20A) (for those residing outside the CT) How often does a member of your household travel to <CT in question>? i) daily ii) more than once a week iii) few times a month iv) few times a year
- 20B) What is the primary reason for traveling to <CT in question>? i) employment in service ii) location of own business iii) business and commercial transactions iv) sale of agricultural produce v) purchase of agricultural inputs iv) shopping v) administrative offices vi) education vii) health
- 20C) What are other reasons for traveling to <CT in question>? i) employment in service ii) location of own business iii) business and commercial transactions iv) sale of agricultural produce v) purchase of agricultural inputs iv) shopping v) administrative offices vi) education vii) health
- 20D) To what extent is your household dependent on <CT in question>? i) very dependent ii) moderately dependent iii) somewhat dependent iv) not at all dependent
- 21A) (for those residing within the CT) Do you have family ties in surrounding rural areas? i) yes ii) no
- 21B) Do you have an alternative place of residence in surrounding rural areas? i) yes ii) no
- 21C) How often does a member of your household travel to surrounding rural areas?
 i) daily ii) more than once a week iii) few times a month iv) few times a year
- 21D) What is the primary reason for travel to surrounding rural areas? i) visiting family and friends ii) business and commercial transactions iii) as requirement of service employment iv) to supervise cultivation v) other

References:

- Appadurai, A. (2000) "Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics", *Public Culture* 14(1), 21-47.
- Arnold, D. (2012[2000]) "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India" in Chaturvedi, V. (ed) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Post-colonial*, Verso.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2009) "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal", *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 33, 455-467
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2011) *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2014) "Does Caste Matter in Bengal? Examining the Myth of Bengali Exceptionalism" in Chakraborty, M.N. (ed) *Being Bengali: At Home and in the World*, 32-47, Routledge, London.
- Banerjee-Guha, S. (2010) "Introduction: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order" in Banerjee-Guha, S. (ed) *Accumulation by Dispossession: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order*, Sage.
- Basile, E. (2011). *A Marxist-Institutionalist analysis of rural capitalism in South India: the case of a Tamil market town after the green revolution*. D. Phil.Thesis, University of Oxford.
- Basile, E. and Harris-White, B. (2000). "Corporative capitalism: Civil society and the politics of accumulation in small town India", QEH Working Paper 38, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.
- Batra, L. (2009). "A Review of Urbanization and Urban Policy in Post-Independent India", Working Paper Series, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
- Baviskar, A. (2011) "What the eye does not see: The Yamuna in the imagination of Delhi", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(50), 45-53.
- Bell, D. & Jayne, M. (2009) "Small Cities? Towards a Research Agenda", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 33.3, 683-99
- Bhagat, R. (2005). "Rural-Urban Classification and Municipal Governance in India", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 26 (1): 61-73
- Bhagavan, M. and Feldhaus, A. (2008) *Claiming Power from Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Bhan, G. (2009). "This Is No Longer The City I Knew: Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi", *Environment & Urbanization*.
- Biswas, R., Marjit, S. and Marimoutou, V. (2008) "Fiscal federalism, state lobbying at the centre and discretionary finance in India", *Economics and Politics*, 22:1, 68-91.
- Breman, J. (1996). *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.
- Brenner, N. (2012) "What is Critical Urban Theory?" in Brenner, N., Marcuse, P. and Mayer, M. (ed) *Cities for People not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*, 11-23, Routledge.

- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C (2014) "The 'Urban Age' in Question", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38-3, 731-755
- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C (2015) "Towards a new epistemology of the urban?" *City*, Vol. 19, No. 2-3, 151-182
- Bunnell, T. and Maringanti, A. (2010) "Practising urban and regional research beyond metrocentricity", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(2), 415-420.
- Castells, M. (1977) *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, (Maspero, 1972, 1976) Trans. by Alan Sheridan. Cambridge, MIT Press
- Chakrabarty, D. (1992) "Post-coloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", *Representations*, No. 37
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2002a) "A Small History of Subaltern Studies" in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, 3-19, University of Chicago Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2002b) "Subaltern Histories and Post-Enlightenment Rationalism" in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, 20-37, University of Chicago Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2009) "Indian Modernity: Once Colonial, Now Global", lecture delivered at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, 29 September
- Chakrabarty, D. (2013). "Subaltern Studies in Retrospect and Reminiscence", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 48(12), 23-27.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2015). Subaltern studies in retrospect and reminiscence. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38(1), 10-18.
- Chakravarti, U. (2002) *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, Stree, Delhi.
- Chakravarti, U. and Sangari, K. (1999) *From myths to markets: essays on gender*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study
- Chandra, U. (2015) "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 45:4, 563-73.
- Chandra, U. and Nielsen, K.B. (2012) "The Importance of Caste in Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVII: 44, 59-62
- Chari, S. (2004) "Provincializing capital: The work of an agrarian past in South Indian industry", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46(4), 760-785.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993) *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Chatterjee, P. (1998) "Development Planning and the Indian State" in T J Byres (ed), *The State Development Planning and Liberalisation in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 82-103.
- Chatterjee, P. (2000) "The nation and its peasants" in Chaturvedi, V. (ed) *Mapping subaltern studies and the postcolonial*, 8-23.
- Chatterjee, P. (2004) *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Permanent Black, Mumbai.

- Chatterjee, P. and Ghosh, A. (2006) *History and the Present*, Anthem Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (2008) "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53-62.
- Chatterjee, P. (2009) "The coming crisis in West Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42-45.
- Chatterjee, P. (2010) *Empire and Nation*, Columbia University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (2012) "After subaltern studies", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(35), 44-49.
- Chatterjee, P. (2013) "Subaltern studies and capital", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 48(37), 69.
- Chattopadhyay, S. (2012) "Urbanism, Colonialism, and Subalternity", in Edensor, T. & Jayne, M. (ed) *Urban theory beyond the West: a world of cities*. Routledge.
- Chibber, V. (2013a) *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital*, Verso.
- Chibber, V. (2013b) "How Does the Subaltern Speak?", *Jacobin*, Issue 10 available at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/how-does-the-subaltern-speak/>
- Chibber, V. (2014) "Making sense of postcolonial theory: a response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 27(3), 617-624.
- Chowdhury, I. (2014) "Speaking of the Past", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 49(30), 39.
- Damodaran, H. (2008). *India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation*, Permanent Black.
- Das, G. and Kaushik, M. (2015). "A Tale of 100 Smart Cities: The Quest to Build Them and The Problems on The Way", *Business Today*, March 15
- Das, K. (2015) "Subaltern historiography to Dalit historiography: Tracing Heterogeneity in Dalit Subalternity", *Economic and Political Weekly*, L:7, 60-65.
- Denis, E. and Zerah, M. (ed) (2017) *Subaltern Urbanisation: An Introduction to the Dynamics of Ordinary Towns*, Springer (forthcoming).
- Denis, E, Mukhopadhyay, P & Zerah, M (2012) "Subaltern Urbanization in India", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 30, 52-62
- Deshingkar, P. and Akter, S.(2009) Migration and Human Development in India. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Research Paper 2009/13
- Dijk, T. A. (1995) "Aims of critical discourse analysis", *Japanese discourse*, 1(1), 17-28.
- Diouf, M. (2000) "The Senegalese Murid trade diaspora and the making of a vernacular Cosmopolitanism", *Public Culture*, 12(3): 679-702.
- Djurfeldt, G. with Sircar, S. (2016) *Structural Transformation and Agrarian Change in India*, Routledge.
- Edensor, T., and Jayne, M. (eds). (2012) *Urban theory beyond the West: a world of cities*. Routledge
- Gidwani, V. (2008) *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India*, University of Minnesota Press.

- Gidwani, V. (2009) *Subalternity*. In R. Kitchin and N. Thrift (eds), *The International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier Publishing, Boston, 65–71.
- Government of India (1985). *The 7th Five Year Plan*, Planning Commission, New Delhi
- Government of India (2005) *Provisional Results of Fifth Economic Census*, available at http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/economic_census_prov_results_2005.pdf
- Government of India (2010) *West Bengal Development Report*, Planning Commission, Delhi.
- Government of India (2014). *Draft Concept Note on Smart City Scheme*, Ministry of Urban Development, New Delhi.
- Government of West Bengal (2004) *West Bengal Human Development Report*, Development and Planning Department, Kolkata
- Green, M. (2002). “Gramsci cannot speak: Presentations and interpretations of Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern”. *Rethinking Marxism*, 14(3), 1-24.
- Gregory, D. (1994). “Social theory and human geography”. In *Human Geography*, 78-109. Macmillan Education UK
- Gubrium, J and Holstein, J. (2009) *Analyzing Narrative Reality*, Sage.
- Guha, R. (1982). *A rule of property for Bengal: An essay on the idea of permanent settlement*. Orient Blackswan.
- Guha, R. (1997). *Dominance without hegemony: History and power in colonial India*. Harvard University Press.
- Gupta, M. (2010) *Left Politics in West Bengal: Time Travels among Bhadrakol Marxists*, Orient Blackswan.
- Gupta, M. (2013). *Didi: A Political Biography*. HarperCollins Publishers India.
- Guru, G. (2012) *Humiliation: Claims and Contexts*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Harris, J.R. & Todaro, M.P. (1970). “Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two Sector Analysis”, *The American Economic Review*.
- Harriss-White, B. (2002) *India Working*, Cambridge University Press
- Harriss-White, B. (2004) *Rural India Facing the 21st Century*, Anthem, London.
- Harriss-White, B. (2005) “Poverty and Capitalism”, Working Paper 134, Queen Elizabeth Hall Working Paper Series, Oxford University.
- Harriss-White, B and Heyer, J. (ed.) (2014) *Indian Capitalism in Development*, Routledge.
- Harriss-White, B. (2012). Capitalism and the common man: peasants and petty production in Africa and South Asia. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 1(2), 109-160.
- Harvey, D. (1989). From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, 3-17.
- Harvey, D. (2001). Globalization and the spatial fix. *Geographische revue*, 2(3), 23-31.
- Harvey, D. (2005) *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism*. Verso.
- Harvey, D. (2008). The right to the city. *The City Reader*, 6, 23-40.

- Henderson, J. V. (2010). "Cities and development." *Journal of Regional Science* 50(1): 515-540
- Hung, H. (2014) "Introduction: Review Symposium on Vivek Chibber's Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital", *American Sociological Association*, 20:2, 281
- India Infrastructure Report (2006) *Urban Infrastructure*, Infrastructure Development Finance Company, Delhi.
- Jazeel, T. (2014) "Subaltern geographies: Geographical knowledge and post-colonial strategy", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, 88-103.
- Jazeel, T., & McFarlane, C. (2007). Responsible learning: cultures of knowledge production and the north-south divide. *Antipode*, 39(5), 781-789.
- Jazeel, T., & McFarlane, C. (2010). The limits of responsibility: a postcolonial politics of academic knowledge production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35(1), 109-124.
- Jodhka, S. (2012) *Village Society*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi.
- Jodhka, S. (2015) *Caste in Contemporary India*, Routledge, New Delhi.
- Jones, G. A. and S. Corbridge (2010). "The continuing debate about urban bias: the thesis, its critics, its influence and its implications for poverty-reduction strategies." *Progress in Development Studies*
- Kaviraj, S. (2010) *The Imaginary Institution of India*, Columbia University Press.
- Kothari, U. (2008) "Global peddlers and local networks: migrant cosmopolitanisms", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26(3): 500-16
- Kundu, A. (2011a) "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 40, 13-16.
- Kundu, A. (2011b) Trends and Processes of Urbanisation in India. Human Settlements Group IIED, Populations and Development Branch, UNFPA, Urbanization and Emerging Population, Issue 6.
- Labov, W. and Waletzky, J. (1967) Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience, in J. Helms (ed.) *Essays in the Verbal and Visual Arts*, University of Washington.
- Langellier, K. (1989) Personal narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9: 4, 243-76
- Langellier, K. (1999) "Personal Narratives as Sociology", *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(4), 391-401.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991[1969]). *The production of space* (Vol. 142). Blackwell: Oxford.
- Lefebvre, H. (2003[1970]). *The urban revolution*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Lerche, J. (2013). The agrarian question in neoliberal India: Agrarian transition bypassed?. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 13(3), 382-404.
- Lerche, J. (2015) "Regional Patterns of Agrarian Accumulation in India" in Harris-White, B and Heyer, J. (ed.) (2014) *Indian Capitalism in Development*, Routledge
- Lipton, M. (1977). *Why Poor People Stay Poor: A study of Urban Bias in World Development*, Temple Smith

- Mahadevia, D. (2003) *Globalisation, Urban Reforms and Metropolitan Response in India*, School of Planning, CEPT, Ahmedabad and Manak Publications, Delhi.
- Marcuse, P. (2009). "From critical urban theory to the right to the city". *City*, 13(2-3), 185-197.
- Marcuse, P. (2012). "Whose right (s) to what city?", *Cities for people, not for profit: Critical urban theory and the right to the city*, 24-41.
- Mbembe, A. and Nuttall, S. (2004) "Writing the world from an African metropolis", in *Public Culture*, 16(3): 347-72.
- McKinsey Global Institute (2010) *India's Urban Awakening: Building inclusive cities, sustaining economic growth*, McKinsey and Company, Delhi.
- Menon, M (2004) *One Thousand Years, One Thousand Voices*, Seagull, Mumbai.
- Menon, M. (2012). *Riots and after in Mumbai: chronicles of truth and reconciliation*. SAGE Publications India.
- Merrifield, Andrew (2014). *The new urban question*. New York, NY: Pluto Press.
- Mishler, E.G. (1995) Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology, *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5: 2, 87-123
- Mitchell, D. (2003). *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*. Guilford Press.
- Mohanty, B. B. (Ed.). (2016). *Critical Perspectives on Agrarian Transition: India in the Global Debate*. Routledge.
- Moreno-Monroy, A. (2012). "Critical Commentary. Informality in Space: Understanding Agglomeration Economies during Economic Development." *Urban Studies* 49(10): 2019-2030.
- National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (2008) *Contribution of the Unorganized Sector to GDP*, Working Paper 2, NCEUS, Delhi.
- Nilsen, A. and Roy, S. (2015) *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualizing Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Ong, A. (2011) "Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global", in Ong, A and Roy, A (ed) *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.
- Ong, A and Roy, A (ed) (2011) *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.
- Pandey, G. (2013) *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste and Difference in India and the United States*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.
- Parnell, S. (2007). Urban governance in the South: the politics of rights and development. *A handbook of political geography. Sage, London*, 1857-1876
- Patterson, W. (2008) Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations in Andrews, M, Squire C, & Tamboukou, M (ed.) *Doing Narrative Research*, Sage.
- Phadke, S., Khan, S., & Ranade, S. (2011). *Why loiter?: Women and risk on Mumbai streets*. Penguin Books India.
- Potts, D. (2008) "The Urban Informal Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Bad to Good (to back again?)", *Development Southern Africa*, Vol. 25, No. 2

- Pradhan, K. (2012) "Unacknowledged Urbanization: The New Census Towns of India". Working Paper, Centre for Policy Research, 2012
- Pradhan, K. C. (2013) "Unacknowledged Urbanisation: New Census Towns of India," Economic & Political Weekly, Vol 48, No 36, 43–51.
- Rao, A. (2009) *The Caste Question: Dalits and Politics in Modern India*, University of California Press
- Rege, S. (2004). "Dalit women talk differently: a critique of 'difference' and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position". *Feminism in India*, 211-25.
- Rege, S. (2006). *Writing caste, writing gender: reading Dalit women's testimonios*. Zubaan.
- Rege, S. (2013). *Against the Madness of Manu: BR Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. Navayana, New Delhi.
- Riessman, C. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, Sage.
- Riessman, C. (2001) "Analysis of Personal Narratives" in Gubrium, J and Holstein, J. (ed) *Handbook of Interviewing*, Sage.
- Riessman, C. (2000). "Even if we don't have children [we] can live". in *Narrative and the cultural construction of illness and healing*, 128-152.
- Rigg, J., A. Bebbington, K. V. Gough, D. F. Bryceson, J. Agergaard, N. Fold and C. Tacoli (2009). "The World Development Report 2009 'reshapes economic geography': geographical reflections." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34(2): 128-136
- Rigg, J. (2006). "Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty: rethinking the links in the rural South". *World Development*, 34(1), 180-202.
- Robinson, J. (2002) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Routledge, London
- Robinson, J. (2003) "Post-colonialising geography: tactics and pitfalls", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 24 Issue 3, 273-289
- Robinson, J. (2006) "Global and World Cities: A View From Off The Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 26.3, 531-54
- Rondinelli, D. (1983) "Towns and small cities in developing countries", *The Geographical Review*, 73, 379-95
- Roy, A. and Alsayyad, N. (ed) (2003) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*, Lexington Books.
- Roy, A. (2009a). The 21st-century metropolis: new geographies of theory. *Regional Studies*, 43(6), 819-830.
- Roy, A. (2009b) "Why India Cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization", *Planning Theory*, 2009: 8.
- Roy, A (2011) "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35.2, 223-38
- Roy, A. (2015). What is urban about critical urban theory?. *Urban Geography*, 1-14.
- Roy, A. (2016). Who's Afraid of Post-colonial Theory?. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

- Roy, D. (2012). "Caste and power: An ethnography in West Bengal, India". *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, 947-974.
- Samaddar, R. (2013). "Whatever has happened to caste in West Bengal?". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(36), 77-79.
- Sanyal, K. (2014[2006]). *Rethinking capitalist development: Primitive accumulation, governmentality and post-colonial capitalism*. Routledge.
- Sarkar, S. (2011). "The impossibility of just land acquisition", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 46(41), 35-38.
- Sassen, S. (1991). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo, Princeton. NJ: Princeton*.
- Sassen, S. (1994). "The informal economy: Between new developments and old regulations", *Yale Law Journal*, 2289-2304.
- Sassen, S. (2000). "Women's burden: counter-geographies of globalization and the feminization of survival". *Journal of international affairs*, 503-524.
- Satterthwaite, D. (2006) *Outside the Large Cities; The demographic importance of small urban centres and large villages in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Human Settlements Working Papers, IIED.
- Satterthwaite, D. & Tacoli, C (2003) "The Urban Part of Rural Development: The Role of Small and Intermediate Urban Centres in Rural and Regional Development and Poverty Reduction", International Institute of Environment and Development
- Scott, J. (1999) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press
- Scrase, T. J., Rutten, M., Ganguly-Scrase, R., & Brown, T. (2015). "Beyond the Metropolis—Regional Globalisation and Town Development in India: An Introduction". *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38(2), 216-229.
- Shah, A. and Harris-White, B. (2011) "Resurrecting Scholarship on Agrarian Transformations", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLVI, No. 39, 13-18
- Shaw, A. (1999). "Emerging patterns of urban growth in India". *Economic and political weekly*, 969-978.
- Simone, A. (2010) *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads*, New York: Routledge.
- Skaria, A. (2009). "The Project of Provincialising Europe: Reading Dipesh Chakrabarty". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52-59.
- Spivak G (1985) "Subaltern Studies: deconstructing historiography". In Guha R (ed), *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 330–63. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the subaltern speak?" in Nelson C, Grossberg L (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (271-313). Macmillan Education UK
- Spivak G ([1988] 2010) "Can the subaltern speak?" in Morris R (ed) *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, 237–92. Columbia University Press, New York).
- Spivak, G.C. (1999) *A critique of postcolonial reason: toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

- Spivak, G.C. (2005) "Scattered speculations on the subaltern and the popular". *Postcolonial Studies* 8.4, 475–86.
- Spivak, G. C. (2014). "Review: Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital". *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 27(1), 184-198.
- Srinivas, M. N. (1976). *The remembered village* (No. 26). Univ of California Press.
- Srinivas, M. N. (1994). *The dominant caste and other essays*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Steinmetz, G. (2014) "On the Articulation of Marxist and Non-Marxist Theory in Colonial Historiography", Review Symposium on Vivek Chibber's Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital", *American Sociological Association*, 20:2, 282
- Sundar, N. (2016). *The Scheduled Tribes and Their India: Politics, Identities, Policies, and Work*. Oxford University Press.
- Tacoli, C. (1998) "Beyond the Rural Urban Divide", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 10 No. 1, 3-5
- Tacoli, C. (2003) "The links between urban and rural development", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 15, No.1, 3-12
- Tacoli, C. (2006) *The Earthscan Reader in Rural Urban Linkages*, Earthscan.
- Thorat, S., and K.S. Newman. (2010) "Introduction: Economic Discrimination, Concept, Consequences and Remedies" in Thorat, S., and K.S. Newman (ed.) (2010) *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. Oxford University Press
- Thorat, S., Kundu, D. and Sadana, N. (2010): "Caste and Ownership of Private Enterprises" in Thorat, S., and K.S. Newman (ed.) (2010) *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. Oxford University Press
- Thorat, S., Mahamallik, M. and Sadana, N. (2010). "Caste System and Pattern of Discrimination in Rural Markets", in Thorat, S., and K.S. Newman (ed.) (2010) *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. Oxford University Press
- Timmer, C.P. (2009). *A World without Agriculture: The Structural Transformation in Historical Perspective*. The AEI Press, Washington, D.C.
- Venables, A. J. (2005). "Spatial disparities in developing countries: cities, regions, and international trade." *Journal of Economic Geography* 5(1): 3-21.
- Walker, R. (2015) "Building a better theory of the urban: a response to 'Towards a new epistemology of the urban?'" *City*, Vol. 19, 2-3, 183-191
- World Development Report (2009). *Reshaping Economic Geography*, World Bank.

Web Resources:

<http://archivepmo.nic.in/abv/speech-details.php?nodeid=9009>

<http://censusindia.gov.in/>

http://nceuis.nic.in/Final_Booklet_Working_paper_2.pdf

http://www.archive.india.gov.in/business/land/urban_land_ceiling.php

<http://www.Censusindia.gov.in/2011-Circulars/Circulars/11-31-10-Circular-02.doc>

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/haryana-monsoon-session-laced-with-humour-jain-monk-drives-bitter-messages-home/story-kkOSVc2ZHf0hUR1BsEYEMN.html>

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/world-population-day-small-towns-in-india-recording-population-recasting-urban-landscape/story-AqhdHASEJ5mSYm2XmAko3O.html>

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/5bsICkXvI4t4hXSeWk8bkN/Four-out-of-five-Indians-will-still-be-Hindu-even-when-Muslim.html>

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dalit-asmita-yatra-from-ahmedabad-to-una-a-journey-for-liberty/article8991385.ece>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZHH4ALRFHw>

ⁱ As mentioned before, accusations of relativism and “neo-Orientalism” are not new for Subaltern Studies. When the nationalist Hindu right was showing signs of political consolidation in India in the 1990s, Marxist historians directed “a substantial amount of hostile criticism” (Chakrabarty 2002: 21) towards Subaltern Studies for fueling the fire of such dangerous trends. However their own response to this politics was to denounce it as “based in religion” and therefore “irrational”. Such denunciation however did not stop the politics from emboldening itself. On the other hand it was the incisive analysis of subalternists like Kaviraj (2010) and others that engaged with the politics of the Hindu right and exposed it to be a reactionary mobilization of communal identities in the face of rising political assertions from Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi communities. Today the Hindu right is in power and Dalit-Bahujan activism is at a moment of tremendous potential. In this context, I would like to submit that, one of the sharpest responses in the public domain, to ideas such as those of Chibber, has come from a Dalit student activist whose name will go unrecorded in the annals of social theory. In an interview to *The Hindu*, one of the largest circulating English language dailies in India, Chibber is quoted as “Dalit movement should see itself as part of a class-wide movement.” This interview was shared on an online forum called Roundtable India, a community platform for Dalit intellectuals and activists. The student activist I refer to, reacted to this post with the wry comment “you don’t get it Mr. Chibber, our movement is not against capitalists. It is against you.” Perhaps the irony, even impropriety, of Chibber’s remark — an upper caste, privileged Hindu (by birth) of American citizenship, telling the Dalit movement how it should go about its politics — is lost on himself. But not all are ready to share his analytical opacity. Some might even prefer to treat historiography as “a democratic dialogue with the subaltern” (Chakrabarty 2002: 33).



Private examination center in Amlagora



View of the temple in Garbeta from the Dalit neighbourhood

Article I

**‘Census Towns’ in India and What It Means to Be
‘Urban’: Competing Epistemologies and Potential New
Approaches**

Srilata Sircar

Department of Human Geography, Lunds Universitet

10, Sölvegatan

Lund 22362

Sweden.

(accepted for publication in Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography)

Abstract:

The classification of 2532 new settlements in the Census of India (2011) as “urban”, and specifically as Census Towns, has brought small and emerging urban centres back into the purview of urban studies and urban development in India. Taking this to be a point of entry, this article seeks to explore how the “urban” has been framed and approached from different and competing epistemological standpoints in the Indian context. First, it attempts to outline the different epistemologies of the “urban” in India, which may be seen as competing traditions because of the unequal stakes they have claimed so far in public and policy discourse. Then, it presents three brief case descriptions of Census Towns from the state of West Bengal to put forth new questions in this regard. The case descriptions reveal significant gaps and discrepancies between the lived experience of the “urban” and its representation in dominant epistemological frameworks such as the official Census. I argue that the historical development of various settlement systems, which constitutes the core narrative of urbanization in India, cannot be understood in all its complexity through mere Census extracts or aerial images, but requires engagement with rich embedded epistemologies that have taken shape within these settlements.

Key words:

Census Towns, urbanization, India, competing epistemologies

The primary aim of this paper is to critically review the framing, knowledge production, and ordering of ideas and concepts around the ‘urban’ with specific focus on India. Our “inherited conceptions of the urban” have been brought under the scanner by Brenner and Schmid (2015: 151), who have recently extended their ongoing research on ‘planetary urbanization’ to raise questions about “what categories, methods, and cartographies” are relevant for engaging with the present urban condition. Taking this to be a point of reference, my paper attempts to ask similar questions about the state of urbanization in India. It further attempts to direct attention towards potential alternatives for understanding the organization of socio-economic life in settlements that defy a neat categorization within the current scheme of things.

In India, as in most other countries, the definition, conceptualization and generation of knowledge about the ‘urban’¹ have been predominantly carried out by state agents through formal statistical and legislative exercises. As per the 2011 Census of India (henceforth CoI) the number of settlement units classified as ‘urban’ has increased by more than 2700 in the period 2001-11. This is a sharp rise, given the previous track record of 2541 new settlements being classified as ‘urban’ over the period of an entire century since 1901. Furthermore, of the 2774 newly categorized urban settlements, 2532 have been placed within the category of ‘Census Towns’, (Kundu 2011a, Pradhan 2012, Samanta 2014)- a category denoting smaller urban centers and shrouded in much speculation, as the following sections will reveal. On one hand, this has encouraged a break away from the metro-centricity that pervades scholarship on urbanization in India. On the other hand, it has brought into focus the inadequacy of relying solely on state generated official databases to understand the processes underlying the phenomenon of growth not just in big cities but across the spectrum of urban settlements. (Mukhopadhyay & Maringanti 2014)

The proliferation of the ‘Census Town’ (henceforth CT) category has been variously described as “sudden”, “phenomenal” and “unprecedented” (Kundu 2011a, Pradhan 2012). Several prominent readings of the CoI 2011 paint the picture of an unforeseen urbanization boom in the preceding inter-census decade. However alternative readings of the same data have provoked discussions around the possibility of a more diffused and decentralized pattern of urbanization in India, than what was presumed before (Pradhan 2012, Denis et al 2012). A persistent pre-occupation in the study of urbanization in India has been with the urban growth rate and the rate of urbanization statistics. The inclusion and/or exclusion of settlements (and thereby populations) from the ‘urban’ category has been largely seen through the lens of how this will affect the statistical figures on urbanization and how that in turn would place India in the global hierarchy of urbanized nations. At the global level too, the ‘urban age’ thesis has gained

hegemonic status, based on similar statistics; but has been recently brought under intellectual scrutiny by scholars like Brenner and Schmid (2014).

What is lost in this statistical enterprise is the question of what it means for a population to be characterized as ‘urban’ and be incorporated into the urban local governance system or, as in the case of CTs in India, be characterized as ‘urban’ without the corresponding promise of an urban plan, a budgetary allocation or an administrative set-up. This is a curious paradox of the Indian case, where classification as a CT brings a settlement into consideration for the measurement of urbanization statistics, even as it continues to be governed under Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the local elected bodies for rural self-governance. As a corollary to this, the question may be raised as to how certain rural local governing bodies, equipped only to deal with small, agrarian populations are coping with the governance of settlements, with acknowledged urban characteristics. In considering these questions, the moral connotations of how ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ have been framed within official epistemology becomes a revealing factor. Thus the new Census Towns of India may be seen as cases that prompt a rethinking of the standard epistemology of urbanization in India.

Taking the new CTs to be a point of entry, this article explores how the ‘urban’ has been framed and approached in India, from different and competing epistemological standpoints. They are seen as competing traditions because of the unequal stakes that they have claimed so far in public discourse and policy considerations. The following sections present a critical review of the official framing and classification, based on discourse analysis using policy documents and Census reports made available online by different state agencies. This is interwoven with excerpts of interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014 with state functionaries at multiple levels. The paper then presents two brief case descriptions from ‘Census Towns’ in the state of West Bengal. The cases studies are at a preliminary stage of analysis and are presented here as illustrative (rather than discursive) tools. For details of interviews conducted see the appended table.

The framing of the ‘urban’ and the Indian State

Within the federal structure of governance in India, the Constitution places the subject of urban development under the purview of the individual state governments. However there exists since 1952, the Union Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), which has been the apex authority on the formulation of policies, financing of schemes and programs, and co-ordination between various Central Ministries and the different state government bodies. In the statement of its “allocated businesses”ⁱⁱ or the roles and responsibilities that it assumes for itself,

the Ministry focuses largely on Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region but also mentions planning and co-ordination of urban transport systems, planning and development of metropolitan areas, matters of housing, and matters of urban land use in the wider national context. In the section titled “policies”, the website of the Ministry lists documents pertaining to sanitation, transport, sustainable habitat and metro rail systems. There also exists at the national level, a separate Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA). At present, both of these ministries are taken charge of by the same Union Minister, although this has not been the case in the past. What is important to note is the fact that there exist two separate administrative and bureaucratic structures at the national level, dedicated to urban matters.

Two things emerge strongly from the statements of “allocated businesses” of these two ministries. The first is the emphasis on planned interventions in infrastructure. The second is the conspicuous absence of any substantial mention of small and emerging urban settlements, accompanied by an overall bias in favor of large metropolitan areas and urban agglomerates. These are characteristics that pervade overall policy making in this field and may be seen as indicative of the Indian state’s general disposition towards the phenomenon of urbanization. It may be argued that the process of urbanization is seen as desirable, by the Indian state authorities, even if its outcomes are looked upon as posing considerable demands on infrastructure, service delivery and governance. For instance, the phenomenon of increasing numbers of urban centers is repeatedly referred to in official forums as a “critical growth driver for the Indian economy”, “an important determinant of national economic growth and poverty reduction” and “an important and irreversible process”. The “policies” section of the websiteⁱⁱⁱ of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation takes note of a clear shift in their outlook towards urbanization from a potential “drain of resources from the countryside” to “the positive aspects of cities as engines of growth”.

In keeping with these formulations, the task of urban governance and service delivery is framed as “increasing the efficiency of the urban sector” and “reform driven and fast track development of cities”. It is implicit that ‘cities’ in this context refers to large urban units such as metropolitan areas, million plus cities and second tier cities with population not below 50,000. One of the trademark programs of the Ministry, launched in 2005 is the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which in addition to infrastructure and service delivery, focuses on community participation and accountability in Urban Local Bodies (ULB). Of its four sub-missions, the ones pertaining to infrastructure and governance, and basic services to the urban poor, were applicable to only 67 select cities from the top tiers of the urban size-class pyramid. The other two sub-missions, pertaining to infrastructure development of small and medium towns, and integrated housing and slum development, were applicable to all urban centers

with elected ULBs. However, as the upcoming section will discuss, CTs (that currently account for nearly 30 per cent of national urban growth) remained unaffected by the JNNURM and other urban policy as they stay under the rural local governance set-up until a legislative intervention on the part of respective state governments.^{iv} This feature of the JNNURM underscores the general consensus on the primacy of large cities and metropolitan areas in urban development and planning in India (Samanta 2013). This is further demonstrated by the recently launched Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) of the MoUD which aims at basic services and amenities provisioning with a focus on water and sanitation among other things. The coverage of this mission too includes only capital cities and settlements of at least 100,000 population with notified ULBs. The few settlements with a lower population to which the scheme is extended are chosen on the basis of either geographical or historical pre-eminence.

This particular framing of urban issues becomes more pertinent when seen in contrast to the framing of ‘rural development’ within the official discourse. While the category ‘urban’ is defined in specific terms by the Indian state, the category ‘rural’ is a residual category (Bhagat 2005) with no limitations of definition in terms of population count, density, sectoral distribution of employment or other criteria. However the presence of the state in these areas and the role of state actors in their interactions with rural populations are very clearly spelt out. Referred to as “the most disadvantaged sections of society” on the website of the Union Ministry of Rural Development, increasing livelihood opportunities and providing social security emerge as the two most dominant themes in the outlook of the state towards rural spaces and populations. With a frequent recurrence of terms such as “community development”, “social assistance”, “betterment” and “upliftment”, the ‘rural’ is evidently an entity with much lesser agency, in the dictionary of the state authorities. In the ‘rural’, employment has to be “generated” and livelihood opportunities “created” as opposed to the burgeoning ‘urban’ that grows spontaneously attracting labor and capital. One of the stated aims of the Ministry of Rural Development is to “provide urban amenities” to “improve the quality of rural life”. This implicit notion of certain amenities and infrastructure as intrinsically ‘urban’ is ubiquitous in both official and academic literature.

According to the disposition of the Indian state ‘urban’ status therefore automatically acts as a claim to superior stake in economic growth and better investment-worthiness while ‘rural’ status comes with an implicit assumption of stagnation and dependence. For this reason, ULBs are granted greater autonomy in fiscal matters, while PRIs act as little more than implementing vessels for top-down development programs and welfare schemes. This framing is important to bear in mind because it constructs the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’ as not merely demographic and sociological categories but also as bearers of certain values. The

implied normative framework then acts as a determining factor in how resources are distributed between settlements and populations that lie at various points on the rural-urban administrative spectrum. It then becomes imperative to ask, what does it really mean to be 'urban'.

Classifications of the Urban in the Indian Official Parlance

The Registrar General of India (also the Census Commissioner) may be seen as the source of authority on the classification of settlement units as 'urban' or 'rural' at the national level, The separate census schedules for 'urban' and 'rural' areas are the epistemic tools used to crystallize these categories. Over the decades, several different approaches have been adopted within the census exercise in India to conceptually organize settlement units classified as 'urban'. Some of these include the "town group" concept of 1961, the "standard urban area" concept of 1971 and the "urban agglomeration" concept of 1981 (Verma 2006). In 2001, the CoI revived with some slight modifications, two definitions from 1951 and 1961 respectively to clarify the notion of a "town" (Verma 2006 cited in Denis & Marius-Gnanou 2011) thereby categorizing all 'urban' settlement units into the following three kinds:

Statutory Towns (STs) defined as all settlement units that were recognized by a state legislation to possess a governing body belonging to the urban local governance network of institutions (aforementioned ULB) such as a municipality, a municipal corporation, a cantonment board, a Town Panchayat or a notified town area committee.

Outgrowths (OGs) defined as viable settlement units that emerge adjacent to but outside the administrative boundaries of an ST. They are not seen as complete settlement units by themselves.

Census Towns (CTs) defined as complete settlement units (known in the Census as 'Census Villages') that were classified as 'urban' by the CoI on the basis of the following three criteria- population of 5000 or more, population density of 400 per square kilometer or more, and 75 per cent or more of the male workforce engaged in non-farm/non-agricultural activities. (Bhagat 2005, Denis & Marius-Gnanou 2011, Pradhan 2012)

Apart from these classifications, there has been a consistent practice of placing all ‘urban’ settlements in the CoI on the following class rank distribution.

| Size-Rank | Population Threshold |
|-----------|----------------------|
| Class I | 100,000 and more |
| Class II | 50,000-100,000 |
| Class III | 20,000-50,000 |
| Class IV | 10,000-20,000 |
| Class V | 5000-10,000 |
| Class VI | Less than 5000 |

Cities with a population of more than 10 million have been sometimes referred to as ‘megacities’ while those with 1 million or more population have been referred to as ‘metro’ cities (Kundu 2011 b, Denis & Marius-Gnanou 2011). There is a clear dissonance between these two systems of classification since settlements with population below 5000 are simultaneously recognized as Class VI towns while not being recognized as Census Towns, which purportedly marks the formal transition of a settlement from ‘rural’ to ‘urban’. Further discrepancies in this system of classification become visible on closer inspection of the census data. For instance according to the 2001 census, the number of Census Villages with 10,000 or more population exceeded the number of “towns” and “urban areas” with a comparable population. (Denis & Marius-Gnanou 2011)

As indicated in the previous section, mere classification as a ‘Census Town’ in the CoI does not imply that the settlement is brought into the structure of urban administration with corresponding institutions of governance allocated to it. This continues to be a long-drawn bureaucratic process and a matter of state discretion, therefore susceptible to arbitrary measures. As data from the two censuses of 2001 and 2011 reveal, a large number of settlements classified as CTs in 2001 continue to be governed within the rural local governance framework of institutions. The state of West Bengal is a case in point, where the rate of ‘municipalization’ (conversion from CT to ST) has been one of the lowest in the past decade. West Bengal has seen the greatest proliferation in the number of CTs between the two censuses (526 new CTs in 2011) but also has 251 settlement units that had been classified as CTs in 2001 and continue to be classified the same in 2011 (figures calculated by Pradhan from Town and Village Directories of 2001 and 2011) while still being governed by rural local governance institutions. The criteria for transition from CT to ST status are determined by the state governments and differ considerably from state to state. Samanta (2014) has pointed out that in the case of West Bengal the official requirements for being accorded statutory status and an Urban Local Body for governance are

- population threshold of 30,000
- density of 750 or more per square kilometer and
- 50% or more of the adult population employed in non-agriculture.

While these criteria appear to be a logical progression from the definitional boundaries set for CTs, it remains unclear as to how settlements are to be governed while transitioning from the first set of criteria to the second. The process of identifying the CTs itself is fraught with uncertainties. This is a process that is carried out at sub-national levels, with predictable variations between regions and states. A senior official at the Directorate of Census Operations in Kolkata, West Bengal elaborated on the process adopted within the particular state.

“Once the data has been compiled and submitted for a given census year, our job is done. We return to it only when the next Census operations start. So for 2011, we started looking at the 2001 data, sometime around late 2009. Going through that data when we find villages meeting those three criteria, or coming very close, we count them as census towns in the next census.”^v

In the particular case of West Bengal, it seems possible that settlements that acquire the designated characteristics of CTs, remain classified as ‘villages’ for up to ten years, until the next census operations.

While this description came from a state level functionary, there have been reports elsewhere (Bhagat 2005) of decisions regarding the identification of CTs being made at the district or block levels. Thus, the procedure for identifying CTs, though standardized on paper, is marked by time lags and arbitration in practice. . In fact, the attempt to trace the actors and processes behind the identification of CTs in West Bengal alone, turned out to be quite a meandering wild goose chase, with actors at each level (Village Panchayat, Block Panchayat, District Panchayat, and the Census Bureau in Kolkata) adding to the lack of clarity. While similar process-tracing attempts from other states are not known of, there is also no evidence of standard and regular practice in this regard. This is exemplified by the presence of some STs that are less populous and share the same economic and demographic characteristics as several large CTs.

The same lack of regularity pervades the procedure for legislating CTs into STs. This is revealed in the following quote from an interview with the head of a District Rural Development Cell in West Bengal:

“It is impossible for you or me to say when a particular town will get a municipality. It might grow into another de-facto district headquarter and still not have a municipal recognition. Or it might be an insignificant rural town and still be

made into a municipality. It is not in our hands. It is a matter of the will of those high-above.”^{vi}

The exact machinations of these processes and how they differ across space and time is the subject for a separate enquiry. It suffices to mention here that it remains uncertain as to at what point the settlements effectively qualify as ‘urban’ in administrative practice. At first glance the official system of identification and classification as ‘urban’ may seem to be based on a set of objective demographic and socio-economic criteria, but the limitations of this system become apparent quite readily on slight investigation. While on one hand the fulfilment of the stated criteria does not automatically lead to ‘urban’ status for some settlements, for others even the accordance of this status does not translate into access to urban amenities and service provisioning. This gap between on-paper status and actual lived experience furthers the question of what it really means to be “urban” in the Indian context and if the answers to that question lie outside of the realm of official categorizations.

Competing Epistemologies of the Urban

As estimated by Pradhan (2012: 4) up to 26.8 million people could have been reclassified between 2001 and 2011 from village to Census Town inhabitants but continue to depend for all public services provisioning on a rural local government of sorts (Marius-Gnanou & Moricani-Ebrard 2012). This has led to the case of the booming CTs being described as “unacknowledged urbanization” (Pradhan 2012) or “denied urbanization” (Samanta 2014). This provides an opportune moment to relate the dominant streams of knowledge production about urban India, to critical discourses at a broader conceptual level. Kertzer & Arel (2002) have argued that a census plays a key role in dividing the national population into different identity categories by placing pressure on people to rank-order their localized and overlapping identities. In the Indian case, the categorization of settlements as ‘urban’ or ‘rural’ and the identification of new CTs take place based on the projections from the previous census, *before* the actual census operations start (Pradhan 2012: 1, Kundu 2011). At the same time, the Director of Census Operations in consultation with state governments and the Census Commissioner of India, is accorded the power to declare an area ‘urban’ (Bhagat 2005) Thus the identity as a rural or urban resident of the country is imposed on the people, without taking their lived experiences into account. Scott (1998: 65) has referred to censuses as “the state’s attempt to make a society legible” and thereby radically simplify a complex social reality through a “series of typifications”. According to Scott, the statistical depiction of collective identities is not merely an exercise in observing, describing, and mapping but rather a conscious effort to shape a people and a landscape so that they lend themselves to these particular techniques of observation. Thus instead of the existing social reality shaping these epistemic

tools, it is the nature of the epistemic tools that shapes how the social reality is to be depicted. Such a pre-disposition in favor of oversimplification, combined with an ambiguous and possibly arbitrary process, makes the classification of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ in India vulnerable to contestation by non-state actors.

Guilmoto (2011) has argued that given the brief statistical history of the sub-continent, the establishment of a solid and stable relationship between the state and its subjects is relatively recent in India and there continues to be a large semantic gap between statistical classifications and relevant social categories. Furthermore, it has been argued that the actual process of large scale statistical data gathering in India remains shrouded in mystery with almost no studies engaging with the nature of the social interactions between populations and surveyors that eventually lead to the creation of statistical “data” (Kertzer & Arel 2002, Guilmoto 2011). In India, these epistemic processes might seem to be most politically charged in the case of identities attached to sociological categories such as caste, language, and religion. However in recent times, the geographical and/or demographic categories of ‘urban’ and “rural”; and within urban the categorization of settlements as Census Towns or Statutory Towns, have also emerged as significant sites where this epistemic politics is played out. For instance in 2009, forty nine villages in Maharashtra protested their forced inclusion in the newly formed Vasai-Virar Municipal Corporation by publicly demonstrating against the move and eventually taking the matter to court.^{vii} On the other hand in Odisha, there has been a longstanding demand on the part of twenty three villages to be merged into the Berhampur Municipal Corporation.^{viii} A number of factors determine the motivations behind such struggles, including land use policy, land acquisition and compensation packages, policies around taxation and subsidies, and provision of civic amenities. Nevertheless, census figures and other forms of state-led epistemological traditions continue to dominate the public and policy discourses on urbanization, urban planning and urban governance. It is only in the past few years that alternatives to this dominant epistemology have come into existence and slowly but significantly laid their stake on the discourse on urbanization in India.

Recognizing the wide variety in the definition of the ‘urban’ across the globe and the problems of cross-country comparison that this presents, the e-Geopolis project^{ix} has adopted a “single definition at world scale” (Marius-Gnanou & Moriconi-Ebrard 2008: 5) of what constitutes a “settlement agglomerate” (Denis et al 2012: 54), based on the following criteria: a continuity of built-up area with not more than 200 meters between constructions (“a simple morphological criteria through time and space”) and a common threshold of 10,000 or more inhabitants (even if the national definition uses another threshold). These “settlement agglomerates” are seen as distinct from “urban agglomerates” but have been used as the basic units of analysis within the ‘Indiapolis’ division of the global comparative e-Geopolis project. These units have been geospatially matched with

CoI settlement units to obtain their population count and then based on the 10,000 population threshold the settlement agglomerations have been classified as 'urban'. (Denis et al 2012: 54)

From this alternative epistemological position and through the tools of geospatial imaging and matching, it was found that 37.5 per cent of India's population in 2011 lived in settlement agglomerations classified as 'urban'. This was considerably more than the CoI figure of 26.6 per cent. The state of West Bengal once again stood out as an exceptional case where as much as 46.6 per cent of the population qualified to be 'urban', compared to the 27.2 per cent reported in the CoI. (ibid: 55)

Two points of contestation are immediately apparent from the contrast between the state-led and the alternative epistemological approaches. The first, as noted by Denis et al (2012: 55) is the issue around the employment criteria used by the CoI in defining the 'urban'. Despite the use of tools such as aerial photographs, the e-Geopolis project shares with the census its identification of a certain population threshold and a certain level of density of habitation as core characteristics of the 'urban'. The scholars from the Indiapolis project argue that India's low official rate of urbanization is a result of the high level of non-farm employment used as a criteria- a feature that is uncommon globally. This once again throws up questions about what is really understood by 'urban' and also means that the well-documented prevalence of multi-spatial and multi-sectoral livelihoods ((Deshingkar & Akter 2009) need to be taken into consideration. Retaining the non-farm employment criteria in the official definition would imply more careful collection of information about the livelihoods of individual census households and devising a way to further place them into well-defined but more detailed categories. The validity and relevance of such an exercise may be put to question at a time when studies of "urban agriculture" are gaining ground in different low and middle income countries and farm work is no longer being seen as an exclusively rural phenomenon. (Tacoli 2003, Schaeffer, Kahsai & Jackson 2013)

The second issue relating to this alternative standpoint on urbanization is the question of those Census Towns that have been categorized as 'urban' in the CoI but fall short of the 10,000 population criteria and are not part of a bigger settlement agglomeration unit within the e-Geopolis method. Pradhan (2012), also associated with this project, has used a differentiated spatial buffer to inspect the spatial distribution of the new CTs from the CoI 2011. His results show that 97 per cent of CTs with a population above 5000 were already parts of Indiapolis settlement agglomeration units in 2001. Thus despite adopting a higher population threshold, the alternative reading does not exclude any significant proportion of settlements or populations officially categorized as urban. However 42 per cent of the CTs were also found to be part of settlement agglomeration units of less than

50,000 population thus indicating their distance from existing big cities. Pradhan (2012: 9) has interpreted the CTs to be part of “a cluster of settlements that are relatively proximate to each other” but “relatively distant from Class I towns”. Denis et al (2012: 55) have termed this to be “a process of spontaneous transformation of settlements” and a “relatively widespread geographical phenomenon”.

By and large, settlements and populations identified as ‘urban’ under the e-Geopolis epistemological framework encompass those categorized as ‘urban’ in the CoI. The framework further includes additional settlements and populations that had fallen out of the ‘urban’ category in the CoI because of not fulfilling the employment criteria. It also provides an alternative approach towards visualizing and analyzing the relative locations of the new CTs in space and time, which enables us to take a more nuanced view of the urbanization process in India. It marks a shift from the image of sudden and drastic proliferation of small towns to a more diffused and consistent pattern of urban growth.

The token recognition of CTs as ‘urban’ in the CoI contributes to the narrative of progress and growth associated with the urban status and sought to be projected by the state. At the same time, their indefinite omission from the system of resource allocation for urban infrastructure and amenities allows the state to continue patronizing them as ‘rural’ for all practical purposes. This contradiction is all too evident although neither the census data nor the e-Geopolis images provide any substantial insight into the lived experiences of communities in these spaces of contradiction. It is therefore necessary to turn to yet other alternative approach towards understanding the dynamics of ‘urbanization’ as they play out on the ground.

Embedded Epistemologies of the Urban

Guilmoto (2011) draws the attention of cultural geographers to how it is difficult to align administrative toponyms with popular cultural regions in India. In specific he points out that names of regions commonly used by individuals and communities to identify their origin, have not found space in the administrative scheme of nomenclature.

Challenges to the official epistemology are thrown by the everyday usage of terms and corresponding conceptualizations of settlement organizations in the popular imagination, that develop in an organic manner as a competing epistemology of the urban that is embedded in the social reality of the inhabitants of the settlements. In the following paragraphs I present two brief case descriptions of Census Towns from the state of West Bengal to illustrate the points made above. In the absence of an official map of all CTs in West Bengal, the towns were selected on the basis of the level of entry facilitated by local gatekeepers and key

informants, their connectivity by road, and distance from the capital city of Kolkata. The visits were exploratory in nature, with the aim to identify sites for further detailed and grounded enquiries. The local resource persons were identified on the basis of publicly held positions or professional competence. In most cases they were elected representatives in local governing bodies, teachers in local public schools, grassroots level political leaders or local journalists and field reporters. At each site between three and five unstructured interviews were conducted to probe into the history of the settlement and its growth trajectory in both economic and demographic terms, suggesting the need for an embedded epistemological stance that emanates from the inhabitants and their own understanding of what constitutes the ‘urban’.

Garbeta-Amlagora

Located in the West Medinipur district of West Bengal, Garbeta and Amlagora are listed as two separate Census Towns in the CoI 2011. Both have been categorized as such for the first time in 2011 and are among the seven new CTs identified in the district. The district has four older CTs from the CoI 2001, thus making the total number of CTs eleven- one of the lowest among districts in West Bengal. In the census Amlagora is presented to be consisting of 1064 census households while Garbeta is said to be consisting of 1098 census households.^x These numbers are quite close to the district average of 1174 census households for all new CTs but are considerably lower than the average of 5752 census households for all old CTs from 2001. Thus, going by census figures, each of these two CTs would appear to be minor and newly emerged urban centers in a less urbanized district of the state.

In popular parlance, however, the two settlements of Garbeta and Amlagora are not represented as discrete or analytically separate units. They are always mentioned in unison as “Garbeta-Amlagora”. In real space they are separated by a railway track, but exist as an otherwise continuous extended linear settlement along the Garbeta-Hoomgarh Road, an important link road in the region. Key informant interviews revealed a long history of settlement. Once home to British indigo farmers the settlements came to be inhabited by the families of the landless daily wage labourers of the indigo farms in the subsequent period. These families were reported to have also accessed farm land in the post-independence period, either through occupation or through received donation. The current economic base of the settlements was reported to consist primarily of potato trading. More than fifteen new cold storage facilities were said to have emerged in the past decade and the labor in these new enterprises was drawn overwhelmingly from the surrounding rural areas, including those belonging to the poorer neighboring states of Jharkhand and Odisha. The trade was reported to be flourishing with ties at the national level and with neighboring Bangladesh.

Interviews with local elected representatives to the Village Panchayat revealed that the settlement had for several decades been represented in the state legislature by a political party that was a minor partner in the erstwhile ruling coalition. This was perceived to be one of the major reasons for overall neglect meted out by the state government, to what was clearly seen in the popular imagination as an important trading center not only in the district but also in the region. Although local Panchayat members were aware of the recent CT status accorded to the settlement/s, they seemed unmoved by this development. It was reported that the clamour among the trading big-wigs was not for ‘urban’ status, but for recognition as a “district sub-divisional headquarter” which would enable them to maintain their ‘rural’ status within the scheme of taxation and subsidies while bringing forth greater allocations from the state government for improvement of public infrastructure.

Among the prominent actors in the public socio-economic life of these settlements were the Garbeta Chamber of Commerce and Industries, the Amlagora Association of Potato Traders, and the Amlagora Association of Truck Owners. Irrespective of the settlement they were named after, the membership of these collective local bodies was drawn from both the settlements and beyond. These bodies acted as the nodes of organization of the local and regional potato economy. They were responsible for communicating and negotiating with similar collective organizations both locally and regionally. Some of the bodies that they had been in correspondence with included the Dhadhika Chamber of Commerce and Industries (situated in the neighboring settlement Dhadhika, which had urban morphological characteristics but had not received Census Town classification), several private transport associations from Odisha and Jharkhand, wholesalers’ collectives based in Kolkata, and the office of the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

Thus, the socio-economic life of these two settlements, clearly unfolds in relation to multiple other sites and actors, and is shaped by a system of self-governance that is separate from the top-down administrative ordering of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’. This is recognized by the local Village Panchayats of both Garbeta and Amlagora. When officials at the Garbeta Village Panchayat were approached for detailed interviews regarding the settlement, they promptly directed all enquiries to the head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries, saying that the Panchayat only “worked to implement the schemes coming from above” while it was the Chamber and similar bodies that “actually knew the pulse of the place”.^{xi}

Phulia

At 13538 census households, Phulia is the largest Census Town in Nadia district, more than three times the size of the average old CT in the district and even larger than the average new CT. It has been categorized as a CT since 2001.

At first glance, Phulia appears in material conditions, to be a peri-urban neighborhood attached to metro cities in West Bengal, such as Kolkata. All residential houses are two or more storeys high and most come with an attached private parking space often occupied by more than one heavy vehicle. It is difficult to imagine such a landscape as being governed by a Village Panchayat but in fact this continues to be the case.

Phulia is well-known all over the district as the hub of the textiles manufacturing and trading business. Several houses have their ground floors dedicated to a boutique or show-room. The owner of the largest of these showrooms was identified by local informants as the most influential figure in the settlement. He eventually became an important key informant during the visit. The interview with him revealed that the settlement had grown rapidly in the post-partition years with a steady influx of migrants and displaced families from across the border.

There were also references to close ties between the trading community of Phulia and the political class of Kolkata. During the interview he mentioned having frequently met several cabinet ministers from the state legislative assembly. On being asked about his opinion on the classification of Phulia as a CT since 2001, he said that he was “in talks” with “people who matter” to ensure speedy municipalization. To him, the matter of urban status and municipal governance, was one of personal prestige rather than of state discretion. It was as though to compensate for the absence of Statutory Town status, that he hastens to add that he

“...did manage to secure a steady electricity line so that the work is not hampered. It took some running around, but now the laborers from all over the district are enjoying the benefits.”

Apart from reaffirming the subjective and irregular modalities of the classification process, this also brings forth the extent to which the socio-economic life of the settlement unfolds within a network of interactions. Phulia commands the flow of labor, capital, and raw materials pertaining to the production of *sarees* for the entire district and its surroundings, including Bangladesh across the border. Given the values of ‘heritage’ and ‘luxury’ attached to *sarees* (especially of the handloom variety), this positions Phulia as a place of relevance to the state of West Bengal in terms of ‘image’ and ‘brand’ building. And yet it remains underserved in terms of amenities and infrastructure thanks to the lack of an ULB and consequent exclusion from central government schemes such as JNNURM or AMRUT.

A number of insights emerge from these brief and cursory case descriptions. It is possible to conceptualize the spatial terrain of a state or a district (if not the entire country) as a variegated network of settlement systems that can be placed at different points on the urban-rural continuum, both in terms of administrative

denomination and actual lived experience. Settlements and the households within them exist within a wider spatial network of social and economic relations that supersede the imagined and superimposed boundaries. Each of these networks is likely to have their own components that may or may not adhere to the definitions and delimitations adopted in the CoI. The networks may also include settlement units that do not form part of the settlement agglomerations envisioned under the Indiapolis project. As seen in the first case, the economic base and in fact the very identity of the Garbeta-Amlagora settlement complex as a trading center is dependent on labor drawn from surrounding hinterlands that fall out of the 'urban' map in both the official and alternative epistemologies. In the case of Phulia, on the other hand, the personal-political interactions between key residents and actors in Kolkata form an important factor in determining the socio-economic trajectory of the place.

There are obvious discrepancies in how settlement units are defined in the census, how they appear in aerial photographs and how they are perceived to be distributed and organized in the popular imagination of the inhabitants. Instead of seeing settlement units as discrete entities, whether in the form of "towns" or in the form of "settlement agglomerations", from this embedded epistemological position it is possible to see them as settlement systems that share unique relationships with neighbouring systems and with big centers or nodal points of agglomerations. Their identity and being as spatio-temporal entities are constituted as much by the relationship they share with these neighboring systems, as they are by economic activities, social relations and material conditions of life contained within their own notional boundaries. I return here to the idea of 'urban' and 'rural' as value laden categories, as suggested in the prior sections. The ordering of settlements, as put forth by the embedded epistemological stance, problematizes the notion of infrastructure or amenities that can be thought of as exclusively 'urban'. For instance, the provisioning of roads and transport facilities to Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT, without corresponding investments in the villages surrounding and supporting its burgeoning cold storage business, can be inadequate. Or the securing of steady electricity supply to Phulia, without extending the same to surrounding settlements that it draws labor from, can build up popular resentment. Governance and service delivery mechanisms that exclude one or more parts of such systems while aiming to cater to others are likely to fall short. Thus, it is the systems and their networks in the entirety and not the settlements in isolation that needs to be studied in order to arrive at a clearer picture of urbanization trends and patterns.

It is further apparent that, settlement systems and networks such as these 'new' 'Census Towns' have a long history of inhabitation. Their current geographical shape and socio-economic structure is the result of a historical process on which an arbitrary point of rupture is imposed by state driven change of nomenclature

and/or designation. This frames their existence and therefore their study in a truncated manner that supplants them from their context and history. Thus for many of these settlement systems, their current state of existence is neither “sudden”, nor “phenomenal” or “unprecedented”. It is only the state-led epistemic view point that has rendered them so.

These preliminary readings find several points of resonance in the existing literature on rural-urban linkages and the critique of statistical over-determinism. On the basis of multiple case studies from various low and middle income countries, Tacoli (1998, 2003) has argued that strict urban-rural classifications can be misleading. Drawing attention to the increasingly multi-sectoral and multi-locational nature of economic activities, she has emphasized on the need for a synergy between interventions aimed at agrarian and urban based enterprises. The failure on the part of policy-makers to take this into account can have an adverse impact on the lives of low-income groups.

This observation resonates heavily with Brenner and Schmid’s (2014) rejection of the ‘urban age’ thesis, based on its “methodological territorialism” (ibid: 745) and its over-emphasis on “concentration within cities” that leads to a disregard for “a range of large-scale, long-term socio-spatial transformations beyond the agglomeration itself” (ibid: 744). Rejecting the idea that social processes take place within clearly delineated territories, or that ‘urbanization’ is only denoted by a concentration of populations and activities within such a space, they argue for a renewed look at the global urban condition. Among other things, they call for an acknowledgment, indeed a reminder, that ‘urban’ is a theoretical category and not a pre-given condition. Therefore, any engagement with framing, knowledge production, and classification relating to the ‘urban’ must be self-aware of the conceptual abstractions involved. Furthermore, they point to the need for understanding urbanization as both concentration and extension, and as constantly resulting in new morphologies, new differentiations, and new socio-spatial forms. Thus, an epistemology of the urban has to take into account process, as much as it takes into account the present outcome. Such an epistemology is bound to be reliant on grounded, embedded, and everyday forms of knowledge making.

In this context, it might be helpful to note the prevalence of self-enumeration, self-mapping and self-documentation practices among the urban poor in larger metropolises such as Mumbai (Appadurai 2012). It has been argued that such processes not only generate new knowledge and new ways of knowing as far as the nature of urbanization is concerned, but also act as tools for group formation by bringing the community into existence in the minds of its own members. Thus while embedded epistemologies have been studied to some extent in big city contexts, they remain to be explored in the context of settlements that are in a transitional phase.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has aimed to shed light on the subjective, constructed nature of ‘urban’ (and ‘rural’)- categories that have been uncritically applied in the framing and understanding of settlements and lives, especially within India. This has been done through the prism of Census Towns, which appear at first to be a definitive category in relation to the Census of 2011, but eventually leave more questions unanswered than not.

The first section aimed to point out the values attached to the ways in which ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ are considered and depicted in the state and/or development discourse, thereby spilling over into popular perceptions. The process of identity formation as “urban” or ‘rural’ is not only mediated by but also is a direct consequence of political negotiations at various levels. In the state-led epistemology this bears serious consequences because apart from being demographic and sociological categories, ‘urban’ and “rural” in India are also value-loaded morally charged categories. The ‘rural’ is painted on the one hand as the repository of authentic and pristine Indian-ness and on the other as “backward” and in need of “development”, “welfare” and “upliftment”. The ‘urban’ category has generated greater consensus in being held as the site of economic growth and future hope, thus calling for “renewal”. I also pointed to the overall metrocentricity and primacy of large urban centers within urban policy considerations.

The second section has explored the irregularities involved in the processes of identification and classification. By drawing attention to the ad-hoc decision-making and the numerous gaps in logic and execution, I seek to argue that our knowledge of the urban condition in India is in need of problematization.

This is taken up in the third section where I elaborate on the dissonances between the state-led and the alternative epistemologies of the urban. The parameters and tools employed under the Indiapolis project reveal an alternative reading of the same social reality that departs significantly from the dominant one and can have far-reaching repercussions for planning and policy making. However, this perspective is still a distant one, far-removed from the everyday realities of life in these places. I seek to address this through the section on embedded epistemologies where I have presented preliminary descriptions from exploratory visits to two Census Towns in West Bengal. Against this intellectual-moral backdrop, the settlement systems’ own clamor for or struggle against official ‘urban’ classification becomes a question of urbanization that can hardly be appreciated in all its complexity through mere Census extracts or aerial photographs. Thus the true character of these settlement systems, the essence of their historical development and thereby the core narrative of urbanization in India

can only be deciphered through relying on the rich embedded epistemologies that have taken shape within these settlement systems.

The public release of urbanization figures from the Census of India 2011 presents a crucial opportunity to review existing epistemological positions towards studying urbanization in India and calls for a serious consideration of the competing epistemological streams that have been largely absent from public and academic discourse so far. In conclusion then, the “proliferation” of Census Towns in India provides a vantage point to question and unsettle our received categories of knowledge and the values attached to them; and to look beyond our readily available tools of investigation.

-
- ⁱ I use 'urban' to denote official classification; separate from urban as experienced and articulated in lived realities.
- ⁱⁱ See http://moud.gov.in/sites/upload_files/moud/files/Mandate_2.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://mhupa.gov.in/policies/index2.htm>
- ^{iv} One of the "businesses" of the Ministry is to oversee the decentralization of urban governance powers and responsibilities through the creation of municipal corporations, municipalities and other local urban governance bodies such as town panchayats. This is mandated by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which marked a sharp turn towards decentralized governance in India.
- ^v Original interview conducted in Bengali during October 2014. Translated and excerpted by the author.
- ^{vi} Original interview conducted in Bengali during November 2014. Translated and excerpted by the author.
- ^{vii} See <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/49-villages-up-in-arms-over-civic-merger/articleshow/4835766.cms>
- ^{viii} See <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/merger-of-border-villages-with-bmc-demanded/article2733997.ece>
- ^{ix} See <http://e-geopolis.eu/spip.php?rubrique57&lang=en>
- ^x In 1971 Census a household was defined as 'a group of persons who commonly live together and would take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevented any of them from doing so'. See http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Indian_perceptive_link/Census_Terms_link/census_terms.html
- ^{xi} Original interviews conducted in Bengali during November 2013. Excerpts translated by the author

Appendix

Summary of Interviews

| Location | Type of Interview | Number |
|---|--|--------|
| Directorate of Census Operations, Kolkata | Semi-structured; with census officials | 2 |
| West Medinipur District Magistrate's Office | Semi-structured; with district level functionaries | 2 |
| Garbeta Block Panchayat Office | Semi-structured; with Block Development Officer | 1 |
| Garbeta Block Panchayat Office | Unstructured; with census worker | 1 |
| Garbeta Village Panchayat | Unstructured; with Panchayat workers | 2 |
| Garbeta-Amlagora | Unstructured; with key informants | 2 |
| Phulia | Unstructured; with key informants | 2 |
| Shantipur Block Panchayat | Unstructured; with former Panchayat member | 1 |

References:

- Appadurai, A. (2012) "Why Enumeration Counts", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 24. No. 2, 639-641
- Bhagat, R. (2005). 'Rural-Urban Classification and Municipal Governance in India', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 26 (1): 61-73
- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C (2014) "The 'Urban Age' in Question", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38-3, 731-755
- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C (2015) "Towards a new epistemology of the urban?" *City*, Vol. 19, No. 2-3, 151-182
- Denis, E. and Marius-Gnanou, K. (2011). 'Toward a Better Appraisal of Urbanisation in India', *Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*, 569-583
- Denis, E, Mukhopadhyay, P & Zerach, M (2012) "Subaltern Urbanization in India", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 30, 52-62.
- Deshingkar, P. and Akter, S.(2009) *Migration and Human Development in India*. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Research Paper 2009/13
- Guilmoto, C. (2011) "Demography for Anthropologists: Population, Castes and Classes" in Clarke-Deces, I. (ed) *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Jodhka, S. (2013) "Beyond the binaries of 'India' and 'Bharat': Reimagining the rural-urban in contemporary times", Unpublished key note address at Workshop on Urbanization and Migration in Transnational India organized by South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) and Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) from March 5-7, 2013 in Bangalore
- Kertzer, D. & Arel, D. (2002) "Censuses, Identity Formation and the Struggle for Political Power" in Kertzer, D. & Arel, D. (ed) *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Language in National Censuses*
- Kundu, A. (2011a) "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 40, 13-16.
- Kundu, A. (2011b) *Trends and Processes of Urbanisation in India*. Human Settlements Group IIED, Populations and Development Branch, UNFPA, Urbanization and Emerging Population, Issue 6.
- Marius-Gnanou, K. & Moriconi-Ebrard, F. (2008), "Urbanization in India: From Megacities to Urban Villages", Indian French Institute in Pondicherry, available at http://www.ifpindia.org/ecrire/upload/press_ifp_website/indiapolis_articlerelu.pdf
- Mukhopadhyay, P & Maringanti, A. (2014) "Articulating Growth in the Urban Spectrum", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, No. 22, 44-45
- Pradhan, K. (2012) "Unacknowledged Urbanization: The New Census Towns of India". Working Paper, Centre for Policy Research, 2012

-
- Samanta, G. (2013) "Urban Governance Reforms and Basic Services in West Bengal" in Markandey, K. , Sreenagesh, B. & Lonavath, A. (ed) Challenges of Urbanization in the 21st Century, Vol. III: Planning and Governance, Concept Punlishing, New Delhi.
- Samanta, G. (2014) "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 49, No. 22, 55-62
- Schaeffer, P. Kahsai, M. & Jackson, R. (2013), "Beyond the Rural Urban Dichotomy: Essay in Honour of Professor A.M. Isserman", International Regional Science Review, 36 (I), BI 96
- Scott, J. (1998) Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed , Yale University Press.
- Tacoli, C. (1998) "Beyond the Rural Urban Divide", Environment and Urbanization, Vol. 10 No. 1, 3-5
- Tacoli, C. (2003) "The links between urban and rural development", Environment and Urbanization, Vol. 15, No.1, 3-12
- Verma L.N., 2006, Urban Geography, India, Rawat Publications, p. 312

Article II

The small and the south in urban theory: Lessons from a Census Town in India

Abstract: The aim of this article is to claim space for the small and the South within the narrative of urban studies. There have been streams of scholarship on small cities as well as postcolonial writing on cities from the Global South that have challenged the hegemonic narrative of urbanization. I argue that the confluence of these hitherto parallel streams can be facilitated by the recent interjections made by Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) in the fields of planetary urbanization and critical urban theory. The article then proceeds to present empirical material from a small town in West Bengal, India in keeping with the guiding principles constructed in the first part. Several significant learnings emerge from these accounts. I propose a reconfiguration of our understanding of the ‘urban’ as a political relation enacted through lived experiences- an articulation of the morphing social relations as negotiated between the state, the elite, and the subaltern. Among other things, they go on to illustrate the potential for theorization that remains untapped in geographic imaginaries from the margins.

Key words: India, postcolonial, small towns, census towns, urban theory, planetary urbanization

Prologue I

The train route from the district headquarter of Bankura to the town of Jhantipahari is a busy one during the early morning hours. In the course of my twenty minute train ride every morning, I see women carrying massive baskets of fresh produce. I see young students, both boys and girls, dressed in their public-school uniforms. I see middle aged men, with the trademark briefcases that come with having a government job. And I see the occasional *baul*- the saffron clad itinerant performer-panhandler, singing of the strange ways of the universe on their signature one-stringed instrument, and collecting alms from benevolent passengers. The trains run twice every hour until late evening. The platform in Bankura station spills over with passengers waiting to board, even in the late hours of the day.

At Jhantipahari station, the platform is always more sparse. The ticket counter opens only a few minutes before the arrival of each train and shuts down again as soon as the train leaves the platform. The tea-stall at the station is decked with packaged snacks from multinational brands that rarely sell and have probably outlived their date of expiration. They are strung around as decorations while small batches of fresh, hot, tea-time snacks sell out every evening. A few cycle-rickshaws wait near the exit and try to attract customers for short, cheap rides into the town. The first time I walked the short stretch of a few hundred meters from the station to the edge of the town, it was late morning and the wholesale market for fruits and vegetables was in the process of wrapping up for the day. The market unfolded in the form of rickety bamboo stalls, shaded by thin sheets of waterproof material and held together by corrugated aluminum sheets. It was the first prominent morphological feature of the town that I encountered every morning. Despite its distinct physical structures, it seemed to be ready to pack up and move in a matter of minutes. This is in fact, what happened every day as the sellers and buyers gathered every morning and took off for their respective homes by noon. The market all but disappears by the time I walk back to the station in the evenings, like an amorphous dollop of camphor that dissolves away into the ceremonial flames at the roadside temple next door.

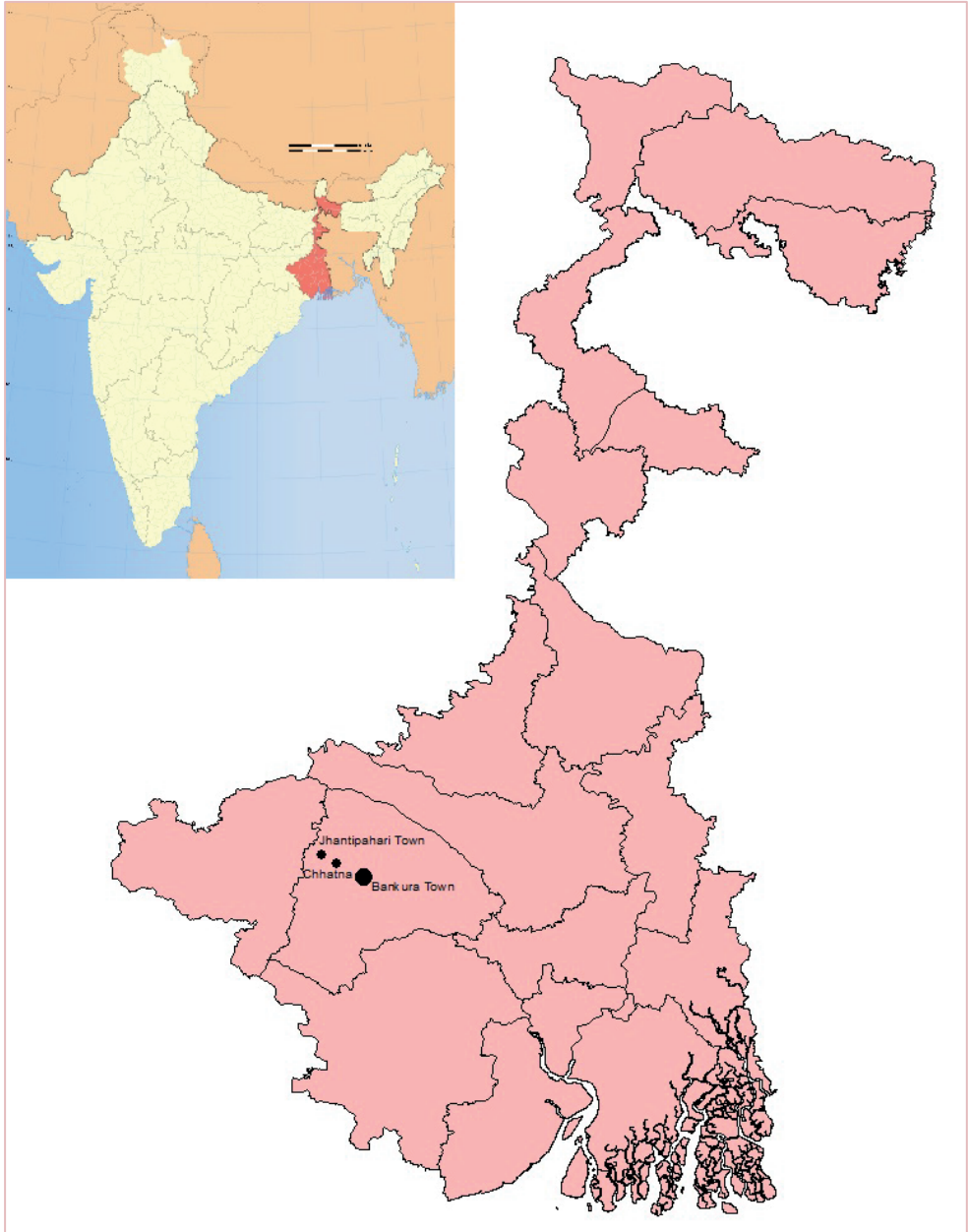
The road from the station to the bus stop is narrow and meandering, but paved and busy. It is dotted on both sides by sweets shops and tea-stalls, home-based eateries, garment stores, grocery stores, medical stores and residential buildings. It grows quiet and empty in the afternoon and comes back to life again in the evening, when motor bikes, bicycles, and pedestrians reappear. Where the road meets the highway, an orange tower appears in the horizon, rising above the rooftops and terraces of surrounding buildings. This is the chimney of the largest rice mill in the area. The bus-stop on the highway is a hub of activity. More tea-stalls, makeshift barbers shops, stationery stores, medical stores, and fruit carts hold the

hub together as (mostly) men and some women wait for their bus or simply lounge about.

The town extends from the station to the bus stop, and then onto the edges of the highway in both directions. A walk along the arterial roads of the settlement, without digressing into the by-lanes and back alleys, allows me to cover the entire built-up area in about an hour. Another ten minutes through the neighboring fields and hedges, take me to the settlement called Ranagoda. This is an unpaved, dirt track leading into a settlement of thatch-roofed mud huts. Ranagoda is homogeneously composed of about thirty five Santhali households, one of the ‘Scheduled Tribes’ (STs) of India. Jhantipahari on the other hand, has at least five distinct neighborhoods, each dominated by a particular caste group. For the residents of Ranagoda, Jhantipahari is the town anchoring their economic lives. For the residents of Bankura, Jhantipahari is just another small town dotting the rail route to the neighboring state of Jharkhand.

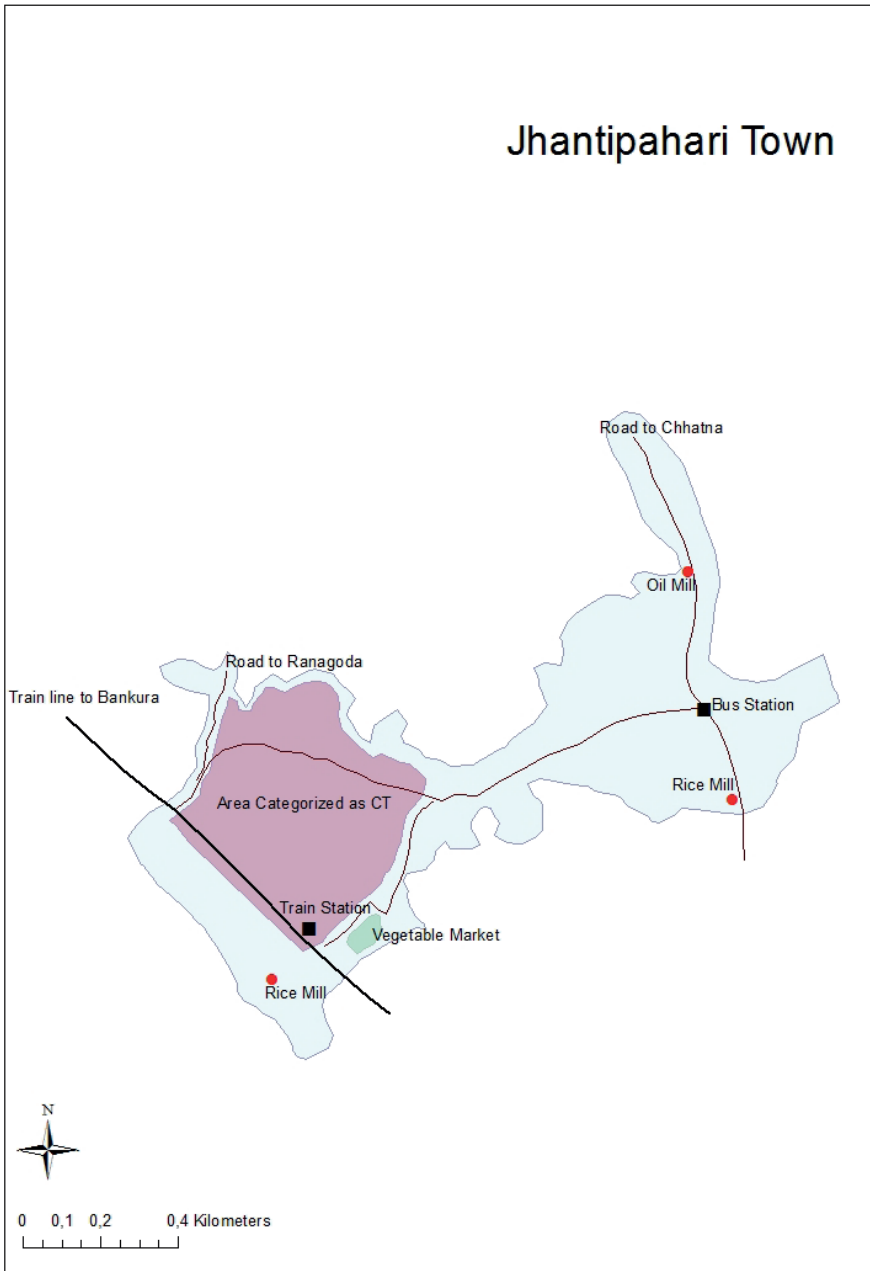
In the 2011 Census of India, Jhantipahari came to be categorized as one of the 2500 new ‘Census Towns’ (CTs). CTs are one of the smallest units of official urban classification in India based on population, density, and employment pattern. A settlement is classified as a CT when it fulfils the criteria of 5000 population, density of 400 people per sq. kilometer, and 75 per cent of the male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. However CTs remain under rural administrative institutions until legislative intervention from the state. This category exists parallel to the hierarchical classification of urban centers into Class I (million plus) through Class VI (5000 or less) for the purpose of planning and policy making.

Yet, such a classification does not translate into administrative reform. For a settlement to be brought under the framework of urban governance in India, a legislative intervention from the state is necessary. This process, known as municipalization and entirely subject to political will, is estimated to take place between seven and ten years after the urban classification in the census, if at all (Samanta 2014). For this reason, now and in the foreseeable future, Jhantipahari will remain under the same institutions of rural local governance, as any other village in India and therefore beyond the purview of Urban Studies.



Map 1. Location of Jhantipahari and Bankura in West Bengal, India

Jhantipahari Town



Map 2. Key physical features of Jhantipahari town

Prologue II

In a recent issue of the journal *City*, Richard Walker (2015) wrote a response to Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid's (2015) "*Towards a new epistemology of the urban?*" and called it "*Building a better theory of the urban*". His critique unfolds in two parts. In the first part, Walker makes seven "broad-brush strokes"-like comments to give a general impression of his reaction to the authors' work. One of these comments pertains to the authors' position with regard to "postcolonial urban theory". Characterizing "postcolonial urban theory" as a "minefield of debate", Walker concedes that "the one thing they have right" is the scholarly attention they endow upon "megacities blossoming across the landscape" outside of Euro-America.

In the second part, Walker responds to each of the seven theses that Brenner and Schmid (2015) have put forth in their essay. In these seven responses Walker mounts his elaborate critique, during which he calls out Brenner and Schmid (2015) for "confounding epistemology with ontology" (ibid: 185) and for confusing "the geographic and the historical" (ibid: 187). It all crescendos in the proclamation- "we urbanists can do better" (ibid: 189). This is immediately followed by a section titled "A Concluding Thought". In this section Walker spells out the core of his disagreement with Brenner and Schmid (2015) - the fact that they have sought to revisit and rethink the "first principles" of urban theory. In Walker's opinion, the tools inherited by the "urbanists" from "academic artisans" like Marx, Weber, and Lefebvre are quite adequate. To look for other philosophical pursuits is akin to having "our heads in the clouds". He ends with an urge to his "fellow urbanists" to "get on with our hard work"; because when Walker wants to "say something about Chilean cities" he turns to "colleagues who know Latin America, and not philosophers" (ibid: 190).

Reading Walker's response had an affective impact on me. It left me with a sense of unsettlement that I could not frame or articulate immediately. It reminded me almost instantly of a conversation I had once had with a friend. A white woman born and raised in Wisconsin, my friend had expressed her great enthusiasm for "ethnic cuisines" while inviting me to cook dinner together at her place. It had struck me how the food she had grown up eating everyday was just "food", while the food I had grown up eating every day was somehow "ethnic cuisine". It had made me question if "white" was an "ethnicity" and if "American" could be a "cuisine". I know now, that scholars, activists, and practitioners within critical race studies and postcolonial studies have been grappling with such questions in great depth over the past several decades.

The same is however, not equally true of us "urbanists". Can a scholar of Latin America for instance, also be a philosopher? Can theory from and about "megacities" of the South be simply "urban theory" without having to be qualified

as “postcolonial” or “from the South”? Who are the “fellow urbanists” of Walker that attend to the questions of epistemology and ontology; Geography and History, indeed of universal “urban theory” while “others” go about studying their own specific “regions” and “areas”? Can there be a geographical imagination beyond Euro-America that is not necessarily marked by “blossoming megacities”? Can “urban theory” emanate from these geographical imaginaries?

These questions that Walker’s response evoked in my mind are certainly not novel or unexplored (see for e.g. Roy 2016, 2015; Robinson 2002, 2006; Jazeel 2012, 2014 etc.). However their continuous articulation and reiteration is important, lest they get lost in a “minefield of debate”.

The Small and the South: two limits to Urban Studies

The discursive terrain of Urban Studies has been brought under scrutiny from many different perspectives. In trying to locate and expand the boundaries of what qualifies as Urban Studies and especially, urban theory, at least two limits to this intellectual enterprise have been identified and documented. The first of these is based on small-ness (Bell and Jayne 2009) and the other is based on “Euro-Americanism” (Robinson 2002) or the tacit obfuscation of the Global South. Each of these themes has given rise to a body of scholarship. These scholarly streams have so far run disjointedly, but parallel to each other, each addressing the hegemonic edifice of urban theory in its own way. I propose here that these two lines of argument are in fact complimentary and there exists a possibility to bring them into collusion, and create the opening for a new theoretical ground. In the following paragraphs I will briefly summarize the core contentions of each of these two streams of scholarship. I will then shift focus to recent developments within urban theory that generate a new vista where the two streams could meet.

Bell and Jayne (2009), in their agenda-setting drive to direct attention to small urban studies, have criticized the existing metrocentricity of Urban Studies for having obscured as much as it has illuminated. They point to the work of scholars like Thrift (2000), Clancey (2004) and Robinson (2002, 2006) to argue that the over-emphasis on a handful of metropolises from the Global North within Urban Studies has led to a “limited and truncated conceptualization of urbanity” (2009: 688). As they rightly point out, the real lived experience of the urban condition on a global scale is marked by heterogeneity. Some aspects of this social reality might even be at odds with the notion of urbanity constructed through this narrowly defined project of Urban Studies. Bell and Jayne elaborate on this through their examination of four key constructs of the Urban Studies enterprise, and how they each render small cities invisible and structurally irrelevant.

The four theoretical constructs identified by Bell and Jayne are- the epochal city, the hierarchy of cities, the global/world city paradigm, and the idea of the city

region. They argue that in pursuing each of these theoretical models of the urban, scholars within Urban Studies have focused on urban centers that best exemplify and vindicate their theoretical position. In doing so, urban centers everywhere and of all kinds have been put into straitjackets of being either typical to these models (therefore successful), or aberrant (and therefore unsuccessful). For small cities especially, this mode of conceptualization has meant that they have been typecast as cities that failed to be big. This has led to a consolidation of the developmentalist approach towards understanding small cities, where the emphasis has been on ways to 'fix' all the problems of smallness that keep a city from growing.

Bell and Jayne (2009) directly oppose this line of logic when they suggest a fresh way to think of smallness "in terms of influence and reach, rather than population size, density and growth" (ibid: 689). This call echoes the work of scholars like Rondinelli (1983) and Satterthwaite & Tacoli (2003) who have focused on small cities from developing countries and drawn attention to their functional characteristics rather than merely their size. In shifting focus away from their size and directing attention to other aspects of the small city phenomenon, these scholars in fact raise questions over the fundamental concept of 'city-ness'. They seek to challenge "the ways cities are talked about and thought about by different people, including academics but also importantly planners, managers, and urban inhabitants" (Bell and Jayne 2009: 690). In specific, they challenge the extreme polarization between the global and the local that has been an inevitable inheritance of the extensive discussion within Urban Studies on the impact of globalization on various urban centers. What they define instead, as a valuable goal for Urban Studies, is to "pursue an understanding of the ways in which smallness is bound up with particular ways of acting, self-images, structures of feeling, senses of place, aspirations and so on" (ibid: 692). Further in their article, they go on to discuss 'Smallville, USA' - a section devoted to understanding the framing of small cities in the policy and academic discourse in USA in the post-industrial times. Despite their prolific references to postcolonial voices within urban theory in the prior sections and their explicit acknowledgment that the skewedness of the dominant Urban Studies narrative emanates not only from its metrocentricity but also from its Euro(-American)centricity, their first attempts at defining a research agenda for small cities ends up inevitably emerging out of the Global North. This brings us to the question of the South.

One of the most prominent and widely cited calls to challenge the Euro-Americanism of Urban Studies has come from Robinson (2002, 2003, 2006) in her rejection of intellectual maps that do not register a vast number of cities in their charting of the urban terrain. Like Bell and Jayne (2009), she points to the pervasive developmentalism in the academic outlook towards these outlying cities 'off the map', which render them as somehow lacking in the ideal city-ness. In this

context the widely used category of ‘megacity’ has been understood to be the notional other of the ‘global city’- its aspirational poorer cousin from the ‘Third World’ that is yet to arrive on the map of cities that actually count as structurally relevant to the global economy (Robinson 2002, 2006; Roy 2009b). Furthermore such an approach has been criticized as imposing severe restrictions on the building of future urban theory and imagining future cities. Extending the same line of argument to the discipline of geography as a whole, Robinson (2003: 277) writes:

“A geography whose intellectual vision is limited to the concerns and perspectives of the richest countries in the world, has little hope of effectively participating in the debates that will matter in the 21st century.”

One of the key challenges identified by Robinson in this regard is the tension between the ‘territorial foundations’ and ‘universal scope’ of urban theory. In the dominant narrative, experiences and processes of a few big cities from the Global North have not only come to occupy the entire intellectual terrain but have also come to pass as universal urban theory. This has in turn produced all other experiences and processes as failed or inadequate attempts. Robinson, in her seminal 2006 book *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, has sought to bridge this longstanding binary by imagining all cities as ‘ordinary’, with their own unique, structurally relevant and theoretically legitimate trajectories.

What is at stake in this re-imagination of the terrain of urban theory is the relevance of urban analysis itself. But there is yet something more at stake in this discussion of the limits of Urban Studies. That is the question of epistemic justice. Urban knowledges from the Global South have often been relegated to the category of ‘case studies’- presented as an afterthought, an add-on, or an illustration of aberration from the main body of work that is presented to be of universal relevance (Robinson 2002, Roy 2009a). Instead of simply clamoring for more such ‘case studies’ to be included in the narrative, Roy (2009a: 820) writes of “dislocating the Euro-American center of theoretical production”. When the dominant epistemic structures of urban theory are seen as a “divisive geopolitics of knowledge” (Robinson 2002), “a recalibration of the geographies of authoritative knowledge” (Roy 2009a) becomes the only option for delivering epistemic justice.

It is however not enough to dismantle existing power centers and move them to the South. Theory emanating from any territorial foundation has to be amenable to travel, remapping and reconfiguration. One of the recent attempts in this direction has been made by Ernstson et al. (2014) in their articulation of “conceptual vectors” (ibid: 1564) that emerge from the particular historical experiences and intellectual traditions of certain African cities and can travel to other contexts for

adaptation and application. At the very onset the authors reject the need to position themselves in respect to the conceptual frameworks propagated from the North. On the contrary they directly “begin to speak back to established urban theory in a coherent manner”. Following authors like Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) and Myers (2011), Ernstson et al. proceed to look beyond the ‘urban problems’ of African cities and narrate accounts of city life emphasizing “intimacy, microscopic social textures, psychic dispositions, aesthetic adventures, and agency” (Ernstson et al. 2014: 1566).

This is where the two streams of writing on small cities and cities of the South merge into a common epistemic format. Both bodies of scholarship are essentially aimed at subverting the dominant epistemic mode of producing urban knowledge based on statistical accounts and conceptual metanarratives such as those of high modernism, functionalism, neoliberalism, globalization, development and Marxist political economy. They are both pitched against the dominant mode of urban theorization and carry in them varying degrees of interest in epistemic justice. In that sense they are both committed to the making of what Robinson (2002, 2006) has called a “cosmopolitan postcolonial urban theory”. I argue in the following section that Brenner and Schmid’s (2014, 2015) formulation of “planetary urbanization” along with Brenner’s (2009) renewed interpretation of a “critical urban theory” opens up the necessary window within the landscape of Urban Studies, for these various subversive strains of scholarship to merge and give rise to a new basis for urban theorization. Further in this article I describe learnings from Jhantipahari town in India, to illustrate the theorizing potential of small towns from the South.

Planetary Urbanization, Critical Urban Theory, and a Cosmopolitan Postcolonial Urban Theory

Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) have been pushing for a fundamental re-imagination of the urban. One of the suggestions they make is to think of the urban not as a universally generalizable condition but to imagine it as a fabric that can be stretched out across the planet, waning and thickening in different places. Contesting the now near-commonsensical thesis of the “urban age” and critiquing what they have termed as “settlement fetishism” (2014), one of the core features of Brenner and Schmid’s proposition is to discard the “fundamentally empiricist conception of the ‘city’” (2015: 160). This is their point of departure from existing urban theory.

Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) reject the notion that the urban condition can be defined or understood through various combinations of statistically measured variables that describe certain arrangements of social reality that have been coded as either ‘urban’ or ‘non-urban’. In their spirit of epistemological unorthodoxy and methodological experimentation, they align themselves at close quarters with the

postcolonial theorists of the urban. In their own words, they join forces with the postcolonial stream in “an overarching concern to develop new ways of understanding emergent urban conditions and ongoing urban transformations” (2015: 160). However they part ways with them on one fundamental question.

As discussed above, the postcolonial stream of writing on the urban question has broached the subject of epistemic justice from the standpoint that sites from the Global South need to be brought into the narrative of urban theory, not only as dispersed, unique or exotic cases but as worthy seats of theoretical production in their own right. Bell and Jayne (2009) and others writing on small cities have made the same case for the sites of their study, aka small cities everywhere. Brenner and Schmid share with these scholars, the desire to diversify and democratize urban scholarship but differ on the fundamental issue of what constitutes the ‘urban’. While for the others the question of justice is addressed by the inclusion of more and other sites into the narrative core, for Brenner and Schmid the very idea of a spatial unit or a settlement type as the analytical basis is flawed. While this may seem like an essential contradiction, I argue that it in fact creates possibilities for these divergent streams to confluence. To elaborate on this, I refer to Brenner’s (2009) interjections on critical urban theory.

Brenner (2009) traces the notion of critique from its original Marxist dialectical conception to its elaboration as an epistemological concept under the Frankfurt School, and its explication by Marcuse (1964 in Brenner 2009: 201) as an engagement with “the ‘historical alternatives’ which haunt the established society as subversive tendencies and forces”. Based on this, Brenner proposes four key elements as characteristic of critical theory. I will not deviate here into a detailed replication of that discussion, but briefly summarize each of these characteristics. The first is that critical theory is theory, meaning that it is rooted in an impetus for abstraction, and is not meant to serve as a predictive formula or sequential chart for executing social change. The second is that critical theory is reflexive, in the sense that it is inextricably contextual and is a product of the conflicts and contradictions of the very context that it critiques. The third is that critical theory entails a critique of instrumental reason. This refers to a rejection of the idea of separation of the knower from the object of knowing and thereby a rejection of a unilinear understanding of cause and effect; means and ends. The fourth is that critical theory emphasizes the disjuncture between the actual and the possible, in the absence of which critical theory would cease to remain theory and would translate into critical practice.

Brenner (2009) further proposes that these elements be applied to the urban question. When seen through this prism of critical theory, urbanization no longer remains a mere spatial expression of other “purportedly more fundamental social forces” such as industrialization and globalization, but becomes a sphere for

generation of critical analysis in its own right. Thus, Brenner defines critical urban theory as an analytical disposition that “rather than affirming the current condition of cities as the expression of trans-historical laws of social organization, bureaucratic rationality or economic efficiency,...emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space” (Brenner 2009: 198).

This formulation resonates deeply with the postcolonial epistemic project and that of the scholars backing the cause of the small cities. If scholarship in general, and social scientific scholarship in specific, are seen as the products of specific contexts and historical processes, ridden with power differentials between actors, geographies, and narratives then the clamor for a cosmopolitan postcolonial urban theory converges closely with the quest for a critical urban theory. Thus, the theory of the urban that must emanate from small cities and the Global South, must also contest established categories of organization and entrenched flows of power that have given shape to the existing scholastic terrain. It then has to navigate this conceptual ordering of the urban, test each of its components for extant relevance, and reconfigure them to use as tools to forge its own terrain. In doing this, the seven theses put forth by Brenner and Schmid (2015) for the new epistemology of the urban, can prove to be a starting point.

For the purpose of this article, and to make an illustrative intervention, I wish to rely on the first two of the seven theses put forth by Brenner and Schmid (2015). The first thesis is simply the assertion that “the urban and urbanization are theoretical categories, not empirical objects”. I interpret this to mean, not (as Walker interprets it to be) a denial of the tangible, physical, morphological features of ‘the city’ that have height, breadth, and depth in the most literal sense. Instead I interpret this to be an awareness of the reality that it is not the physicality of ‘the city’ that makes it ‘the city’ in our consciousness, but rather our coding of certain particular kinds of physicalities as ‘urban’ and of others as not. In this sense the urban and the process of urbanization are theoretical constructs, and thereby susceptible to deconstruction and reconstruction. The second thesis asserts that “the urban is a process, not a universal form, settlement type or bounded unit”. This follows directly from the first thesis. If the theoretical category of ‘urban’ is a fluid and subjective one, then its corresponding spatial articulation has to be in the form of the enactment of relations rather than only as morphological features. We therefore have to imagine urban space as produced through a set of relations (following Massey 2005) rather than as pre-existing and contained by morphological features.

Taking this to be a framework of engagement I now proceed to present learnings from a small town in West Bengal, India. What is presented is mostly thick description and reporting of participant observation, along with narrative analysis

of a few oral history and business history interviews¹. As Ernstson et al. (2014: 1567) have observed, “Theory-making is threaded closely with field-work reporting”. The ambition here is to take the initial steps towards developing a new register, a new terrain of knowledge and perspectives on the urban from the South.

Jhantipahari, West Bengal: The Urban as Theory and Process

The category ‘Census Town’, as an empirical category, seems to be straightforward. However, it remains wracked in confusion when we consider its implications for an ontological understanding of the urban. One way to look at it would be to see the CT as the binary opposite of an ST or a ‘Statutory Town’ which is the term used in the Census to refer to all urban centers that have at the helm an Urban Local Body (ULB) mandated by a state legislative act. From this perspective, it would seem that the theoretical category of ‘urban’ is constructed in the Census of India as a two tier system of entitlements. The top tier consisting of STs allows a settlement and its population access to an ULB, which then translates into urban governance and its associated paraphernalia such as tax regimes, budgetary allocations, plans, and infrastructure outlays. The second tier consisting of CTs then becomes quite literally the second class citizens of the urban world, that are given the customary acknowledgment of an urban status but no corresponding urban amenities. In this construction of the urban universe in India, the state legislature emerges as the ontological gatekeeper even though the Census is the epistemological lighthouse. The Census flag-posts which bounded territorial units (and communities inhabiting them) can be categorized as urban, while the state legislature decides through its actions or lack thereof, what this urban condition actually consists of. In that sense, the CTs signify an ambivalent conceptual state, where they are both simultaneously urban and not really so. This curious case of the CTs had gone largely unexamined until the category exploded in the Census of 2011.

More than 2500 ‘new’ CTs were identified in the Census of 2011. In keeping with the statistical determinism of the field, the immediate interpretation of this result was that there had been a massive wave of low-level urbanization during the decade of 2001-11 (Kundu 2011, Pradhan 2012). Some scholars even suspected ‘census activism’ geared towards projecting an image of the country being more urbanized than it actually was. On the other hand, interventions from other actors in the field like the international e-geopolis project (Denis, Mukhopadhyay & Zerah 2012) revealed that when combined with aerial images, the same data could be read to imply a far greater extent of urbanization than what was put forth in the census. While this exchange of views and interpretations of the census data further

¹ See Appendix for full list of interviews conducted. All interviews were conducted in Bangla between November 2014 and February 2015. Translation and excerpts by the author.

reifies the thesis that the urban is after all a theoretical category and not a standardized state of being, it still overlooks the pitfalls of holding on to the notion of the urban as bounded units that can be sufficiently represented on Excel sheets or Census abstracts. As I have argued elsewhere (Sircar 2017, forthcoming) one of the dangers of overreliance on census data emerges from the fact that the contiguous spatial and morphological entities are segmented into neat analytical units for the purpose of the census operations. So, while the census analysis might be focusing on a particular spatial unit and monitoring its demographic and socio-economic features, in reality that spatio-morphological entity stretches and shrinks, merges and divides, engulfs and expels, and follows its own trajectory of material existence. Unable to keep up with this constantly morphing reality, the census and other tools of knowledge production lag behind in their classificatory and analytical schemes. This was an important point that was made evident to me by my explorations of the lived experiences that make Jhantipahari town.

Jhantipahari is one of the 532 new CTs identified in the state of West Bengal in the Census of 2011. Apart from its easy accessibility by road and rail routes, I was also drawn to this town by its location in the district of Bankura. Bankura is one of the districts with a concentration of Adivasi² population and is part of the ‘red corridor’, the name given to a geographical belt in eastern India with a history of armed, Maoist anti-state insurgency. This intersectional identity of Jhantipahari as an ambivalent urban center in a conflict ridden Adivasi district makes it an interesting site of exploration for me.

Mapping the socio-economic life of the town

My initial forays into Jhantipahari started with the Gram Panchayat³ office. The office was four kilometres outside of the town and the drive from Jhantipahari station to the Gram Panchayat office was through a decidedly rural landscape of rice fields, ponds, and hedges. At the office I was introduced to Mr. Dutta, an elderly gentleman who was the husband of the elected Panchayat representative from Jhantipahari.⁴ He is quick to point out that ‘Jhantipahari town’ is substantially larger and distinctly different from the constituency he (his wife) represents at the Gram Panchayat. ‘Jhantipahari town’ he claims, straddles the

² Adivasi is the term adopted by people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) of India, to identify themselves. For more on Adivasi identity see Xaxa, V. (2008)

³ There are three levels of rural local governance institutions in India- Gram (Village), Block, and District. The Gram Panchayat is the grassroots level body that I approached for gaining access to key informants and local inhabitants.

⁴ Members of Gram Panchayats are elected representatives. Thirty three per cent of the seats are reserved for women candidates, many of who have been described as ‘proxy candidates’ for male members of their families/communities. For more on women’s participation in Gram Panchayats see Sircar, S. (2010)

administrative jurisdiction of three different Gram Panchayats and is home to a population of “at least ten thousand people” although this number is distributed across different administrative units. His overwhelming impression of the past few decades is one of rapidly increasing density of built-up area and intensification of economic activities.

“There used to be open spaces everywhere when I was a youngster. But now if you walk through the town you wouldn’t catch a glimpse of even one dismal⁵ of free land.”

An oft-repeated assertion in the town is that it is a “business center” and that it has “always been” one. “*I was born here and that is how I have seen this place*”, said Mr. Dutta. “*You will have to ask my grandfather’s generation. For us, it has always been an established business center of the district*”, said another participant who was also the owner of one of the big businesses in the town. With this sense of place in mind, I set out to map the imagination of Jhantipahari town as a business center and found that the notion was built upon three anchoring pillars. These were- the rice mills, the oil mills, and the vegetable market. I elaborate briefly on each of these in the following paragraphs.

The rice mills

Jhantipahari town is home to a dozen rice mills of which only two were still open for business at the time of my visit from November 2014 to February 2015. Interviews with owners and managers of three different rice mills, including the functional ones, brought forth the claim that an array of factors had together contributed to the closure of the majority of the mills over the past two years. One of the factors that interviewees identified as seminal in this downfall of a flourishing sector was the regime change that the state had undergone. The state of West Bengal underwent a historic change of regime in 2011 when the Left Front government led by the (Marxist) Communist Party of India (CPI (M)) lost power to the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) after thirty seven years in office.

Since this change of regime, there was the perception of a general attitude of neglect towards local industries in the region. Interviewees reported that competing rice mills in neighboring districts like Bardhaman and Birbhum had taken over the reins of the sector. The levies imposed on the mills in Jhantipahari by the state government were perceived to be excessive and led to the incurring losses as compared to the market price. This approach of the new state government was attributed by the mill owners to the fact that the electoral constituency of Jhantipahari had been devoted to the political parties of the Left Front for decades and had enjoyed their political patronage in the form of subsidies and ease of

⁵ Dismal is a local unit of measurement of land. 1 dismal= 45 sq. feet approx.

conducting business. In an alleged act of retribution, the political rivals of the Left Front had now begun to withdraw these privileges from Jhantipahari and extend the same to constituencies favored by them.

There was also a failure on the part of the mill owners to make adequate capital investments for upgradation of plant machinery. Bank loans for this purpose were difficult to obtain, due to the limited financial inclusion of the region into the capital market. Additionally, there was the premonition of a labor crisis as many of the erstwhile mill workers now sought employment in alternative avenues, including those created through national employment guarantee schemes for the rural populace.

It is pertinent to mention here that the rice mills were all owned and managed by families from the Tambuli community, a Hindu caste-group with a majority population in the surrounding rural regions. Tambuli families from neighboring villages had moved to Jhantipahari town several generations ago and established their businesses even as they maintained their agricultural lands and family homes in their native places. The labour for the mills was drawn from the Adivasi settlement Ranagoda, which was a ten minute walk away. Apart from working in the rice and oil mills, the Adivasis were also share-croppers or tenant farmers who cultivated the agricultural lands of the Tambulis.

Nearly every Tambuli household in Jhantipahari had linkages to larger urban centers like the district headquarter Bankura or state capital Kolkata. While some had younger members who had moved to these places for education and employment, others had parallel business establishments in these cities. This was reportedly the reason why most of the mill-owning households were not keen to make big investments into renovating and reinstating the mills. The prevalent sentiment was to “wait and watch” and keep the milling business alive in case the disposition of the state government became more favourable in the near future. In the absence of that, families were ready to shut down the mills altogether and rely only on other sources of income.

Thus the mill-owning (and land-owning) Tambuli caste in Jhantipahari represents local agricultural capital and has been driving agro-dependent industrialization within the region. However, they are neither a straight-forward example of a capitalist class nor representatives of an easy transition from agriculture to industry- concepts that are central to the dominant imagination of urbanization. The capital investments made by the Tambuli households are more often than not drawn from wage earnings by members of households employed in formal sector services. This collapses the distinction between capital and labor, with the same households representing both categories at different sites. Moreover, the logic of capital is not central to the operation of the mills and the decision-making of the mill-owners. As successive interviews with Tambuli households revealed, their

primary sense of identity was derived from the idea of being the numerically dominant and socio-culturally benevolent group in the town. For them, running the rice mills was a way of investing in the quality of agriculture and agrarian life in and around the town. While closing down the mills was a decision many owners were ready to take, their greater concern was for maintaining their landholdings and thereby their way of life as the caste-group at the helm of agrarian production. Thus, the logic of capitalist urbanization was superseded by the logic of caste-based identity and its related flows of power.

The oil-mills

Jhantipahari town was also home to twenty two mustard oil-mills of which only three were open and functional at the time of the visit. Although there is an apparent similarity between the situations of these two local industrial sectors, there are also two major differences. The first is that the reported causes for the closure of the oil-mills had less to do with negligence of the state and more to do with competition from external players including multinational companies that had entered the local market. Interviews were conducted with the owner and the manager of two functional mills respectively. Both talked at length about the recent slump in the sector over the past few years and made several references to the “good reputation” and “well-established standards” of the mustard oil milled in the town. The onus of stagnation was placed squarely on the shoulders of other private players who had flooded the local market with cheaper oil milled at other locations and packaged and marketed locally. It was reported that erstwhile mills in other towns had now turned into packaging units. The oil-mill owners in Jhantipahari too were open to the idea of turning into packaging units in the future, if it became impossible to sustain the milling business. For them, the most important consideration was to remain attached to the business of producing oil to which their ancestors’ names and reputation were integrally linked.

The second important difference is that the oil-mills are all owned and managed by families from the Marwari community who had migrated into the area from northern parts of India several generations ago. They still sourced their raw material (mustard) from northern and central Indian states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh through longstanding familial and community networks. The Marwari community is a well-documented capitalist caste-group (Damodaran 2008) spread across the country as a dispersed, trading community. Their historical association with Jhantipahari stands as an example of the cosmopolitan potential of the small-town and elevates it from the position of being merely a parochial locale. Thus, the presence of these two different kinds of capital in Jhantipahari and their thematically allied but strategically different logics of operation indicates the range of politics at work in determining the trajectory of urbanization in the region.

The vegetable market

The vegetable market that unfolds every day at the gateway to Jhantipahari town is currently the most prominent and dynamic feature of its economy. It is a phenomenon that is reported to have gained momentum over the past five years or so. The physical infrastructure of the market consists of ramshackle stalls, sometimes even substituted by a mere plastic sheet on the ground. There are more than thirty stalls and double that number of traders. The land on which the market comes together every morning is owned by the Railways department. Each of the traders is issued a “daily hawker pass” to carry out their transactions on public property.

The market that started out as a small scale local retail venue for fresh fruits and vegetables now brings together farmers, wholesalers, and brokers from villages in a ten to twenty kilometer radius. The brokers are local residents of the town and its surroundings. They are within the age group of twenty to fifty and have usually taken up this line of work within the past few years, after having tried and failed to secure other forms of employment. The business model is unencumbered. The farmers bring in their produce and deposit it with the broker they are in business with. The brokers arrange a deal with the wholesalers who bring their own modes of transportation for the fresh produce and receive a commission. The brokers also hire local men who perform the physical labor of loading and unloading the vehicles for transporting the produce and setting up and dismantling the stalls.

This emerging class of brokers has caught the attention of most town residents for their fast accumulating wealth and conspicuous consumption. They are the young men that dominate evening traffic in their noisy motorbikes and paint the outer facades of their homes in unconventional colors. *“It is easy money”*, says Mr. Dutta. *“You don’t need to be educated or intelligent. You just have to be street-smart and outspoken”*. The note of resentment is echoed in several interviews. *“Those brokers...they just earn obscene amounts of money. It’s unimaginable for genteel people like us to think of that kind of money in such a short period of time”*, said one of the mill managers I interviewed.

This is however not merely an articulation of class rivalry or anxiety. It is in fact the deep-seated notion of what work is appropriate for what caste. It is not coincidental that the group of brokers is pre-dominantly drawn from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds. Their emergence and ascendance within the local economy is frequently linked to complaints about the unavailability of labor, in the narratives of the mill owners.

“It is the biggest problem we face these days...the paucity of labor! They just don’t want to work anymore. They have been made lazy by the vegetable brokers. It is easy money for a few hours of work. Why would they want to work for us anymore?”

Conclusions: A blueprint for inferences

There is a lot more to life in Jhantipahari town than rice mills, oil mills, and the vegetable market. I have attempted to use these three features as the skeleton to construct a fuller and nuanced picture of the socio-economic lived experiences that contribute to the urban character of the town and its surroundings. Several things that become immediately apparent from this picture are not widely discussed in the literature on urbanization.

One of the first learnings from the mapping of the socio-economic life of the town is that there has been a clear trajectory of economic boom followed by stagnation, which does not correspond to the picture painted by the official census data. The actual proliferation of rice mills and oil mills that sustained the economic growth of the town took place over a period of decades prior to the official classification of the town as a CT. By the time this classification took place and academic attention could be directed towards Jhantipahari town, the economy was already on a decline. The name 'Jhantipahari CT' is endowed by the census upon a particular spatial unit (the erstwhile Jhantipahari census village) that is part of but not the entirety of Jhantipahari town. The history of Jhantipahari CT is one of going from a village to a Census Town in the course of 2001-11, as narrated by the census. Jhantipahari town on the other hand, is "an established business center of the district", and has been so for several decades. It has in fact gone down a path of economic decline in the years immediately following 2011. Its history is narrated by its residents to those who care to listen. This exposes the limitations of studying the urban in terms of bounded territorial units. The city-ness (or town-ness in this case) of Jhantipahari is constituted by its interactions with actors at various scales and locations including local farmers, multinational companies, and suppliers within national circuits of production. Thus, a theoretical approach that is fixated on analyzing changes and developments merely within the territorial units classified as Jhantipahari CT, stands to lose out on crucial aspects of the flows and circulations that go into the making of Jhantipahari town.

The second important lesson from this socio-economic mapping of Jhantipahari town is that a plethora of factors contribute to its making, not all of which relate to the path of global capitalism or models of agrarian transition. Local market conditions in various sectors, policies adopted by regional and local state actors, and aspects like the collective sense of identity of particular caste-groups play a crucial role in defining the path of an industry, a town, or a community. Ironically, for the AITC led government of West Bengal that came to power in 2011, (riding on a popular unrest against the incumbent Left Front coalition, involving acquisition of agrarian land for industrialization) making the state into an industrial and economic hub by attracting private investment has been a top agenda. However, like the dominant narrative of urban theory, the government and its policies have also been geared towards global capital flows at the expense of

local and regional outcomes. This has diverted attention away from small-towns and local industrial sectors except for as a political tool for retribution. This relates to the idea of seeing the urban as a process rather than a universal form. In this case Jhantipahari town exhibits many of the features commonly attributed to a universal urban form- demographic and economic concentration, extended built-up area, and a well-developed non-agricultural sector. However it is not these features in themselves that define the urban character of Jhantipahari town but rather the multifaceted processes marked by multiple logics of various groups that have shaped the urbanity of the place.

The third and perhaps most significant lesson is that the making of Jhantipahari town is shaped and sustained by the flows of power in the longstanding social relations of the region. In the agrarian system of production, power is exercised in the form of landownership among other features. Tenancy relations have historically been characterized by customary flows of power manifested in various forms of labor relations. For instance, it is not a matter of coincidence that industrial labor for the mills is drawn from the same community that is the traditional source of agrarian labor. Additionally, Adivasi tenant and wage labor families are customarily expected to provide free or cheap domestic labor to landowning households. Under these circumstances, any alternative form of livelihood such as through brokerage or through public income guarantee schemes, are seen as not merely sources of income but also as forms of resistance against the caste-order of labor relations.

These preliminary learnings act as openings for possible threads of theorization. They make visible the possibilities for building a new urban theory based on geographic imaginaries that have so far remained excluded both from formal epistemological handbooks such as the census, and from critical academic discourse. This article has traversed a long distance in both notional and geographic terms. I started with a two-part prologue that was meant to capture the affective dissonance between my experiences in the 'field' and the conceptual-analytical framework that was offered to me by the mainstream discourses of urban studies and geography. This perceived gap finds concrete articulation in the two streams of urban writing that address the dominant flow of thought within urban studies- one speaking of the 'small' and the other speaking from and for the 'south'. I have argued that it is not only possible but also desirable for these streams to coalesce and mount a unified unmaking of the dominant narrative. It is not enough to merely move the geography of urban studies from the north to the south and/or from the big to the small. A dismantling of the existing epistemic power structure would also have to entail a thorough questioning of the received categories of knowledge and ways of ordering. I have argued that there is a scope for this in the formulations of Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) and in Brenner's (2009) reinterpretation of critical urban theory.

The second part of the article has been dedicated to applying these guiding principles to my empirical material from Jhantipahari town in West Bengal, India. From a town that has languished in obscurity as far as academic discourse is concerned, there emerge three important lessons about the contextual nature of urbanization. While the learnings are important in and of themselves, they also point to the vast possibility of the unknown and the unexplored within Urban Studies. Above all, I see the narration of Jhantipahari town as an intervention towards radical inclusion and epistemic justice within Urban Studies. There are hundreds of more narratives in West Bengal alone and thousands more across the globe, awaiting their moment to complete the picture of the urban condition in the 21st century.

References:

- Bell, D. and Jayne, M. (2009) "Small Cities? Towards a Research Agenda", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 33.3, 683-99
- Brenner, N. (2009) "What is Critical Urban Theory?", *City*, Vol. 13, 2-3, 198-207
- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C. (2014) "The 'Urban Age' in Question", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38-3, 731-755
- Brenner, N. & Schmid, C. (2015) "Towards a new epistemology of the urban?", *City*, Vol. 19, 2-3, 152-183
- Clancey, G. (2004) "Local memory and worldly narrative: the remote city in America and Japan", *Urban Studies* 41.12, 2335-55.
- Damodaran, H. (2008) *India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation*, Palgrave macmillan
- Denis, E, Mukhopadhyay, P & Zerah, M (2012) "Subaltern Urbanization in India", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 30, 52-62.
- Ernstson, H., Lawhon, M., & Duminy, J. (2014) "Conceptual vectors of African urbanism: 'Engaged theory-making' and 'Platforms of engagement'", *Regional Studies*, 48:9, 1563-1577
- Jazeel, T. (2014) "Subaltern geographies: Geographical knowledge and postcolonial strategy", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, 88-103.
- Kundu, A. (2011) "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 40, 13-16.
- Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*, Sage, London.
- Pradhan, K. "Unacknowledged Urbanization: The New Census Towns of India". Centre for Policy Research, 2012
- Robinson, J. (2002) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Routledge, London
- Robinson, J. (2003) "Postcolonialising geography: tactics and pitfalls", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 24 Issue 3, 273-289
- Robinson, J. (2006) "Global and World Cities: A View From Off The Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 26.3, 531-54
- Rondinelli, D. (1983) "Towns and small cities in developing countries", *The Geographical Review*, 73, 379-95
- Roy, A. (2009a) "Why India Cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization", *Planning Theory*, 2009: 8.
- Roy, A. (2009b) "The 21st century metropolis: New geographies of theory", *Regional Studies*, 43:6, 819-830
- Satterthwaite, D. and Tacoli, C. (2003) *The Urban Part of Rural Development: The role of small and intermediate urban centres in rural and regional development and poverty reduction*. Human Settlements Working Paper Series Rural-Urban Interactions and Livelihood Strategies No. 9. IIED, London.
- Sircar, S. (2017) "Census Towns in India and what it means to be urban: Competing epistemologies and potential new approaches", *forthcoming*

- Thrift, N. (2000) “Not a straight line but a curve, or cities are not mirrors of modernity” in D. Bell and A. Haddour (eds.), *City visions*, Prentice Hall, Harlow.
- Walker, R. (2015) “Building a better theory of the urban: a response to ‘Towards a new epistemology of the urban?’”, *City*, Vol. 19, 2-3, 183-191

Appendix

Summary of Interviews

| Participant | Number of Interviews |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Gram Panchayat member (de-facto) | 2 |
| Rice Mill owners | 2 |
| Oil Mill owners | 2 |
| Oil Mill managers | 1 |
| Vegetable market brokers | 3 |
| Mill workers | 3 |
| Domestic worker | 1 |
| Other business owner | 1 |

Article III

“You can call it a *Mufassil* Town, but Nothing Less”: Narratives of
Subaltern Urbanization from New Census Towns in West Bengal, India

Srilata Sircar

Department of Human Geography, Lunds Universitet

10, Sölvegatan

Lund 22362

Sweden.

Phone: +46 764425895

Email: srilata.sircar@keg.lu.se

Abstract:

In the census of 2011 in India, more than 2500 new settlements have been classified as urban. Placed under the category of 'census towns', not much is known about the urbanization processes unfolding at these sites. This article presents learnings from a qualitative case study of a town in West Bengal, to argue that not only do census towns represent a subaltern urbanization but also that they are produced through a range of parallel and competing projects and practices that do not lend themselves to any easy and formulaic understanding of the urban. Borrowing the idea of "worlding" as a conceptual tool to make sense of these processes, I argue that persistent hierarchies of power in the form of caste relations, form the foundation of this urbanization process even as multiple and divergent claims and discourses seek to mould the making of the town. This calls for renewed attention to the question of social justice when reading Indian urbanization.

Keywords: Subaltern urbanization, census towns, worlding, India, West Bengal

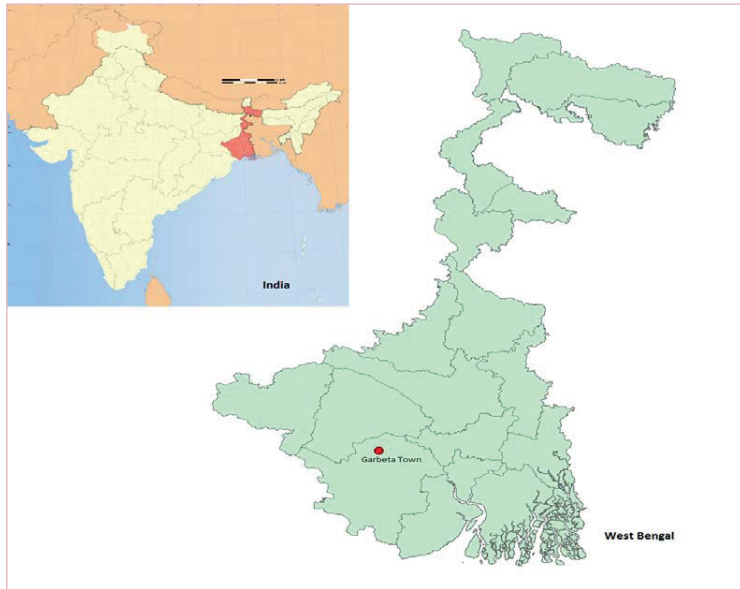
Acknowledgments:

The field work for this research was funded by grants from the Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography, and the Margit Althin Fund of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences (Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien).

Introduction

In the 2011 Census of India, 2553 new settlements have been classified as census towns (CTs). CTs represent one of the lowest size-rank of urban settlements in India. They are defined in the census as settlements fulfilling the demographic criteria of 5000 population, 400 per square kilometre density, and 75 per cent of the male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. Despite their census categorization as ‘urban’ CTs continue to be administered by rural local governance institutions (known as Panchayats), until legislative intervention by the state to accord them with Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

This is an unprecedented and unforeseen growth in the number of CTs, which previously accounted for only 7.4 per cent of the total urban population and are now responsible for one-third of the decadal urban growth (Pradhan 2012, Kundu 2011). Of all the states in India, West Bengal is home to the largest number of new CTs (526) where they account for more than 60 per cent of the decadal urban growth (Pradhan 2012). Taking this to be a point of entry into the discussion on the nature of urbanizations taking place in India, this paper will draw from my fieldwork in Garbeta in West Medinipur district of West Bengal. Based on oral histories of place, life story interviews, business histories and participatory mapping exercises, I will attempt to present Garbeta town as a case study of subaltern urbanization in India. Furthermore, I will attempt to situate the town-making processes in Garbeta within the dialogue on subaltern urbanism. I will focus on questions of land, identity and informality; and how aspects of change and continuity in socio-political relations have given shape to the present morphology of the town.



Map I. Location of Garbeta Town in West Bengal, India

In the southern parts of West Bengal, and the surrounding regions of neighbouring states like Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, “Garbeta” is a well-recognized name. It is an important station on the rail route connecting the state capital Kolkata to the district town Puruliya and thereafter to the adjacent state capital of Ranchi. “Garbeta” is also the name by which three of the six blocks¹ of the Medinipur subdivision are known- i.e. Garbeta I, Garbeta II and Garbeta III. In its most recent avatar, “Garbeta” is also the name of one of the seven new census towns recognized in the district of West Medinipur. With these multiple connotations to its name, Garbeta lends itself readily as a site for the study of the complex matrix of space, place, category, and identity that characterizes the processes of urbanization unfolding in India.

In this essay, I raise two core questions- 1) in what ways is it possible to see Garbeta town as a case of subaltern urbanization in India and 2) how do the town-making processes in Garbeta fit into the ongoing dialogue on subaltern urbanism? I argue that learnings from the case of Garbeta town, uphold the key hypotheses of subaltern urbanization in India (Denis, Mukhopadhyay & Zerah 2012) but in conditional and qualified ways. I also argue that using subalternity as an analytical lens, to view expressions of urbanism in Garbeta town, one is led to revisit social relations of caste, and identity based flows of power as issues central to the project of urban studies. In doing this I call for the question of redistributive social justice to be brought back under the spotlight of academic and policy engagement with the urban in India.

The paper unfolds in five sections. In the first I summarize the notions of subaltern urbanization and subaltern urbanism, focusing on their applicability as analytical devices for understanding processes that are in action in Garbeta town. In the second section I present a map of ‘Garbeta town’ curated through participatory mapping exercises and discuss the dissonance between official and embedded readings of the urban, which forms a crucial part of the idea of subaltern urbanization. In the third section I discuss issues of land ownership and land use and their intrinsic connection to identity formation. In the fourth section I elaborate on labour, entrepreneurship, and informality as the dominant idiom of urbanization (Roy 2009, 2011). Here I also comment on the extent to which the case of Garbeta town validates the subaltern urbanization hypotheses. These two sections build up to the fifth one, where I recognize assertions of an urban consciousness that co-exists with rejections of the official urban status. This section also ties up the empirical learnings from the case of Garbeta town to the conceptual debate on subaltern urbanism. This is followed by a concluding section.

Subalternity: An Analytical Framework

Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012) have described the phrase “subaltern urbanization” as a literary device for discursive engagement in the tradition of the global city (2012:52). The authors define “subaltern urbanization” as “*autonomous growth of settlement agglomerations (which may or may not be denoted urban by the Census of India) that are generated by market and historical forces, which are not (a) “dependent” on large traditionally important settlements or (b) “planned” cities...*” (Denis, Mukhopadhyay & Zerah 2012: 52-53). The focus here is on the autonomy of settlements in interacting with other local and global settlements and in defining their own path of growth. Thus “subaltern urbanization” has to do with “cities as a system and their interrelationships” (ibid: 53).

This places them in close quarters with Roy (2011). In *Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism*, Roy (2011) argues that the ubiquitous slum has become a metonym for megacities which in turn have come to be used as shorthand for the urban condition in the global south. Therefore “subaltern urbanism” has come to be a study of “spaces of poverty and forms of popular agency” (ibid: 224) wherein the slum economy is presented as “economies of entrepreneurialism” which is seen as “a grassroots uprising against state bureaucracy” or “a revolution from below”. Roy argues that this construction of the subaltern as a political agent has led to an ontologically and topologically rigid idea of subaltern spaces and subaltern subjects, which feed into the metonyms of underdevelopment such as the megacity, the slum, and popular/mass politics which essentially reify the colonial modern. As opposed to this view of the subaltern, Roy returns to the original definition of the subaltern by Ranajit Guha (1988:44) as “the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those...described as the ‘elite’”. Following this definition, Roy argues: “this space of subordination cannot be represented by a coherent identity.” Therefore she proceeds to describe subaltern politics as “a heterogeneous, contradictory and performative realm of political struggle.” This resonates closely with the idea of the subaltern as an autonomous domain of political consciousness, which renders it as an epistemological category that is flexible and open to application rather than as an

ontological fixity. Indeed, building on Spivak's (2005 cited in Roy 2011: 231) formulation of the subaltern as "a position without identity", Roy argues that the subaltern is that which marks "the limits of archival and ethnographic recognition"; that which marks "the silences of our archives and annals". It is in this statement that I wish to recognize the point of resonance between "subaltern urbanization" and "subaltern urbanism".

But if subaltern urbanization and subaltern urbanism are not merely the repositories and conduits of subaltern agency; and are to be seen as categories that enable us to expand our archive of the contemporary urban condition, then through what processes are they to be understood? Following Spivak (1999), Roy (2009) and Ong (2011) have used the idea of "worlding" as a conceptual tool to understand these processes. Ong (2011: 11-13) defines it as "the projects and practices that instantiate some vision of the world in formation"; that "articulate disparate elements from near and far, and symbolically re-situate the city in the world." Methodologically, this implies a shift to the anthropological- a careful tracing of everyday practices that constitute "worlds" at various scales and localities.

In particular, with reference to the CTs, the idea of subalternity understood in the form of worlding practices, appeals to me as an appropriate analytical trope. Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012: 57) have developed a matrix to classify urban settlements in India, which also serves to bring out the extent of their archival and ethnographic marginality. Along the axis of spatial proximity, they identify the peripheral (to existing urban centres of 100,000 or more) and the non-peripheral (as in not spatially proximate to the same). Along the axis of administrative recognition they identify the invisible, the denied, the contesting, and the recognized. The figure below illustrates this categorization.

| Spatial Proximity | Administrative Recognition | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| | Invisible | Denied | Contesting (I) | Contesting (II) | Recognised |
| Non-peripheral | | | | | |
| Peripheral | | | | | |

Figure 1: Classification Scheme for Subaltern Urbanisation. Contesting (I) refers to a situation where the settlement wants to be urban but the administrative classification is rural, while the reverse situation is contesting (II). Source: Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012: 57).

I argue that within urban studies, the non-peripheral-invisible and the non-peripheral-denied are the kinds of urban settlements that could be interrogated through the lens of subalternity in light of the silence that surrounds their existence. They fall outside of the narratives of global city and rural development and constitute a category of lived experiences that are yet to be formally archived. As the following sections will show, Garbeta town straddles the categories of non-peripheral-invisible and non-peripheral denied. At the same time, the element of autonomous interactions with other settlements and actors opens up the possibility of recognizing a domain of political consciousness that may be read as urbanism emanating from the settlement. Further, the renewed understanding of subaltern urbanism, allows for separate and multiple domains of consciousness within the settlement to be imagined, all connecting to particular lived experiences nested within the settlement in question, but responding to the universal analytical category of subaltern. This constitutes the overarching analytical disposition of this study.

Methodology

The methodology for this case study was qualitative and participatory. Using the list of all new CTsⁱⁱ in West Bengal, I carried out preliminary pilot visits to eleven towns in five districts during October-November 2013. The towns were selected based on their accessibility by rail and road from the capital city of Kolkata and the extent of my outreach to gatekeepers, key informants and local community members. Among these towns were Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT in West Medinipur district (which later came to be seen as a single urban settlement continuum, as discussed below). My first point of contact at these towns were the local Village Panchayat offices, where I was assured of further support for carrying out detailed interviews for case studies.

I returned to the towns in October 2014 and stayed for two months, identifying participants for the study and conducting interviews and focus group discussions. For oral histories of place, I purposively selected the oldest possible residents who were willing to participate. Due to the nature of gender relations at the site, these participants all turned out to be male. They represented all relevant caste groups. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed at constructing a picture of the physical and notional transformation of the site based on personal memory and collective historical memory. For life story interviews, participants were purposively selected to represent each neighbourhood within the town, which also corresponded to relevant caste groups. Once again, all the participants turned out to be male as the interactions were facilitated by gatekeepers and key informants from the Panchayat office, who were also all male. These interviews were unstructured and aimed at capturing the motivations for and processes behind various key decisions such as migration, change of employment or livelihood strategy, and capital investments, which contributed to the making of the town. Business history interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs who had set up businesses in the last inter-census decade, as well as managers of older enterprises such as cold storages and the chamber of commerce and industries. A special attempt was made to include one female business manager, while the others were brought into the study through snowball sampling. The interviews were semi-structured and covered questions concerning the sources of basic inputs for the businesses, their modes of operation and interactions with state and non-state actors. The two group discussions took shape organically in the course of interactions. They started out as life story and oral history interviews, but got taken over by pro-active participation from bystanders and on-lookers, thereby morphing into group discussions. They were both in Dalit neighbourhoods of the town. One was entirely composed to female participants. The other had both male and female presence, but only male participation. For this reason I have treated them as focus group discussions by Dalit male and Dalit female participants respectively. Table I summarises these interactions.

The method of analysis applied was a combination of thematic coding followed by narrative analysis. All the narratives were first transcribed and translated from Bangla to English. They were then coded into five broad themes- historical narratives, social relations of caste, relations between neighbourhood communities, type of economic operations, and expressions of urbanism(s). The creation of these codes was informed by how the narrative segments resonated with prior literature review. Parts of segments were included into more than one theme. All the material pertaining to each particular theme was then collated. This was then subjected to narrative analysis to arrive at interpretations of patterns and meanings.

Table I. Summary of Interactions

| Garbeta-Amlagora: Summary of Interactions | | | |
|---|------|--------|-------|
| Type of Interview | Male | Female | Total |
| Oral History of Place | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Life Story | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Business History | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| FGD | 1 | 1 | 2 |

Garbeta Town: Mapping, Morphology and Meaning

Below is a map of Garbeta town, that was curated through several interviews and group discussions, assisted by photocopies of hand-drawn outlines of two Village Panchayat maps in the Garbeta I block—namely Garbeta and Amlagora— and then digitized with the help of Google Earth Pro and ArcGIS. In the process of identifying new census towns, each census village (usually corresponding to what is known as a ‘mouja’ⁱⁱⁱ— a sub-component of the Village Panchayat) is checked for the required criteria of population, density and sectorial distribution of employment among the male workforce. When a census village crosses the required threshold on all three counts it is categorized as a census town. This exercise is initiated by the census directorate in each state, a few months prior to the actual census data collection. Often census villages with characteristics below the required threshold are classified as census towns, on the assumption that they would come to fulfil the required criteria in the intervening years between censuses. Some settlements may be re-categorized as villages if they fail to fulfil the required criteria eventually. The final list of new census towns is released after the first round of census operations that involves collection of demographic and household amenities data.

This process of classification of census towns does not involve any cartographical inputs or consideration of the spatial positioning of the census villages, relative to other villages or towns. In this case, Garbeta and Amlagora are both census towns that were, prior to 2011, census villages (or moujas) of the same names, within Village Panchayats also of the same names. As I learnt in course of my stay, these two Village Panchayats are also contiguous in space. The two specific moujas that are now CTs are not contiguous in terms of administrative boundaries, but belong to a larger continuous built-up area that extends beyond the boundaries of the two moujas.

In Medinipur, when one asks to be taken to Garbeta town, one is directed either to Garbeta railway station or to Garbeta bus stand. Both of these, as the map indicates, are located well outside of the area officially designated as Garbeta CT. In the absence of an official map of the CT itself, the methodology for bringing together the map in the figure, had to be inventive. It started with a hand-drawn map of the constituent moujas of Garbeta GP that hung on the wall of the Panchayat President’s office (see Figure II in appendix). Copies of this map were used as tools in group discussions and semi-structured interviews to map the physical extent of Garbeta town as perceived by current residents. After the first few interviews, the need to look at moujas beyond the confines of Garbeta Village Panchayat became evident. A similar hand-drawn map of the constituent moujas of Amlagora Village Panchayat was then included in the participatory mapping. The features that emerged as important in the interviews and group discussions were then collated into the figure presented here in Map II.

It is evident from the image that what is known in popular parlance as ‘Garbeta town’ is different from what has been identified as Garbeta CT. It is much larger in territorial extent and subsumes both Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT, along with extensive parts of neighbouring moujas. One of the participants described Garbeta town as “ten to twelve plots on both sides of the road, from Kumar Bagan to Fatehsinghpur”.



Map II: Important features of Garbeta Town

In terms of morphology, the entire area of Garbeta town is built-up with no significant clear spaces, cultivable land, forest cover or fallow land. The buildings, both residential and otherwise, are predominantly brick and concrete structures with a few exceptions in the fringes of Garbeta mouja, which houses the Dalit settlements. There are perceptible informal ‘zones’ in terms of land use. Garbeta mouja, and parts of Lapuria mouja are almost exclusively residential. Amlagora mouja is the hub of commercial establishments such as cold storages, but also densely residential in parts. The moujas to the immediate west of Amlagora are predominantly commercial, and house the Amlagora market and the Garbeta railway station. These give way to further residential moujas to the west.

Within the residential areas, neighbourhoods are largely homogenous in terms of. The neighbourhoods are also historically distinct from each other, despite their shared claim to the label of ‘Garbeta town’. In the next section I will turn to this issue and attempt to broadly sketch the different prototypes of the Garbeta town resident that emerge from my analysis of the narratives. Before launching into further analysis, it is imperative to take note of what the term ‘Garbeta town’ really implies. It is essentially a notional entity. It does not exist in a complete or coherent form in any official documentation- as an administrative or analytical unit. It is separate from but inclusive of Garbeta CT (and Amlagora CT). It exists in real space as a collection of places, and in collective imagination as a historically distinct, spatially defined, developing urban entity. Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah define invisible settlements as “large dense built-up settlements not seen as urban by the administrative authorities or the census” (2012: 57). As the map reveals, the parts of Garbeta town that are not Garbeta mouja or Amlagora mouja (and therefore not CTs in the official parlance) constitute the ‘invisible’ parts of Garbeta town. In the same vein, the authors define “denied settlements” as those which “satisfy the three fold criteria used by the census but does not receive statutory recognition” (ibid: 58). Statutory recognition refers to a state initiated legislative process which grants a settlement the label of ‘statutory town’ and a suitable ULB (such as a Town Panchayat, a municipality or a municipal corporation). The initiation and pace of this process depend almost entirely on the discretion of the state government. At present the average time for this process in the state of West Bengal is estimated to be between seven and ten years (Samanta 2014). As is true of most other new census

towns, Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT, as parts of Garbeta town, but also independently fit into this definition of denied settlements. This, along with the fact that the nearest statutory town, CK Road is at a distance of fifteen kilometres and has a population less than 50,000, clearly indicates that Garbeta town straddles the categories of non-peripheral-invisible and non-peripheral-denied, a feature that emboldens its position as a case of subaltern urbanization.

It further brings to the forefront, a startling dissonance between how the urban is formally read and represented in dominant epistemologies such as those of the state, and how it is produced and perceived from within. While the map makes this clear with regards to topology and territoriality, the narrative analysis in the subsequent sections will make the same argument with regards to land, labour and identity.

“In a way, we are the original inhabitants...”: Neighbourhoods, Identity and Land

As it emerged from multiple narratives, the residents' claim to the town is often articulated in terms of claims to the identity of “original inhabitants”. At the notional epicentre of Garbeta town, is a temple. The group that constitutes the largest section of residents within the Garbeta mouja is the “upper-caste”^{iv} combination of Brahmins and Kshatriyas bearing surnames like Singh, Shukul, Rai, Tewari, Bajpayee and Ojha. Their ancestry is traced back to the northern and central Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. The history of their arrival and settlement in the area has been narrated in close connection to the temple. Their received memory is that their ancestors were brought into the region as clerks, accountants and security personnel. Subsequent waves of in-migration of similar groups was attributed to various points in history, most important of which is the early British era of indigo farming. The group members themselves identified their ancestors as “not Bengali” but always followed it up with “the oldest residents of this place”. In reference to themselves, they frequently used terms like “almost Bengali” or “just like Bengalis”.

For the other “upper caste” groups residing in Lapuria mouja, and other parts of the town, the residents of Garbeta mouja were objects of suspicion and resentment to varying degrees. This sentiment was also rationalized through certain received memories that had given shape to a collective historical consciousness as articulated in the following quote from Subhash Chattopadhyay:

“...It was towards the end of British rule. When the British were leaving the landlords came into being. The ‘Nogdis’ I told you about, the ones who received salaries in cash... the Singh, Shukul, Tewari and others, they worked as henchmen for the British. While going away, the British wrote off huge tracts of land in their names. It is through those records that they became landlords in the subsequent times....”

Chattopadhyay is a retired high-school headmaster residing in Fatehsinghpur mouja, and was unequivocally identified as “the most knowledgeable person” in the town by all Panchayat officials. A similar sentiment resonates in the narrative from Biplab Majumdar, a much younger resident of Garbeta town:

“They were all attached to the British administrative set-up in some way or the other. And it is through this connection that they became landlords. It is not that they had an ancestral history in being landlords. It was since the 1950s that they became landlords. The benevolence of the rulers is what led them to becoming landlords.”

This resentment manifests itself as both neighbourhood and caste based rivalries, thereby making evident the complex identity politics that lies behind the making of Garbeta town. While denouncing these “outsider” groups' claim to the status of original inhabitants, Chattopadhyay (as also other participants) recognizes the Bagdis and Duleys, both Dalit communities, as the oldest residents of the Garbeta mouja. There are four Dalit neighbourhoods in the northern fringes of Garbeta mouja each inhabited exclusively by the synonymous Dalit community- the Ruidas, the Handi, the Dom and the Bagdis.

When it comes to Garbeta town, the residents of Lapuria mouja attempt to take lead as the principle urbanizers, claiming that Garbeta mouja had always existed as it was and that the process of expansion (and hence elevation to urban status) had actually been brought about by their settling in Lapuria. The residents of Lapuria, also from “upper caste” backgrounds, migrated into the area from various villages in a radius of 20-25 kilometres, during the late 1990s. This migration was motivated by deeply entrenched political rivalries within the Communist Party (Marxist), which was part of the reigning political coalition in the state at that time. Despite an overwhelming hesitation among the

participants, to spell things out clearly in this regard, it is evident from multiple narratives that those in possession of large tracts of land in the villages, were being bullied by rival factions to side with them. The result was a steady migration of households into the parts of Lapuria mouja, which are adjacent to Garbeta Police Station and had been left fallow at that time.

It is clear that land plays a decisive role in formulation and articulation of identity within Garbeta town. Based on the map and the participants' narratives, I propose four categories of the Garbeta town resident. The first is the landed elite residing in the western moujas and of Bengali ancestry. The second is the landed elite residing within Garbeta mouja and of northern and central Indian ancestry. The third is the landed elite residing in Lapuria mouja since the late 1990s, also of Bengali ancestry. The fourth is the Dalit resident, residing mainly in the northern fringes of Garbeta mouja and predominantly landless. It is not a matter of co- incidence that land ownership and caste identity mirror each other in this case. The high incidence of landlessness among Dalits is well documented (Thorat & Newman 2010). What is important here is the idea of changing land use as central to the process of urbanization. Between 2001 (when Garbeta was a census village) and 2011 (when Garbeta became a census town), the pattern of land use in Garbeta town has remained relatively unaltered.

Expansion in built-up area for residential purposes has been concentrated in the Lapuria mouja, and has taken place between 1995 and 2000. Expansion in built-up area for commercial purposes has been concentrated in the Amlagora and Radhanagar moujas, and has taken place since the mid-1970s until the early 1990s. Both of these expansions have taken place on land that was deemed to be waste land or unsuitable for cultivation. Along the highway connecting Bishnupur and Medinipur town, some plots of agricultural land were reported to have been claimed by the state for expansion of the highway. This resulted in a legal dispute that was reported to have been resolved in favour of the landowners in the mid- 1980s.

Thus the physical and economic expansion of Garbeta town has not taken place through the withdrawal of land from agriculture and its subsequent use for other economic activities. Moreover much of the land surrounding the town continues to be cultivated as agricultural land. I argue that this has been the case due to the primacy of land as an emotional asset over its significance as an economic asset. For each of the resident categories, land use and land ownership are central to formation of identity and seeking legitimacy as a resident of Garbeta town. For the first three, being landowners is a state of privilege and entitlement to economic prosperity that is further leveraged by the new urban status of the town. What this implies in terms of diversification of livelihoods and other allied indicators of urbanization, will be taken up in the next section. It suffices to say here that as controllers of a key productive resource, the landowning groups see their ownership of land as the source of power and thereby dominance within the town. This is succinctly put in the following words by Shankar, a seventeen year old resident of Lapuria mouja:

“There is this thing...this idea...that we need to eat rice grown in our own fields...otherwise it is not a real meal...after all, what is the status of a man who has to buy rice to feed his family?”

Shankar is at present preparing for the high school examinations and aspires to gain admission into a well-ranked engineering college. The above statement from somebody of his social position throws up multiple questions about how sectorial transfer of labour and structural transformation of the economy have been understood with regard to urbanization. But his sentiment is echoed in the following quote from Ashok, a sixty year old resident of Garbeta mouja from the Dalit community and the head of the only landowning household in his neighbourhood:

“It has been twenty years since we bought the first piece of land...At that time it was just a pit. Over the next three years, we spent about seventy or eighty thousand rupees, filling it up with soil and making it cultivable. It was completely useless. You would sink up to your knees, trying to walk across the land. It took seventy truck-loads of soil to fill it up and make it usable...By the grace of god I now have some land, we eat rice from our own fields...those who can't are existing completely at the mercy of the rich.”

For the second category of the “outsider” landlords, land ownership has the added relevance in identity politics of marking them as legitimate residents of the area who have a stake in the local economy. In these cases too, land features as much as an emotional asset as an economic one, and is central to defining identity and claiming legitimacy. Conflicts around the transfer of land from agriculture to industry in Singur, also a census town since 2001, have been widely recorded and studied (e.g. Samanta 2014). Although no major efforts in that direction have been made by public or private agents in the

areas surrounding Garbeta town, there is enough assertion in the narratives to suggest that in case such efforts were to be made, it would be a hotly contested move giving rise to emotionally charged political conflicts.

Even for households owning large tracts of land, the holdings are fragmented and scattered across multiple moujas. Yet their existence functions as the adhesive in constructing and holding together an identity that is rooted in Garbeta town. The absence of land on the other hand, reduces even long term (and arguably the “original”) residents such as the Bagdis and the Doms to a position of “mercy”, essentially disenfranchising them from the status of rightful urban residents. This poses a challenge to any easy associations that are made between the rural as essentially agrarian and the urban as essentially non-agrarian. It also paves the way for an investigation of what constitutes the economic base of Garbeta town and what the predominant livelihood strategies are, that have been adopted by its residents.

Working in Garbeta Town: Labour, Enterprise and Informality

In accordance to the criteria defined for identification of census towns, at least 75 per cent of the male work force in Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT are employed in non-agricultural activities. Although the sectorial distribution of employment for all of Garbeta town is not known, there were three kinds of economic activities (all of them non-farm in nature) that dominated the narratives on work and labour- i) work related to the cold storages, ii) engagement in the potato trade, and iii) self-employment in small enterprises. Garbeta was frequently described as an “agro-centric” economy, with the potato crop as the “pillar on which this economy stands”. Here I describe the modus operandi of each of these three segments of the local economy.

The Cold Storages

According to Arun Bajpayee, the president of the Garbeta Potato Traders’ Union, the town hosted fourteen cold storage facilities ten years ago, which has now reduced to eight. The dominant theme in the narrative of cold storages in the town is that of stagnation and decay. The first cold storage facility that was set up in the town was the Amlagora Cold Stores. Since the time of its inception in 1972, it has been managed by Shyamal Bakshi, who now refers to the cold stores as a “sick industry”. Most of the cold storage facilities in the area were established between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, during which time the West Bengal industries department offered a ten per cent subsidy on the cost of establishment and maintenance. The most recent addition to the cluster of cold stores was the Ananda Cold Store, which was set up in 2008 and closed down in 2012. It stands now as an abandoned building.

None of the owners of the currently functional facilities are residents of Garbeta town. They are based either in Medinipur town or in Kolkata. The day to day functioning of the stores is managed by resident full-time staff. Potato is the only crop that is stored and the season for storage is from March to November. The capacity of the stores varies between 0.4 and 0.6 million bags, which is the equivalent of 100,000-200,000 metric tonnes of produce. The peak season for hiring of labour is from February 25 to March 20. During this time the bags are unloaded from the trucks and moved into the sorting area of the stores. Here the potatoes are segregated by size and quality and re-packed into bags accordingly. These are then loaded into the cold storage. The labour involved in loading and unloading is sourced from surrounding places like Bankura, Puruliya, Murshidabad, Bihar and Jharkhand. The labour involved in sorting and grading is locally sourced. There is a shorter period of unloading at the end of November with a smaller labour requirement. Both local and migrant labourers belong to Dalit and Adivasi communities. The currently prevalent wage rate is three rupees and ninety paise (0.06 \$) per bag, from truck to store. The conditions of work are as dubious as other studies of informal wage labour have revealed (see for e.g. Breman 1996). In the words of Shyamal Bakshi,

“They (the migrant labourers) come in bus loads for only two or three weeks. We have staff quarters behind the store but not enough. So we build a tent. That’s where they sleep at night.”

He adds that this is a lucrative source of income for the visiting workers as the payments can go up to five hundred rupees (7.5 \$) per head per day. This adds up to about a hundred and thirty bags per worker per day, each weighing fifty kilograms. Bajpayee estimates that in the loading season all the cold stores together employ up to five thousand daily wage labourers. While the wages and work conditions of the labourers remain unregulated, the rent charged by the cold stores is subject to government stipulation. The current rent stands at one hundred and forty rupees per hundred kilograms

for the storage season from March to November, beyond which it is charged at 12 rupees per hundred kilograms per month. This rate was last revised in 2012. The managers reported this rent to be too low, which made the business unviable unless the stores operated at full capacity, which was seldom the case anymore given the stiff competition. This was also reportedly the reason for several stores shutting down.

The Potato Traders

“Fifty per cent are traders and fifty per cent are general public” is how Bajpayee describes the people involved in the potato trade. The chain of events that the trade consists of are- purchasing the produce from the landlords, transporting it to the cold stores, and selling it to wholesale buyers. The traders are seldom in contact with the actual cultivators or daily wage agricultural labourers. A segment of the traders reside in Garbeta town and supervise the entire chain of events. Another segment that is based in other bigger urban centres, makes the necessary capital investments but outsources the supervision and execution to those residing in Garbeta town. This process is facilitated and sustained by longstanding social networks. Entry into the network is based on goodwill and trust, built on socio-economic status and caste. This is described by Bhajan Niyogi, a potato trader of local prominence, in the following quote:

“I’ll tell you how the trade is done. Say you have a job with a monthly salary of twenty or thirty thousand. You can save five thousand a month and after a while you will have fifty or sixty thousand or even a lakh to spare. Say that year the potatoes are being bought and put into the store at the rate of thirty thousand per truck. You will obviously have a trader friend. You just call him and say, ‘why don’t you put in two trucks of potatoes for me’. I’ll give you thirty thousand for now and the remaining thirty you’ll have to borrow. So the friend will put in two trucks of potatoes for you into the cold store. Now when you decide to sell it in the market, you might make a profit or a loss. But your friend will trust you because they have known you since birth. If it doesn’t work out one year, it will work out in the next....that’s how there is a trader in every family.”

The Self-employed Entrepreneur

In the absence of any manufacturing or heavy industrial units, the non-agricultural employment opportunities in Garbeta town are bound to be in the tertiary sector. Apart from the cold stores and the potato trade, these have emerged in the form of small family enterprises and individual entrepreneurial undertakings over the past two decades. Transport services, road-side restaurants, showrooms for electronic goods and grocery shops are some of the prominent enterprises.

Drawing from multiple narratives, I attempt to present a prototype of the Garbeta town entrepreneur, followed by an illustrative life story. The self-employed entrepreneur in Garbeta town is typically male, between thirty to fifty years in age and has a college degree. He belongs to one of the three landed elite categories of Garbeta town residents, more likely to be of the first or the third type. He has been employed in or has sought employment in multiple service sector opportunities before. His enterprise is funded with the help of inherited wealth, a loan from the immediate family, or a personal loan from the Garbeta branch of the State Bank of India. The reason he has chosen to be an entrepreneur is that public sector jobs are only accessible to those actively involved in “party-politics” and his educational background is not suitable for available private sector jobs. He has never acquired the skills to work in agriculture and deems agricultural labour as unsuitable for himself. Nonetheless, he is reluctant to part with his inherited share of agricultural land. Running an enterprise is the only alternative to remaining unemployed or being co-opted into the party cadre. Even if the enterprise does not flourish, he is invested in just keeping it going, while remaining dependent on ancestral land to make ends meet.

The example of Subhendu Dey, a thirty one year old resident of the Garbeta mouja, is illustrative. Dey has been running a grocery store for the past two years. His shop is the smallest in a line of commercial establishments opposite the Village Panchayat office. His immediate neighbours are a fifteen year old “Hindu hotel” restaurant and a watch repairing shop. The land on which all these shops stand is owned by the Public Works Department. Subhendu has previously run a home based telephone booth, worked as “direct sales officer” for the telecom company Tata Docomo, and owned a poultry farm. His father has worked as a “tax collector” for the Panchayat office, an informal position where he was responsible for bringing in tax payments from the various telecom companies that had erected towers within the area administered by the Panchayat. Through his prolonged association with the Panchayat, and thereby the local political machinery, he had earned their goodwill. Thanks to his socio-political network, Subhendu could set up his grocery store on the fallow patch of land, as had been the case with the other enterprises on that street. He used his savings from the

previous jobs to start the business. The switch was mainly motivated by his favoured All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) coming to power in the Village Panchayat, which meant he could “peacefully serve tea to the political bigwigs instead of running around all over the district.” Subhendu’s family owned land but his father had to let go of his share due to persistent family disputes.

Based on the above descriptions, I make three contentions about the nature of economic production in Garbeta town. The first is that the economy of Garbeta town is heavily dependent on agricultural production, specifically the potato crop. The expansion of the town in physical space and the growth of its economy have not taken place through the transfer of land, capital or labour from agriculture to non-agriculture at any significant level. On the contrary, the economic health of Garbeta town is shaped by the agricultural performance of its immediate hinterlands. Agricultural land surrounds the town and farming has reportedly intensified over the past few decades, as also indicated by the growth in potato trade. The land on which the town itself has expanded, was never put to agricultural use in prior times. The capital investments in setting up of the cold storage facilities have been made by established entrepreneurs from bigger urban centres, on the basis of the lucrative agricultural productivity of the area. The capital investments made into trade and small enterprises are extracted from formal sector salaries or ancestral wealth. While agricultural profits are a key component of this accumulated wealth, the extraction of capital for entrepreneurship is not at the cost of capital investments into agriculture itself. The two moujas- Garbeta and Amlagora- that officially constitute the CTs have formally fulfilled the criteria of 75 per cent employment in non-agriculture. However this belies the overwhelming agro-dependence of the economy of Garbeta town and once again brings forth the dissonance between the official and embedded readings of the urban. The town has emerged as a hub of non-farm activity, dependent on and sustained by agriculture.

The second contention is that Garbeta town is considerably autonomous in its interactions with other settlements and economies at the local and regional levels. As the spatial hub of the potato trade, it acts as the node of supply to surrounding states and districts. Although some of the investments into the trade are brought in by incomes and profits earned at bigger urban centres such as Kolkata or Medinipur town, it is the production and exchange taking place within Garbeta town that attract these investments. Thus growth and expansion of Garbeta, both economically and spatially, take place primarily through local production. The town’s identity and interactions with other spatial entities, be they markets, individuals, or agents of state power, are predicated upon this local production.

The third contention is that the relations of production within Garbeta town closely resemble if not entirely mirror the agrarian relations of production that have customarily been defined in terms of caste roles and privileges. The communities of agricultural daily wage labourers have been pre-dominantly Dalit. These communities continue to be engaged in the same line of work, while successive generations from “upper caste” communities have moved into formal sector white collar jobs or entrepreneurial activities. Labour for the cold storages both from outside and within the area, is also entirely of Dalit and Adivasi descent. The perception of what kind of labour is suited to which caste groups is persistently rigid, and in fact determines the direction of growth and expansion. In other words, the potato production and trade flourish on the basis of an unjust and exploitative labour regime that has been legitimized by the structure of caste relations. While there are no legal or formal barriers to breaking away from this regime, the lack of focus on redistributive justice and the pervasive informality of production systems serve to uphold the customary forms of oppression and extraction.

In *Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities* Roy (2009) has conceptualized informality as the dominant idiom of urbanization in India. Based on examples of land acquisition and other state interventions as planning in megacities like Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata she argues that informality in the Indian urban scene exists not merely in the realms of poverty or unregulated labour and production. According to Roy the Indian planning regime itself has been informalized to allow exceptions, ambiguities and deregulations to serve the interests of “inter-locking elites” from politics, private corporations and the bourgeoisie. This stands at counter purposes to the purported aims of urban development, governance and justice. When applied to a town like Garbeta, the idea of informality as the dominant idiom of urbanization is reified. In the case of the cold stores, the state has made its presence felt in the form of offering subsidies and regulating rent. At the same time it has chosen to remain silent on workers’ wages, the conditions of work and questions of security of livelihood when the stores have closed down. In the case of small entrepreneurs, the state (through its political machinery at the

grassroots) has overlooked encroachment on its land, but only for those actors that it has deemed favourable for strengthening its own stronghold over the electorate. Thus informality, in both its traditional and revised understandings, pervades the making of Garbeta town and the sustenance of its economy. This has meant that the process of urbanization in its present form has not altered, challenged or questioned the status quo in social relations and power differentials. The relative flows of power between the elite and non-elite sections of society have remained consistent over time in Garbeta town.

Subaltern Urbanism(s) in Garbeta town

Garbeta town has a Chamber of Commerce and Industries with more than two thousand enrolled members. The joining fee is a nominal 110 INR (less than \$2) per annum and it is open for membership to entrepreneurs, traders and businessmen from all sectors. In the words of Subrata Mahapatra, the chairperson of the chamber, their activities are “small enterprise oriented” and aimed at “simplifying commerce”. To this end, the chamber has presented a written proposal to the state’s finance minister, requesting the operations for collection of taxes from itinerant traders to be transferred from the Medinipur branch of the State Bank of India to the Garbeta branch. While the proposal remains under consideration, the chamber has been co-ordinating and facilitating timely tax payments for individual traders who had been defaulting due to the logistical complexities involved. Mahapatra explains the position of the traders in the following words:

“It is not a reduction in taxes that we want. It is only a simplification of the taxation process. If a man has to spend the whole day traveling to Medinipur, waiting in queue at the bank, and traveling back, just to pay a tax...say worth three hundred rupees...do you think he would be motivated to do it?”

This is not an isolated demand but an extension of a larger call for easier accessibility of institutions of governance. On behalf of the Citizens’ Forum of Garbeta, which operates as a wing of the Chamber of Commerce, the erstwhile Left Front government in the state was petitioned to grant Garbeta town the status of a sub-divisional head-quarter. The following quote from Mahapatra summarizes the interaction:

“On the day the bifurcation of the district took place and the day before that, Buddha Babu (former Chief Minister) was here in Medinipur town. We went there to meet him. We gave him all the papers that we had prepared. He was forced to admit that we have all the necessary infrastructure, and that we are fully eligible to be a sub-divisional headquarter. But because his funds did not permit, he stalled it for then. And that is what has carried on until now. It is because of the government’s lack of funds that we are deprived of some essential services.”

I would like to highlight here that the demand for a sub-divisional headquarter is qualitatively and politically different from the demand for a municipality or similar ULB. While ULBs work primarily towards improving infrastructure and service provisioning, the sub-divisional headquarter also houses the industrial officer and other state representatives who have jurisdiction over matters of land, commerce, trade and enterprise. It is independent of the three tier system of local governance and acts more as an extension of the state government itself. The office of the sub-divisional head has been in existence since the colonial times and is seen as an accessible limb of the state bureaucracy, rather than a peoples’ self-governing body. In the words of Mahapatra, “*there is the Chief Minister’s office and just below that is the SDO.*”

The demand for being granted sub-divisional head-quarter status resonates with several other participants, all representing various sections of the landed elite. The demand is partly motivated by a sense of entitlement that in turn emanates from a long history of being home to such markers of state presence as a civil and criminal court, a rural hospital, the Block Panchayat office and a public college. The demand is further fuelled by the increased volume of trade, even if by small firms and itinerant traders. However the demand is not one that unequivocally mirrors all urban aspirations within Garbeta town.

As one enters the Dalit neighbourhoods of Garbeta mouja, the experience is not so much of moving from one neighbourhood to another within a town, as it is one of stepping into an entirely different settlement altogether. Although the Dalit and “upper caste” parts of the mouja are contiguous and connected by a road, the material conditions of life are starkly different. The concrete drains give way to muddy streams of sewage and the freshly tarred roads abruptly turn into dirt tracks. The architecture changes from brick and concrete multi-storeyed, well maintained houses to thatch-roofed huts with mud

or straw walls (see Figure IV). In these parts of Garbeta mouja, now officially Garbeta CT, a sub-divisional headquarter is rarely mentioned. The idea of an urban identity sits uncomfortably with many of the participants. Geeta Dom, a middle aged participant who has been residing in the area for several decades said in course of a group discussion:

“In a way it is a town. There is a court and a college and a hospital. Which village would have all of these? But the town ends right there (pointing in the direction of the non-Dalit part of the mouja). Would it be correct if I say I live in a town? Look around you and tell me.”

The narratives of urbanism from the chamber of commerce and those from the Dom neighbourhood are seemingly at odds. However they both represent a nuanced and qualified understanding of what it means to be urban. The two narratives articulate urban identities through different sets of aspirations. Their difference is rooted in the stagnant social relations and deeply entrenched power differentials that have given shape to the current physical and political landscape of Garbeta town. Their co-existence symbolizes the ambivalent space that the town has come to represent in the minds of its own inhabitants. For the Dalit community of Garbeta, the town is a village where the Panchayat concerns itself more with the provisioning of street lighting to the arterial road for the potato trade, than with the implementation of important development schemes relating to rural employment generation. When this was brought up with a Garbeta Village Panchayat functionary, he acknowledged the challenges of governing a half-way space, adding that the Panchayat functioned “*almost like a township Panchayat rather than a Village Panchayat*”.

Mahapatra, in his impassioned plea for sub-divisional headquarter status, calls Garbeta “*a Mufassil Town but nothing less*”. The term “*mufassil*” was introduced during the early colonial period to distinguish the “provinces, country stations and districts” from the Presidency.

“Thus, if in Calcutta; one talks of the Mufussil, he means anywhere in Bengal, out of Calcutta...”

- Yule, H. (Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases)

In this description, it is possible to read an understanding of Garbeta as an urban space that is excluded from the mainstream understanding of the urban. Within that construction of Garbeta, is another idea of Garbeta that exists in a relationship of difference with this one. This, the second idea of Garbeta, comes from the Dalit communities and while it does not wholly reject the first idea, it certainly seeks to problematize it.

Conclusion: Towards a Geography of Subalternity

Subaltern urbanization, as imagined by Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah (2012), offers a fresh perspective on defining and understanding the urban, based on spatial relations at a macro level. This perspective marks a shift from the dominant official epistemology of the urban. New subaltern urbanism, as derived from the work of Roy (2011), enables certain ways of being urban to be seen as challenges to the limits of archival knowledge on how to be urban. I argue that the case of Garbeta town demonstrates that these two positions are not only closely allied but also find synthesis in the lived experiences and autonomous articulations of the residents. The map acts as a visual reference to the notional entity that is Garbeta town. This is not represented in its entirety in the official annals. It finds representation in fragments in the form of Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT. These fragments exemplify what the authors of subaltern urbanization have described as ‘non-peripheral denied’ form of urbanization. The remaining parts of Garbeta town exemplify the ‘non-peripheral invisible’ form of urbanization. In formulating these very categories, the authors have pushed the boundaries of what is recognized and studied as ‘urban’ in the Indian context. The narratives from Garbeta town further strengthen this challenge. There is ample evidence of autonomy in propelling economic growth, fuelling spatial expansion, and conducting economic and political interactions with local and regional actors. These features, while emboldening the argument that subaltern urbanization exists in India, also challenge the very idea of what is thought of as urban in India.

A range of parallel and competing projects and practices constitute the worlding process in this case. The stream of logic cultivated by the Chamber of Commerce in Garbeta is a nuanced political position that exists in a relationship of difference to the dominant format of the legislative route to instituting ULBs. The streams of thought articulated by Dalit residents on the other hand, share points of convergence and divergence with both state discourse on development and elite discourse on urbanism

within the town. Thus the subaltern in this context is not tied to a particular identity or space, but emerges as a mode of discursive existence. The Chamber of Commerce acts as an enabler to first-time Dalit entrepreneurs while many of its members benefit from the customary exploitation of Dalit labour. Small entrepreneurs connive with state agents in informal ways and formal sector workers take up capitalist pursuits with the help of entrenched middle-men. There are no easy or direct formulae that sum up the logics at work in these processes, but they together constitute the project of creating the unique world of the town and placing it within the world of urbanization as another marker of its tremendous heterogeneity.

These complexities lead to the question, what lies at the root of this multiplicity of discourses that are at times in competition with each other but together challenge the limits of the dominant discourse on urbanization. I argue that, as suggested by the case of Garbeta town, the answer lies in the inherent contradiction of rigidly static social relations in the face of dynamic worlding processes. The case shows that economic production and spatial expansion has taken place on the basis of extractive and oppressive relations of labour that are built upon customary caste relations. This directs our attention to the overall side-lining of social justice as a question of relevance within the discourse of urbanization. This oversight has led to readings of Indian urbanization, that fail to acknowledge the continuing and historical injustices that constitute the enabling conditions for such processes to be in action. By worlding the census towns as geographies of subalternity, I seek to bring attention back to these silences within urban studies.

ⁱ The system of rural local governance in India is organized in three tiers consisting of villages at the base, followed by blocks and then districts. At each level there are elected bodies (Panchayats) with provisions for representation of women and marginalized communities such as Dalits and Adivasis.

ⁱⁱ Available online at censusindia.gov.in

ⁱⁱⁱ The term "mouja" has its origin in the organization of land revenue systems and refers in general to a continuous tract of land. In this case a mouja almost always corresponds to a census village of the same name. In the Census of 2011 Garbeta mouja and Amlagora mouja were categorized as Garbeta CT and Amlagora CT respectively. They are both part of what is treated as 'Garbeta town' in this paper.

^{iv} I use "upper caste" within quotes to signify personal dis-identification with the hierarchical organization of Hindu caste society.

Appendix



Figure II: Hand-drawn map of moujas in Garbeta Village Panchayat. Photograph taken by author.

Acknowledgments:

The field work for this research was funded by grants from the Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography, and the Margit Althin Fund of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences (Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien).

References:

- Breman, J (1996) *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy*, Cambridge University Press
- Guha, R. (1988) "On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India" in R. Guha and G.C. Spivak (eds.), *Selected subaltern studies*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Denis, E, Mupkoadhyay, P. and Zerah, M (2012) "Subaltern Urbanization in India", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 30,
- Henderson, J. V. (2010) "Cities and development", *Journal of Regional Science* 50(1): 515- 540.
- Kundu, A. (2011) "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46 (40): 13-16.
- Moreno-Monroy, A. (2012) "Informality in Space: Understanding Agglomeration Economies during Economic Development." *Urban Studies*, 49(10): 2019- 2030.
- Ong, A. (2011) "Introduction: Worlding Cities, Or the Art of Being Global" in Roy, A. and Ong, A. (eds.) (2011) *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Pradhan, K. (2012) "Unacknowledged Urbanization: The New Census Towns of India". Working Paper, Centre for Policy Research, 2012
- Roy, A. (2009) "Why India Cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization", *Planning Theory*, 2009: 8.
- Roy, A (2011) "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35.2, 223-38
- Samanta, G. (2014) "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49: 22, 55-62
- Spivak, G.C. (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press.
- Spivak, G.C. (2005) "Scattered speculations on the subaltern and the popular", *Postcolonial Studies* 8.4, 475–86.
- Thorat, S., and Newman, K (2010) "Introduction: Economic Discrimination, Concept, Consequences and Remedies" in Thorat, S., and Newman, K. (ed.) (2010) *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. Oxford University Press
- World Bank (2009), *Reshaping Economic Geography*, World Development Report.
- Yule, H. (1995 {1903}), *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, Asian Educational Services, Chennai.

Article IV

Placing the Urban in its Rural Context: A Mixed Methods Case Study of a ‘Census Town’ in India

Abstract

How do we understand the contemporary urban condition, especially in the context of the developing world? Through a mixed methods case study of a “census town” in West Bengal, India I seek to demonstrate that, the contemporary urban in form and content, is the imprint of the rural. Based on narrative analysis of oral history interviews and statistical data from a household survey, I argue that the urban here is a spatial articulation of the specific historical experiences of the people inhabiting the context and brings into relief the continuities between agrarian relations and urban forms.

Keywords: census towns, mixed methods, India, urban condition

Acknowledgments: The field work for this research project was supported by grants from the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG) and the Margit Althin fund of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien).

Author Information:

Srilata Sircar

Dept. of Human Geography

Lund University

10 Sölvegatan

Lund- 22362.

Email: srilata.sircareg.lu.se

Phone: +46 764425895

Introduction

In the recent years, there has been a substantial rethinking of the category “urban” among geographers. At the same time the census of 2011 in India has made some startling revelations about the urban character of the country. Against this milieu of conceptual and empirical flux, this paper attempts to gain insights into the lesser known aspects of the contemporary urban condition in India. Following Roy (2015, 2016) I argue that the urban, when seen as the socio-spatial articulation of a set of specific historical experiences (as opposed to merely a set of demographic criteria), brings into relief the continuities between agrarian relations and urban forms. Through a mixed methods case study of a “census town” in West Bengal, India I seek to demonstrate that the quest for a socially just and inclusive process of urbanization needs to be aligned with the cause of reforming agrarian relations and systems of production.

In the 2011 Census of India, more than 2500 settlements were newly brought under the category of “census towns” (CTs). CTs are settlement units that have been declared urban in the census, based on the following criteria: 5000 or more population, density of at least 400/square kilometre, and at least 75 per cent of the male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. CTs remain under institutions of rural governance (Gram Panchayats) until they are allocated Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) by the state legislature. This process, known as municipalisation, is largely dependent on the discretion of the state. Samanta (2014) found that the average period for CTs to be municipalized was seven to ten years.

Of the 2532 new CTs in India, 526 are located in the state of West Bengal. Collectively, they account for 66 per cent of the decadal urban growth in the state (Pradhan 2013). This revelation, along with other statistical observations (such as a higher absolute increase in urban population than in rural population, for the first time) has led to a new-found interest in census towns on the part of geographers, demographers, and urban theorists alike. (e.g. Pradhan 2013; Denis, Mukhopadhyay & Zerah 2012; Samanta 2014; Guin & Das 2015)

One of the first reactions to this census result came from the noted demographer Amitabh Kundu (2011) who suspected “census activism” to be at work. In other words, Kundu claimed that it was a deliberate enthusiasm on the part of census officials to project an image of a rapidly urbanizing nation that is reflected in this unforeseen and unprecedented identification of new urban settlements. This assertion was challenged by Pradhan (2013) and has been recently challenged again by Guin and Das (2015). Pradhan’s approach was to match the newly declared CTs of 2011 with the corresponding census villages in the previous census of 2001, to see if the claim of rapid urbanization was in fact exaggerated. He found that not only did more than half of the new CTs already fulfil the

necessary criteria in 2001, but also if the required population threshold was diminished to 4000 (assuming that it would reach 5000 within a decade) the number reached close to ninety per cent of the new CTs. It therefore becomes evident that contrary to Kundu's (2011) hypothesis, there might even be an under-reporting of CTs. These observations are confirmed by Guin & Das (2015), who take the argument further.

Having corroborated the demographic argument put forth by Pradhan (2013), Guin & Das (2015) proceed to interrogate the employment criteria used in the census-75 per cent of male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. They report that between 1991 and 2001, there was a drastic rise in the number of informal own-account workers and casual workers in the state of West Bengal. They further note that during this period, the state capital Kolkata and its surrounding districts saw a rapid growth in the number of Small Scale Industries (SSIs), which are known to be employers of informal wage labour. They attribute this occurrence to the concomitant agricultural distress of the 1990s, marked by escalating fertilizer and seed prices and failure of irrigation systems. Thus for Guin & Das (2015), the emergence of the CTs is not an indicator of economic development marked by structural transformation, but one of distress led sectoral diversification of village economies. However, the most important aspect of their thesis is their prediction that in the census of 2021, as many as 136 of the 526 new CTs of West Bengal risk being re-categorized as villages (setting aside the unlikely occurrence of them receiving municipal status before that). They pin this prediction partly on the nation-wide resurgence in the number of agricultural workers (Yadav 2014, Guin 2014) and partly on the fact that decisions about CT classifications are taken prior to the actual census operations, based on the findings of the previous census. Since the identification of the new CTs in 2011 took place on the basis of demographic data from 2001, new data on sectoral shares of employment has been collected and will influence the classification of settlements in 2021.

While the validity of this prediction is yet to be tested, what emerges strongly from this discussion of preliminary research on CTs is their precarious position as urban entities. For one, most of the CTs are likely to remain administratively rural for indefinite periods of time unless the state legislature finds practical or political motivation to accord them the status of Statutory Towns. But moreover, even the token urban status of the CTs remains subject to the volatility of changing definitions, revised criteria, remapped territories, and teetering thresholds. In her response to the predictions made by Guin & Das (2015), Roy (2015:10) argues that:

“This is not simply the case of arbitrary classifications and reclassifications. Instead, this is a glimpse of complex forms of rural-urban differentiation that exceed our analysis of urban political economy and its patterns of accumulation and dispossession.”

This brings us to a question that dominates the terrain of contemporary urban theory, especially with regard to the developing world: how do we understand the contemporary urban condition? From that flows the corollary question: what are the social relations and flows of power that characterize it? Questions like these have found their way into the recent works of several prominent urban theorists. In the following section I will present a brief discussion of these theoretical standpoints to build a base on which I wish to plant my empirical explorations.

Conceptual Shifts in Imagining the Contemporary Urban

In her recent essay titled *What is urban about critical urban theory?* Ananya Roy (2015) has argued that one of the defining themes in contemporary urban theory has been the debate between generalizing metanarratives (such as those of globalization, neoliberalism, underdevelopment or class struggle) and specificity induced by historical difference, “often couched as a confrontation between political economy and post-colonial theory” (ibid: 12). This implies that conventional notions of structural change led urbanization as a manifestation of capitalist development are no longer adequate for understanding the contemporary urban conditions in various parts of the world. In *Who’s afraid of postcolonial theory?* (2016) she further argues that generalization must not be analytically confounded with universalization and historical difference must not to be misinterpreted as mere empirical variation. Thus, emerging forms of urbanization in the global South are not to be seen as geographical variants of the kinds of urbanization witnessed in the global North. On the contrary, urbanization processes need to be situated in their specific historical contexts and understood in terms of contextual nuances to see what aspects of this experience are generalizable.

In the former essay Roy (2015) visits sites that she describes as “beyond the zone of familiarity, beyond the city” and seeks to launch her theory-making from these improbable locales. In doing this, her intention is not only to interrogate the “urban” in critical urban theory but also to broaden the stakes on “from where on the map we produce the body of authoritative knowledge that we are willing to acknowledge as theory” (2015:11). Her ethnographic navigation of three new municipalities in the northern outskirts of the Kolkata metropolitan region (the state capital of West Bengal) led her to three key imperatives. The first is to posit the rural as the “constitutive other” of the urban. The second is to foreground the urban as “a historical category” that is made and unmade at particular junctures in time (as opposed to a revolution that has been contemporaneously arrived at). The

third is to understand rural and urban as “governmental categories”. These submissions bring her directly in conversation with a group of theorists writing in various forms about the “complete urbanization society” (Lefebvre 1969 in Merrifield 2014: 2).

Brenner and Schmid’s (2014) thesis on ‘planetary urbanization’ is by now well-known and much cited. In this conceptual and theoretical intervention the authors argue that the imagination of the urban has been marked by a few totalizing elements that have led to the untenable perception of an “urban age”. Key amongst these elements is “settlement fetishism” – the idea that all spaces can be categorized as settlements of some sort. This has led credence to a territorial view that renders the urban and the non-urban/rural either as neat, easy binaries or as polar ends of a continuum. Another key element is the “distributional model of urban transition”- the idea that urbanization is marked by concentration and therefore the movement of populations between settlements can transform their urban character, without impacting their discrete coherence. The authors denounce these totalizing assumptions on various grounds, not the least of which is the arbitrary nature of their definition and the ensuing absence of comparability or standardization at any meaningful level. Instead, they suggest that the urban be imagined as a condition that stretches across the planet, like a fabric of uneven weave, thickening and waning in places but covering all spaces worldwide. Thus the emphasis in this imagination shifts from the city as site to the urban as condition (following Merrifield 2014).

In particular Roy (2015) is interested in understanding what produces the unevenness of the urban fabric. Contrary to Brenner and Schmid’s contention that “there is no longer any *outside* to the urban world” (2014:751), Roy (2015: 4) argues that the non-urban/rural/agrarian is a “constitutive outside” to the urban. This is not meant in strictly geographical or territorial terms, but rather in the analytical and empirical sense of those socio-economic processes and relations that lead to the making of the governmental category “urban”. Applying the method of deconstruction to the discourse around urbanization brings her to unravel the “rural land regimes...<which are> an inscription of specific regulations and logics of territory, land, and property” (2015: 8) that lie at the heart of the making of the urban. As opposed to the quintessentially urban political subject of mainstream urban studies, Roy’s political subject is engaged in everyday forms of negotiations with rural systems of patronage and privilege that have now been designated urban by the state. The question of how the state makes legible to itself, the complex and informal structures of occupancy, tenancy, and inhabitation emerges as central to this understanding. She calls it “at once today’s urban question and today’s agrarian question” (ibid).

This is a formulation that brings coherence and legitimacy to the questions that I am about to raise and the submissions I eventually make in lieu of definitive answers.

Methodology

The Setting of the Study

The sites of my study straddle the urban worlds of both Roy and Brenner & Schmid. The case in consideration here is Jhantipahari town in Bankura district of West Bengal. The town consists of not only the territorial tract that has been designated as Jhantipahari CT, but also of the continuous morphological area that constitutes the town in the popular imagination and its surrounding settlements that are integral to the everyday socio-economic life of the town. Located in one of the least urbanized districts of the state, Jhantipahari exemplifies what Denis, Mukhopadhyay, & Zerah (2012) have described as “subaltern urbanization”. This means that the town is physically removed from any larger urban or metropolitan areas, and that the urbanization processes therein have taken place independent of state planning.

As I have demonstrated in my earlier work¹ the actual morphological entity/continuous built-up area that represents the town in the collective imagination is larger than and different from the particular territorial unit that the census regards as the census town. Map I in the appendix shows the location of Jhantipahari town while Figure 1. below shows an aerial (Google Earth)² view of the town in question. The yellow line marks the approximate boundaries of the territorial tract that is represented as a CT in the census of 2011. The red line represents the actual morphological extent of the town and its boundaries in the collective imagination of its inhabitants. The green lines highlight my sites of study.

Located on the rail route connecting West Bengal and Jharkhand, Jhantipahari town reportedly consists of about 2000 households although the part of the town classified as a CT is officially home to approximately 1200 households. Following the national average household size (4.8) the population of Jhantipahari town and its surrounding settlements may be estimated to be about 10000. The town was frequently described by its inhabitants as “a well-established business centre”. Rice mills and mustard oil mills were the two dominant industrial sectors while a new economic segment of brokering trade deals in fresh produce had emerged in

¹

(hidden to anonymize for review)

² Retrieved from Google Maps (Earth view) accessed on March 20, 2016.

the past few years. At the time of the study³, both the rice and oil mill industries were experiencing a slump caused by withdrawal of subsidies by the state, lack of access to credit for modernization of plants, and political rivalries between the ruling party and the local elite.

The town itself is dominated by the Tambuli community/caste which is further represented by three sub-groups based on specific surnames- the Rakshits, the Kundus and the Dattas. Each of these sub-communities has its own homogeneous neighbourhood within the town. I refer here to the Tambulis as the “dominant community” following M.N. Srinivas’ (1994 [1959]) thesis that a caste group in a specific context may be thought of as the “dominant caste” if it is numerically preponderant, wields political and economic power, and is not too low in the hierarchy of local caste groups. This means that groups that are not named as Brahmins or are not among the ‘upper castes’ can still constitute the dominant caste in particular contexts. This is in fact the case in the Jhantipahari town area, where the Tambulis, who are listed as part of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in West Bengal, outnumber other demographic groups and hold positions of power both economically and socially. This will emerge more explicitly in the upcoming discussion.

The surrounding settlements are also homogeneous in terms of caste/community representation⁴. Settlement no. 1 is another Tambuli settlement consisting of thirty one households. Settlement no. 2 is a Dalit (Scheduled Caste) settlement consisting of twenty eight households. Settlement no. 3 is an Adivasi Santhal (Scheduled Tribes) settlement consisting of forty five households⁵.

Much has been written about the qualitatively differentiated experiences of marginalization faced by the Dalits and Adivasis (see for e.g. Thorat 2009, 2010 and Lama-Rewal 2005). One of the longstanding arguments has been that the oppression of Dalits is historical in nature while the oppression of Adivasis has both historical and geographical aspects to it. For instance most Adivasi communities have been customarily living on resource-intensive land that has been brought under state jurisdiction through legal interventions such as the Indian Forest Act of 1927 and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Since 2006 the customary rights of Adivasi communities have been recognized and protected

³ The fieldwork for this study was carried out between November 2014 and February 2015.

⁴ I use the terms caste and community interchangeably to include “tribes” in the discussion although as a group they are considered to be structurally external to the framework of caste.

⁵ Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are official nomenclature originating in the colonial vocabulary of classification. The corresponding names adopted by the communities in their own struggle for social justice are ‘Dalit’ and ‘Adivasi’ respectively. I will use these terms for the remainder of this paper.

through the Forest Rights Act, but violations of its provisions prevail rampantly⁶. The Dalit and the Adivasi communities in this particular area have been living at close quarters and experiencing similar forms of social relations with the dominant Tambuli community.

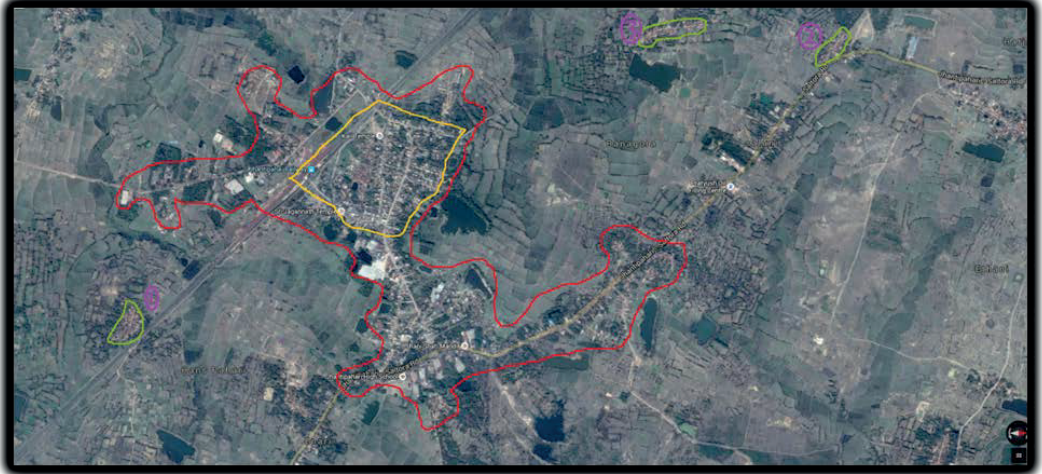


Figure 1. Location of Jhantipahari town and survey sites

Data Sources and Analysis

The first aim of this case study was to understand how the making of Jhantipahari town is understood as a historical process by the different communities with a stake in this urbanization. To this end I carried out extended oral history interviews with three life-long residents of the town and its vicinities- Krishnapada Rakshit (87) representing the Tambulis, Sasadhar Bhuiyan (73) representing the Dalits and a 58 year old male interviewee representing the Adivasis, who wished to remain anonymous. In the case of the Dalit interviewee, the main interviewee was joined by his two younger brothers who were not active participants as interviewees but were witness to the entire interviewing process and made passing observations a few times. During the first of the two sessions, three other elderly men from the settlement were also present and contributed with active responses to questions posed to Sasadhar Bhuiyan. For this reason, some segments from the first session were transcribed as focus group discussions.

The three interviewees were selected on the basis of suggestions from local gatekeepers and key informants. All three were considered knowledgeable and

⁶ See for example <http://scroll.in/article/802590/in-chhattisgarh-mining-interests-and-tribal-rights-on-a-collision-course>

articulate within their respective communities and were nominated on this basis. This selection process reflects both the grounded approach of the study and the inherent biases of the context in question. Although the three interviewees were nominated by their respective communities as capable representatives and custodians of local history, the absence of female interviewees reflects the gender bias prevalent on the ground. Despite having several introductory conversations with local women, none of them agreed to be interviewed for in-depth historical narratives. This reflects both their own lack of faith in their own status as worthy custodians of history and my inability to convince them otherwise. All the interviews were conducted in the local language Bangla and transcribed and translated to English by the author.

The interviews were then analysed through a combination of structural and contextual narrative analysis (following Labov & Waletzky 1967, Patterson 2008, Gubrium & Holstein 2009). I have used a combination of the qualified Labovian approach to structural analysis of the narrative (Patterson 2008, 2013) and the thematic approach proposed by later authors such as Gee (1991) and Riessman (1993). This entails treating the entire response of an interviewee as an overarching narrative within which thematically coherent narrative segments may be embedded. The analysis consists of identifying these narrative segments and their thematic basis; testing them for the structural coherence proposed by Labov, and then considering them in combination to detect a structural coherence in the over-arching narrative that is the entirety of the response. This understanding of the narrative is then situated against the author's existing knowledge of the socio-cultural context of the narrator, to discern forms of meaning-making that may be contextually relevant but otherwise easy to overlook (see Gubrium & Holstein 2009).

The second aim of the case study was to record the larger material conditions in the settlements surrounding the town in terms of land and capital. Moreover, caste/community based relations of labour that make the everyday production of the town possible were also investigated. These questions were approached through a household survey conducted in the three surrounding settlements. The survey included questions on land ownership, livelihood practices in agriculture, and the role of the town in generating non-agricultural employment including small-scale entrepreneurship. The survey was conducted amongst all the households in the three settlements outlined in green in Figure 1) above. It was administered to the head of the household or next present adult member, in all households of the three settlements. In total it was administered to 103 households of which 46 were Adivasi (Santhal) households in settlement 3, 28 were Dalit (Bhuiyan) households in settlement 2, and 29 were Tambuli (Rakshit and Kundu) households in settlement 1. Of these, three questionnaires from settlement 2 were left out of the analysis as the households later retracted consent. One questionnaire

from settlement 3 also had to be discarded due to errors in coding and incomplete responses. In total 99 questionnaires were used for analysis. The analysis was carried out using the programme SPSS.

These sites of the survey were twice removed from the dominant imagination of the “urban”. For one, they constituted the hinterlands of a small urban centre that had only recently been recognized as such. For another, the urban centre itself was a census town and therefore remained for all administrative purposes, “rural”. Yet as the following sections will demonstrate, they played an absolutely essential role in facilitating the urbanization processes.

A Note on Mixed Methods

The use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses, quite separate from the strengths and weaknesses of the individual methods used. The strength of the approach used here is its consistency in terms of the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions. The ontological assumption is that the urban exists not merely as a set of demographic characteristics but also as a shared historical experience that is socially constructed. The corresponding epistemological approach is to use narratives and collective memory as sites to locate the construction of the urban. Since such an exercise could not be replicated for all members of the communities in question, the quantitative methods are used as a tool to verify the extent to which the central findings from the narratives are generalizable within the given context. Thus the statistical data is used only for recording and describing rather than for carrying out any causative or prescriptive analysis.

Narrative Analysis: Competing Oral Histories of Jhantipahari Town

When I first arrived in Jhantipahari town and asked to be put in contact with long term residents who could narrate to me the history of the place, I was emphatically and inevitably directed to Krishna Babu⁷. Krishna Babu (full name Krishnapada Rakshit) is eighty-seven years old and runs a single room press-cum-photocopying centre next to the Jhantipahari bus stop, a few steps away from Jhantipahari High School. He is a retired headmaster of the school and most middle-aged men in the town refer to him as “mastar-moshai” a respectful term for ‘teacher’. He was born and raised in the town and continues to live there with his wife. He has three adult sons two of who live in Tokyo while the third lives in Bangalore. When I met Krishna Babu at his work-place for the first of three sessions of an extended oral history interview, he was forthcoming and enthusiastic and spoke to me for over

⁷ ‘Babu’ is a locally used term of respect or endearment for elderly men. The interview was carried out over 19-21 November, 2014.

two hours at a stretch. This section will present my inferences from his interviews as a way of setting the stage for the following sections.

Interview with Krishnapada Rakshit

Using the methods described above, I glean three separate thematically grounded narrative segments in each of which Krishna Babu narrates the story of ‘what is Jhantipahari town?’

The first of these segments has to do with the theme of public infrastructure. In this segment Krishna Babu narrates the making of Jhantipahari town in terms of the incremental building of public infrastructure. It begins with the establishment of the high schools in 1945 and goes on to include the introduction of telephone cables and electricity connections. These kinds of segments recur in the narrative several times, where he uses the access to a public service to mark a milestone in the historical development of the town. The second thematic deals with the growth of business and commerce. These segments are even more recurrent in the narrative and cover particular instances like the infamous Bengal famine of 1943, the ensuing trade with neighbouring Bihar, the establishment of rice and oil mills, and finally the period of distress affecting the millers since 2011. The third thematic is built around the coalescing of place and caste as identities. These segments are clustered in the parts of the narrative that deal with present-day characteristics of the town and the current socio-economic situation. I infer these segments to represent a telling of the history of the town as a history of the Rakshit community. One of the prominent features of these segments is the easy movement of the narrative from the collective to the personal. I present the quote below as an example:

“Rakshits are the biggest in number. Kundus are lesser in number than us, comparatively. If you look around you will mostly find Rakshits. I graduated from the matriculation exam in 1947. In 1951 I graduated from college. From Bankura Christian College. At that time there were no colleges here. Bankura was the only one.”

I read an extension of this theme into the segments that narrate the circumstances of the surrounding settlements. These segments were not self-directed but were narrated in response to questions about the agricultural practices in the region. The following was the question asked:

Can you describe the agricultural system to me? Who are the ones owning land, who are the ones cultivating...in the villages around here...

This was followed up by short queries for clarification, without diverting the flow of the narrative. One of the segments in the response is cited below as an example of the third thematic identified above.

“The Santhal population is high. As you exit the town, within a 2-3km radius there are lots of Santhal villages. They are dependent on Jhantipahari for their livelihoods...We are the ones who brought them. We took them out of our villages and brought them here and settled them here. We gave them places to build houses and live, for the convenience of our farming...And it was in our interest to do it. They are settled on our land. Now they are self-reliant. Now they are working in these various jobs.”

I argue here that in the Krishna Babu’s telling of the history of Jhantipahari town, it is a story of improving public infrastructure and growing business and commerce (as one might assume for a place denoted ‘urban’), but also one of consolidation of the socio-economic status of the Rakshits articulated through the structure of the local agrarian system of production. This is a striking example that lends support to Roy’s (2015) assertion that the current urban question is also the current agrarian question. This is illustrated further by a similar narrative analysis of an interview with a key respondent in the Adivasi settlement (no. 3 in figure). He was fifty-eight years old and wished to remain unnamed.

*Interview with Adivasi interviewee*⁸

The opening question for all oral history interviews was the same: ‘Can you tell me the history of this place to help me understand how this town came to be?’ Prior to the interviews, each of the interviewees were informed that Jhantipahari has been recognized as a CT in the census of 2011 and that the study was concerned with understanding the processes of urbanization. The first part of the question is kept deliberately unspecific in terms of defining ‘this place’ to allow for the interpretation of the interviewee in concern. The thematic segments identified in the response of the interviewee from the Adivasi settlement were starkly different from those identified in the response from Krishna Babu.

The interview took place inside settlement 3, on the courtyard outside the interviewee’s home, after I had accompanied him on his walk back home from his job as an assistant at the daily wholesale vegetable market in Jhantipahari town. The walk was a brisk ten minute stroll down meandering mud paths through fields, groves, and pond-sides. The over-arching narrative of this response was one of stagnancy. There were thematic segments within the over-arching narrative, mostly in response to queries for clarification that described specific changes as the following illustration will demonstrate. However the recurrent refrain was one

⁸ The interview was conducted on November 26, 2014.

of stagnation and the ‘abstract’ (in the Labovian sense) presented for the over-all response was a statement of a perpetual state of being.

“All the people here are poor, Didi⁹. We work in Jhantipahari and come back home to find some rice to feed our children and raise them. That is our life.”

I reproduce here, two of the thematic segments from this narrative that were the most pertinent for this analysis. The first has to do with the ownership of agricultural land and the second pertains to changes in the informal agricultural contracts between landlords and sharecroppers. With regard to land ownership, the interviewee said:

“There is no agricultural land for any of us. It all belongs to the Tambulis from Jhantipahari. One step out of our homes and the land is no longer ours. That is the story of every home here. These fields you see here, the ones surrounding us on all sides. They all belong to the Bengalis¹⁰. The Rakshits, the Kundus, the Dattas. But not us. This is how it has been from the beginning. There has been no change.”

In response to a clarifying query about the details of informal share-cropping contracts, the interviewee elaborated in the following structurally coherent (in Labovian terms) segment:

“The seven anna- nine anna system is now over. It has been over for say about five years or so. Now it is half and half. They give half and we give half. And the labour is ours. Then we divide the crop half and half. Earlier it used to be seven anna- nine anna.”

The ‘anna’ here refers to an old system of currency that remains in circulation as a popular measure of ratios. Sixteen annas made a whole unit of currency, which means that in the previous system of informal arrangements, the harvest was shared in the ratio of 7/16 to the share-cropper and 9/16 to the landowner. At present it is distributed in equal halves. The cost of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation are shared equally between the two.

Following Gubrium and Holstein’s (2009) assertion that narratives need to be situated in their context, this discussion would be incomplete without a mention of the redistributive land reforms attempted in West Bengal since the late 1970s. The term for ‘share-croppers’ in Bangla is ‘*bargadar*’; and yet when I asked looking

⁹ *Didi* is the Bangla term for ‘sister’, also used to address all suitably aged women in a respectful way.

¹⁰ Adivasis in the region use the term *Bengalis* to denote the “upper caste” Hindu society while using caste or tribe specific names to refer to themselves e.g. *Santhals* for themselves and *Bhuiyans* for the Dalits in this case.

for *bargadars* in Jhantipahari town or its surroundings I was unequivocally told that there were no *bargadars* there. Through informal discussions with Panchayat officials it emerged that '*bargadar*' had been rendered into the technical term for those share-croppers who registered their tenancy under the land reforms initiative of Operation Barga in 1977. The *barga* system essentially sought to secure the tenure of tenants and make the tenancy inheritable to protect peasant families from arbitrary eviction or loss of livelihood. However it also formalized the period within which the harvested crop had to be delivered to the landowners and imposed penalties on defaulters. This was interpreted by landowners as license to withdraw the informal terms of contract within which they shared the costs of production. Thus having their tenancy registered meant doubling their cost of production for the share-croppers. This was not only undesirable but also impossible to sustain for most of the share-croppers in this context.

I eventually shifted to the term '*bhaagidar*', literally translated as 'share-holder', which is the colloquially popular term for share-croppers. Using this term revealed that almost all Adivasi families had been engaging in agriculture as *bhaagidars* over the years and continues to do so. This was however not the case for Dalit households. I turn now to the third oral history interview, with a life-long resident of the Dalit settlement (no. 2 in figure).

Interview with Sasadhar Bhuiyan (and co-interviewees)

This interview was carried out over two sessions, in the courtyard of the family home of the interviewee¹¹. The story of Jhantipahari town as narrated by Sasadhar Bhuiyan had points of convergence with both the narratives presented above. He spoke of how the Bhuiyans came to the region following their Tambuli benefactors and built their homes on land donated by them. In the subsequent decades as the Tambulis diversified their businesses into the milling sectors and share-cropping became increasingly popular, the Bhuiyans fell out of favour with them. Unable to make the investments necessary to become share-croppers and unwilling to disrupt group unity by competing internally for the limited amount of available informal wage work in the mills and businesses, the Bhuiyan male work force largely got shunned out of employment opportunities in Jhantipahari town. Only the women continued to work as domestic labour in Tambuli households. The men turned instead to other places such as the Block headquarter Chhatna, fifteen kilometres away; and the district town Bankura at a distance of twenty-five kilometres. In the mean time they were also embroiled in a long-drawn out dispute with the Tambulis who now wanted their land back since they no longer employed the Bhuiyan men. The nearly thirty-household-strong settlement was not at an immediate threat of losing their homestead lands; but it was a notional threat that

¹¹ The interview was conducted on January 23 and 24, 2015.

loomed as a shadow in all their interactions with the Tambulis. In the words of Sasadhar Bhuiyan:

“It’s all well and good...that Jhantipahari is now a town...I mean there is everything that a town needs...school, station, market, shops...but if there is no land then what else can I say? It is possible that today we are here and tomorrow we are not. I am not saying that they are evicting us...but the roads are theirs, the station is theirs, Jhantipahari is theirs...”

This narrative not only aligns itself with Krishna Babu’s infrastructure and public amenities based construction of the town’s history but also confirms the sense of stasis in terms of power relations between communities which are integral to the making of the town. This represents the core dynamic in the urbanization of Jhantipahari- the consolidation of the material and social status of the dominant caste accompanied by the perpetuation of unequal power relations between caste and community groups.

Synthesis of Narrative Analysis

The history of Jhantipahari town as told by Krishna Babu, is a composite picture of interactions between the state, private individuals from the dominant group, and the subaltern groups. In this telling it was easy to navigate between the personal and the collective. The subaltern narratives of the history of Jhantipahari are overwhelmingly marked by a sense of continuity. That is to mean the domination by the dominant group over the subaltern groups. The personal here is not only subsumed within the collective but also rendered into a singular narrative of oppression. This is consistent with Beteille’s (1996) seminal contention that the institution of caste serves to subordinate the individual before the collective.

All three narrations of the history of Jhantipahari demonstrate an urban consciousness in terms of constructing the town and its surroundings as distinctly separate from each other, with the former having unqualifiedly urban features. I read the telling of a narrative of stagnation by the Adivasi and Dalit interviewees, within this consciousness of place, as a form of narrative resistance against the dominant telling of the town’s history by Krishna Babu (who is unequivocally put forth as the most ‘knowledgeable’ person to interview, even by the Adivasis). It is in this telling that the Adivasis and Dalits produce themselves as the subaltern subjects of the history of Jhantipahari town.

Survey Results

We turn now to the findings of the household survey. As mentioned before, the survey was conducted amongst all households in the three settlements marked in green in Figure 1. Each settlement was homogeneous in terms of the caste/community residing therein. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies and percentages of different community/caste groups in the data set, after eliminating invalid and retracted questionnaires.

Table 1.

| Caste/Community wise distribution of households | | |
|---|-----------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage |
| Tambuli | 29 | 29.3 |
| Adivasi | 45 | 45.5 |
| Dalit | 25 | 25.3 |

The next section provides a broad overview of the agrarian character of the economy and livelihoods in these settlements and the differentiated experience of agricultural production, based on caste/community. The different kinds of engagement in agricultural production have been identified and defined through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. They are explained in the definitions below. An important point to note is that the categories are defined on the basis of the role played by them in the organization of agricultural production. This is a deliberate shift from the customary method of classifying farmers solely on the basis of farm-size, to reflect the ways in which the communities and agricultural practitioners see themselves.

Wage labour: This refers to households that do not own land, do not practice share-cropping as either *bhaagidar* or *bargadar*, and earn a daily wage from agricultural work.

Hired labour-for consumption: This refers to households with substantial landholdings, that hire daily wage labourers to cultivate their land and the harvested produce is used predominantly for consumption within the landowning household.

Bhaagidar-for consumption: This refers to households with substantial landholdings, that lease land out to share-croppers and the share of produce received is used predominantly for consumption within the landowning household.

Bhaagidar-commercial: This refers to households that engage in share-cropping and use their share of the produce for commercial sale. It includes a small number of (Tambuli) households with landholdings that are leased out to share-croppers

and that use the received share of produce for commercial sale. Some share-croppers are also themselves small-holders. The defining characteristic of this category is the use of harvest obtained through share-cropping for commercial sale.

Commercial-hired labour: This refers to households with substantial landholdings who hire daily wage labourers to cultivate their land and the harvested produce is used predominantly for commercial sale.

Commercial-combined: This refers to households with substantial landholdings that employ hired daily wage labour (on part of the land) and lease out the rest to bhaagidars; and the produce is predominantly for commercial sale.

N/A in the tables refers to households where no agriculture is practised in any form. Table 2 describes the overall prevalence of these categories within the settlements. Table 3 demonstrates their distribution by community/caste group.

Table 2.

| Distribution of households by form of agriculture practised | | |
|---|-----------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage |
| Wage Labour | 9 | 9.1 |
| Hired labour-for consumption | 6 | 6.1 |
| Bhaagidar-for consumption | 6 | 6.1 |
| Bhaagidar-commercial | 35 | 35.4 |
| Commercial-hired labour | 8 | 8.1 |
| Commercial-combined | 12 | 12.1 |
| N/A | 23 | 23.2 |
| Total | 99 | 100 |

Table 3.

| Caste-wise Cross-tabulation of households practising forms of agriculture (in percent) | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| | Wage Labour | Hired labour-for consumption | Bhaagidar-for consumption | Bhaagidar-commercial | Commercial-hired labour | Commercial-combined |
| Tambuli | 0 | 23 | 27 | 14 | 32 | 5 |
| Adivasi | 0 | 2 | 0 | 71 | 2 | 25 |
| Dalit | 90 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 |

As the two tables reveal in combination, the nature of a household's engagement in agricultural production is discernible to a large extent by the community/caste group it belongs to. In Table 2 we see that more than 76 per cent of the surveyed households are engaged in agriculture in some form or the other, with share-cropping for commercial sale (Bhaagidar-commercial) as the most prevalent form of agricultural practice. The total count of Dalit households engaged in agriculture is only ten despite the total number of Dalit households surveyed being twenty five. Qualitative interviews revealed that the rest of the households were entirely dependent on informal wage labour in the non-farm sector. This will feature later in the section when we look at changes in sources of cash incomes.

Table 3 reveals that amongst the Dalit households engaged in agriculture, 90 per cent are in the role of wage labourers. Seventy per cent of Adivasi households are commercial share-croppers. The largest share of Tambuli households (32 per cent) is engaged in commercial agriculture through hired labour, with other significant practices being cultivation for household consumption through hired labour and cultivation for household consumption through tenant share-cropping. The internal distribution of the different forms of agricultural practice within each group is displayed in the bar chart in Figure 2. in the appendix.

The observations from Tables 2 and 3 lead to the impression of an agrarian system in the area, wherein Dalits are largely wage labourers, Adivasis are predominantly share-croppers, and Tambulis are hirers of labour and renters of land for share-cropping. This picture is made further clear by the representation of the different groups in landownership. Table 4 elucidates this.

Table 4.

| Landownership by Caste/Community (in percent) | | |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Caste/Community | Owns Land | No Land |
| Tambuli | 79 | 21 |
| Adivasi | 31 | 69 |
| Dalit | 12 | 78 |

Only twelve per cent of the surveyed Dalit households owned cultivable land as opposed to 79 per cent Tambuli households. Landownership is also limited amongst Adivasi households to a little more than thirty per cent. Tables 5A, 5B, and 5C show the primary sources of cash income by caste/community and the changes within that distribution over five year periods.

Table 5.

| A. Primary Source of Cash Income by Caste/Community in per cent (ten years ago) | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | Agricultural Profits | Informal Wages | Business | Formal Wages | Other |
| Tambuli | 17 | 3 | 35 | 38 | 7 |
| Adivasi | 2 | 96 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Dalit | 0 | 88 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| B. Primary Source of Cash Income by Caste/Community in per cent (five years ago) | | | | | |
| | Agricultural Profits | Informal Wages | Business | Formal Wages | Other |
| Tambuli | 17 | 3 | 35 | 38 | 7 |
| Adivasi | 2 | 96 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Dalit | 0 | 88 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| C. Primary Source of Cash Income by Caste/Community in per cent (at present) | | | | | |
| | Agricultural Profits | Informal Wages | Business | Formal Wages | Other |
| Tambuli | 28 | 7 | 24 | 38 | 3 |
| Adivasi | 9 | 89 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Dalit | 0 | 88 | 8 | 4 | 0 |

These figures further strengthen the argument that the nature of ones engagement in agricultural production and the role played within the local economy is closely reflective of the relative caste/community position. For the Tambuli community formal sector employment, business revenues and agricultural profits have been the main sources of cash income over the past decade. For the Dalits informal wage labour has persistently remained the main source of cash income. For the Adivasis too informal wage labour has been the primary source of cash income, but its prevalence has decreased marginally in the past five years with profits from agriculture taking over the position of the primary source for three out of forty

three households. The location of this informal wage labour is largely within the town. It is usually at sites such as the rice and oil mills (owned and managed by Tambulis), the vegetable market, various businesses (owned and managed by Tambulis) and the domestic households of Tambuli families. This makes quite clear the quote from Krishna Babu claiming that although the subaltern groups are now employed in various kinds of jobs outside of agricultural wage labour, they remain dependent on the dominant group.

The figures further substantiate the narrative of stagnation that emerged from the interview with the Adivasi participant. The source of primary cash income for all but three Adivasi households and all Dalit households has remained the same for the past decade. This is also counter-intuitive to the image of rapid structural transformation derived from the macro-level analysis of census data. The most prominent change in this regard is seen amongst the Tambulis for whom the share of agricultural profits as the primary source of cash income has increased by about ten percentage points. This has taken place with agricultural profits taking over the primary position from business revenues in the case of three households. This is again counter-intuitive to the logic of agrarian structural transformation led urbanization.

The last set of observations from the survey data that will be presented in this section pertains to the frequency of visits to the town and the main reasons behind them. Table 6A cross-tabulates the frequency of trips made to Jhantipahari town with caste/community to reveal that of the three groups Adivasis are the most frequent visitors to Jhantipahari followed by the Dalits. Close to 98 per cent of Adivasi households reported having a member travel to Jhantipahari town on a regular basis.

Table 6.

| A. How often does a member of your household travel to Jhantipahari? (in percent) | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Daily | Several times a week | Several times a month |
| Tambuli | 17 | 3 | 35 |
| Adivasi | 2 | 96 | 2 |
| Dalit | 0 | 88 | 8 |
| B. Reasons for visiting Jhantipahari (in percent) | | | |
| | Employment in Informal Wage Work | Shopping for Essentials | |
| Tambuli | 7 | 59 | |
| Adivasi | 89 | 100 | |
| Dalit | 84 | 84 | |

A number of responses were recorded for the reasons of visiting Jhantipahari town. Of these, employment in informal wage labour was recorded to be the most widely reported reason, followed by shopping for daily needs. Table 6B presents

the percentages of these respective responses cross-tabulated with caste/community. The tables reveal the important role of the Adivasi and Dalit households in not only providing informal wage labour to enterprises and households within the town but also as consumers of goods sold at enterprises therein.

Based on the interviews presented in the previous section and the survey data presented in this section, a number of points of discussion emerge. These are taken up in the concluding section and discussed in relation to the conceptual framework established at the beginning.

Conclusion

One of the assertions that emerge quite starkly from the narratives and the survey data is the image of a deeply unequal context where caste/community is an important factor along which social influence and economic opportunities are divided. The survey data exhibits the skewed nature of landholding while the interviews elaborate on the intricacies of the agrarian system of production that is structurally derived from the system of caste hierarchy and oppression. The non-agricultural economic production within the town continues to follow along the same lines. The caste relations which are also labour relations have been modified to fit the emerging forms of economic organization but not transformed in terms of the flows of power and authority. In other words, the urban here is a spatial articulation of the specific historical experiences of the people inhabiting the context. This assertion is borne out by the narration of Jhantipahari town as the ‘history of the Rakshits’ by Krishna Babu as well as the survey data pointing to the stability of structure shown by the caste/community wise distribution of agrarian roles and sources of cash incomes.

This supports the rejection of “urban as the city” approach and strengthens Brenner and Schmid’s (2014) position against settlement fetishism. In this particular context the importance of the thesis lies in the fact that a segment of the town has been officially recognized as the CT. The extraction of a particular territorial tract as ‘urban’ while ignoring the context it is embedded in and the relations that have produced its current form, amounts to an erasure of the specific historical experience of the subaltern groups. As the interviews have revealed there are clearly two kinds of tellings of this history- an elite one and a subaltern one. The classificatory project that is animated by the logic of settlement fetishism serves to silence the subaltern telling. In counting only the Tambuli dominated built-up area of the town as the urban and ignoring its entrenched links and dependence on the surrounding Adivasi and Dalit settlements for labour, the official (and mainstream) accounts of the urban thereby obfuscate the nature of the historical making of this urban. It is in this sense that the case here relates to Roy’s (2015) notion of the rural/agrarian as the constitutive other of the urban. It is also

in this sense that the urban emerges here as a historical category that has been named as such at particular points of time by forces that are in charge of writing history- in this case the dominant narrators and the state through its census operations. This historical naming remains fairly irrelevant to the experience of the subaltern groups who narrate the town in terms of stagnation and oppression.

This also relates to Roy's (2015) argument that today the urban question is also the agrarian question. As she eloquently argues, the question of "who gets what land in what way" is the key to how the urban is produced. As we have seen in this context, ownership and productive control over land and related resources has been maintained historically through the status quo of power in caste relations. As survey data about reasons for visits to the town shows, the lives and livelihoods of the subaltern groups encompass both settlement categories of rural and urban even if they don't personally physically commute between the two (although many do in fact commute on a regular basis). I argue here that the contemporary urban in form and content therefore is the imprint of the rural. The rural as an idea is inextricably implicated in the making of the urban. The two are not territorially discrete or spatially segregated, but are produced as strictly separate notional categories in the dominant historiography. This in turn helps to maintain the historical silences, omissions, and erasures around forms of oppression not the least of which is based on caste. The categorization approach towards settlements and socio-economic processes therefore risks being reduced to yet another means of maintaining these.

References:

- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C. (2014) "The 'Urban Age' in Question", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38-3, 731-755
- Béteille, A. (1996) "Varna and jati", *Sociological Bulletin*, 45(1), 15-27.
- Denis, E, Mukhopadhyay, P & Zerah, M (2012) "Subaltern Urbanization in India", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 30, 52-62.
- Gee, J. P. (1991). "Memory and myth: A perspective on narrative". *Developing Narrative Structure*, 1-25.
- Gubrium, J and Holstein, J. (2009) *Analyzing Narrative Reality*, Sage.
- Guin, D. and Das, D.N. (2015) "New Census Towns in West Bengal: 'Census Activism' or sectoral diversification?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, L(14), 68-72
- Guin, D. (2014) "Emergence of New Towns and Their Nature: A Multidimensional Study of the New CTs of West Bengal, 2011," MPhil Dissertation, Centre for Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
- Kundu, A. (2011) "Method in Madness: Urban Data from 2011 Census," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 46, No 40, 13–16.
- Labov, W. and Waletzky, J. (1967) "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience", in J. Helms (ed.) *Essays in the Verbal and Visual Arts*, University of Washington.
- Lama-Rewal, S. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Electoral reservations, political representation, and social change in India: a comparative perspective*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- Srinivas, M. N. (1994). *The dominant caste and other essays*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Merrifield, Andrew (2014). *The new urban question*. New York, NY: Pluto Press.
- Patterson, W. (2008) Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations in Andrews, M, Squire C, & Tamboukou, M (ed.) *Doing Narrative Research*, Sage.
- Patterson, W. (2013). "Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations". *Doing narrative research*, 127.
- Pradhan, K. C. (2013) "Unacknowledged Urbanisation: New Census Towns of India," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 48, No 36, 43–51.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis* (Vol. 30). Sage.
- Roy, A. (2015). What is urban about critical urban theory?. *Urban Geography*, 1-14.
- Roy, A. (2016). Who's Afraid of Postcolonial Theory?. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.
- Samanta, G. (2014). The politics of classification and the complexity of Governance in Census Towns. *Economic and Political Weekly May 31, xlix,56, 55-62*.
- Thorat, S. (2009). *Dalits in India: search for a common destiny*. SAGE Publications India.
- Thorat, A. (2010). Ethnicity, caste and religion: Implications for poverty outcomes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47-53.

Yadav, V. (2014) “Agricultural Labour in India (1991–2011): A District-Level Analysis,” MPhil Dissertation, Centre for Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Appendix

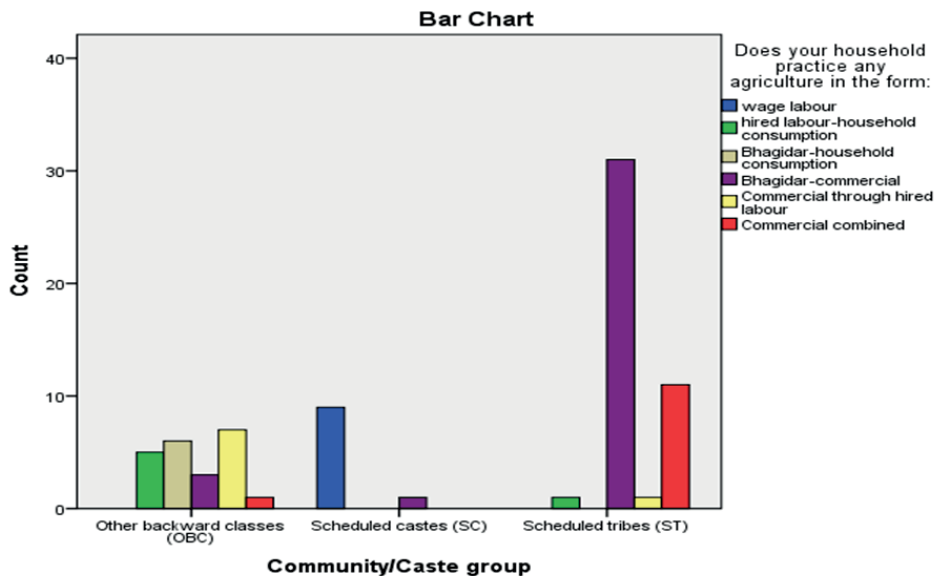
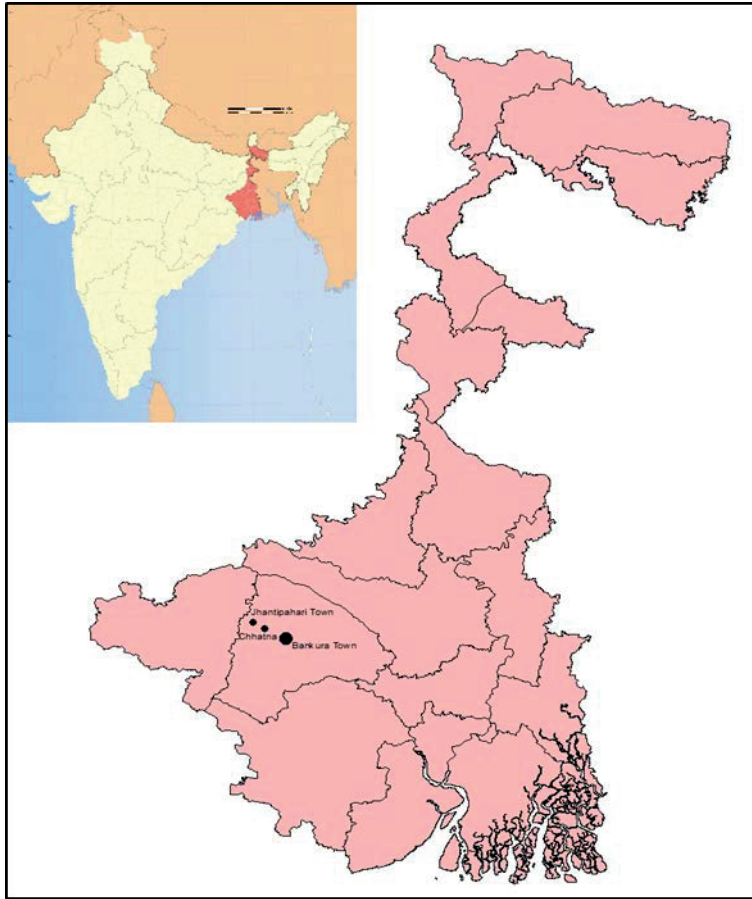


Figure II. Agricultural practice by community/caste group



Map I. Location of Jhantipahari town, block capital Chhatna, and district capital Bankura town in West Bengal, India

Article V

Reflections for Feminist Geography from a census town in India

Abstract: This article presents the case study of a woman-entrepreneur from the census town of Jhantipahari in West Bengal, India to draw lessons for a global feminist geography. I conceptualize globalization as an epistemic possibility to produce theory from localized experiences. I identify three core narrative contradictions that frame the gendered experience of the small town for this middle-aged woman-entrepreneur from a Savarna-Hindu family. I then place these contradictions against the prevailing discursive and policy climate on gender in India, to argue that small towns and similar marginal spaces need to be treated as legitimate locales (at par with metro cities) for launching the feminist political project.

Introduction

In urban studies, globalization manifests itself through the discourse of the ‘global city’. India and Indian cities have been linked to this discourse, largely through the trope of ‘megacities’ and more recently through resistance to this hegemonic discourse through accounts of subaltern urbanization (Roy 2009, Denis, Mukhopadhyay & Zerah 2012). At the core of this resistance lies the question of what is to be the subject of urban theorizing. Feminist concerns within urban studies in the context of India have largely remained confined to the fetishized (following Brenner and Schmid 2014) ‘city’ spaces, with not much focus on geographies outside of the grit and glamour of big urban centers. In this article I seek to raise the question of what lessons are there for feminist geographers in the age of global cities, to glean out of the gendered lived experiences of small-town India. How are we to understand small-towns as gendered spaces from a feminist geography perspective? What should be the feminist concerns specific to the geographies of small towns in India?

I present here, the case study of a woman-entrepreneur in Jhantipahari- a newly designated census town of Bankura, West Bengal. Census Towns (CTs) are settlement units that have been declared to be “urban” in the census based on the following criteria: 5000 or more population, density of at least 400/square kilometre, and at least 75 per cent of the male workforce employed in non-agricultural activities. CTs remain under institutions of rural governance (Gram Panchayats) until they are allocated Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) by the state legislature. This process is largely dependent on the discretion of the state governments. Samanta (2014) found the average period for a Census Town to become a Statutory Town (ST) in West Bengal was seven to ten years.

Through ethnographic participant observation and narrative analysis of a business history interview conducted with this woman-entrepreneur, I elaborate on three core contradictions that characterize her experience of running a garments business in the small town. Building on these three contradictions, I argue that it is important for feminist geographers to respond to the specific manifestations of patriarchal power in small-towns if we are to imagine them as gender-just spaces. These concerns, I further argue, are substantively different from the feminist concerns relating to rural and agrarian life or metropolitan urban life.

The urban has figured prominently in the interests of feminist geographers (Bondi & Rose 2003, Dowell 1993). But like the majority of scholarship on urban geography, feminist geography too has fixed its gaze upon large and glamorous urban centers- global cities in the North and megacities in the South. This has rendered invisible the places “off the map” (Robinson 2002, 2006) that do not feature in this imagination of the urban world as an interconnected web of ‘global cities’ or those aspiring to attain ‘global’ status. Postcolonial scholars within urban

studies have been attempting to throw light on the relevance of “ordinary cities” (ibid) and the need to study urbanization processes and outcomes unfolding away from the glare of globalization. In light of this, I submit that for the purpose of this paper, globalization be imagined not only as a set of socio-economic processes that are connecting disparate parts of the world map, but also as a new era within knowledge production wherein all ‘locals’ are regarded as equally authoritative spots on the map for contributing to a global understanding of the human condition.

It is with this formulation in mind that I seek to speak to a global feminist geography from a deeply localized standpoint- that of a small town in West Bengal, India. Scholarship on small-towns is partly subsumed within discussions of rural development and rural-urban linkage (Rondinelli 1983, Tacoli 2006). In recent times, there have been calls to understand small-towns as important in their own right- both for the populations living within them and for the role they play in shaping the surrounding socio-economic landscape (Bell & Jayne 2009). Extending this analytical disposition to feminist geography would entail engaging in rigorous, detailed, and grounded field work in small-towns, much in the same way that it has been done for metro settings. This paper is a contribution in that endeavor.

In the following section I introduce the scholastic and geographical setting of my enquiry. It also contains a description of methodological encounters that lay the foundation for the analysis. The third section discusses the analytical outcomes. The fourth section draws conclusions and sets the agenda for future research in the field.

Entering Jhantipahari town: Women and family in the ‘urban’

Jhantipahari is one of the seven new census towns identified in the district of Bankura in the census of 2011. Bankura is one of the least urbanized districts of West Bengal (8.3 per cent) although the state itself has the largest share of new census towns from 2011. The 532 new census towns of West Bengal are estimated to have contributed up to two-thirds of its decadal urban growth (Pradhan 2012). Along with its neighbouring districts of West Medinipur and Puruliya, Bankura is a constituent of ‘Jangalmahal’- a region in south-western Bengal once synonymous with ‘Maoist’ armed struggle and now depicted as largely peaceful thanks to military intervention. What brought me to Jhantipahari to begin with was a quest to understand how these census towns had come to be and what processes marked their transition from rural to urban. Jhantipahari lent itself quite easily as a site of exploration, thanks to its convenient location on the Bankura-Medinipur rail route. According to the 2011 census data Jhantipahari census town consists of approximately 1200 households. However the actual built-up area of the town spreads beyond the denominated census tract. Popular estimates from community

leaders such as Panchayat ward members placed the total number of households at more than 2000. Given the average household size in India (4.8), this would lead to an estimated population of approximately 10,000.

Within the terrain of urban studies, places like Jhantipahari occupy the amorphous fringes that come into relief only in the context of statistical constructions of 'urban growth', 'rate of urbanization', and 'the urban pyramid'. Ironically, but typically, my entry into Jhantipahari town took place through the Gram Panchayat office of Arrah Panchayat which is physically situated at a distance of four kilometers from the town. As I discovered through key-informant interviews at the dimly-lit two-room office, the built-up area of Jhantipahari town is administratively divided between three Gram Panchayats of which Arrah has the largest share. I further discovered that there were no opportunities for me to live within the town for any substantial period of time. There were no hotels or guest houses and informal agreements with private home-owners were difficult to negotiate as a young, unaccompanied woman. This was the first indication of the palpable smallness of Jhantipahari for me. I decided instead to live in a guest house at Bankura town which is the district head-quarter and a twenty minute train ride away. From there I made daily forays into Jhantipahari for three weeks, eventually moving on to surrounding hamlets as well.

My days usually started with a walk down the arterial road of the town from the station to the bus stop. It gave me an up, close participant experience of public life in the town. The mornings were especially vital for the town, thanks to the daily wholesale market for fresh produce that saw buyers, sellers, brokers and transporters from settlements in a ten kilometer radius congregate at the patch of open land just beside the platform. The streets of the town would throng with small transport vehicles and individuals on bicycles and motorbikes. The entire length of the arterial road was dotted with businesses such as grocery stores, medical stores, eateries, stationery stores, garment stores and tuition centers. By-lanes branched out from the road in both directions and led into residential neighborhoods. There were five main neighborhoods, I was told- each homogeneous in caste composition. The Tambulis (listed as OBC in West Bengal) were the dominant group, with two sub-groups- the Kundus and the Rakshits. The rest of the town consisted of two groups of 'upper caste' Marwaris- Agarwals and Khandelwals, and a few other OBC communities of various surnames. Dalits and Adivasis did not live within the town itself, but dotted the outskirts.

During my morning strolls down the busy road, I seldom saw any women. The home-based eatery where I usually ate lunch was run by a young married couple, but the woman mostly stayed in the kitchen, coming out only to convey shopping instructions to her husband or to take a quick peek onto the street. After the first week and more than ten oral history interviews with various male residents of the

town, I asked my key-informant Mr. Dutta to put me in touch with some women. He responded with a few moments of bewildered silence and then exclaimed: “but I thought you wanted to know the history of the town”. When I assured him that that was indeed the purpose of my visit, he further exclaimed: “women would not be able to answer your questions!”

It seems relevant to mention here that Mr. Dutta himself was the husband of a ward member- an elected representative to the Gram Panchayat- who had been elected on a seat reserved for female candidates. In the course of my three weeks of daily visits to Jhantipahari I never once managed to meet his wife for more than a customary greeting. I requested to schedule an interview with her a few times, but Mr. Dutta assumed it to be a token gesture to account for having interviewed an elected representative and insisted that it was not necessary since he had already told me “everything that’s worth knowing”. After a point I felt insisting any further would imply a lack of trust on my part in the legitimacy and authority of Mr. Dutta. So I stopped asking and shifted my attention to try and meet other women. It was difficult to justify this want to other interviewees too. ‘Women’ as an abstract category in this case could in no way be reconciled with ‘valid interviewee’ (and by extension ‘valid caretakers of history/knowledge’) in the minds of my male participants. Women within Savarna-Hindu families are noted to experience mobility of status based on age and life-cycle events (Lamb 2000 in Standal 2016, this issue). This implies that their roles and responsibilities, as also their position in terms of the powers they can exercise, change with their progression in identity from daughter to wife, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. However, despite this mobility in position, the roles and influences of women remain restricted to the domestic sphere. This is especially true of ‘upper caste’ families that are invested in maintaining their position of social superiority through the perpetuation of honor that is notionally associated with women’s behavior and visibility in the public (Sircar 2010). Given this construct, the category ‘women’ in general terms evoked the image of docile domesticity in the minds of the male participants and key informants- an image starkly at odds with the idea of a subject who was capable of narrating an autonomous history of their own.

That’s why I decided to try and define ‘women’ more specifically, in ways that contribute to their legitimacy as worthy interviewees. I started asking for women who were involved in running a non-farm enterprise. This search too proved to be elusive for a while. I met a group of about fifteen women from the adjacent Adivasi hamlet, who were daily wage workers in the oil mills of Jhantipahari. They came into the town every day for eight to ten hour work shifts. While I managed to have some informal conversations with them, they too were wary of becoming subjects of formal interviews for a recorder, pen, and notebook wielding researcher. On the twelfth day of my stint, I came to know of a Mrs. Agarwal who had started and was successfully running a garments store in the ground floor

room of her family residence. Although I later learnt her first name, I will continue to call her Mrs Agarwal in this paper to keep her identity anonymous. The following day I traced my way to her shop around two in the afternoon, a time for post-lunch siesta in the town and one likely to be relatively free on a business day. My interview with Mrs. Agarwal lasted about forty minutes and revolved primarily around the process of starting the business. It was what I then framed as, a ‘business history’ interview. In hindsight, and after having transcribed and analyzed the interview, it is evident to me that it was as much about the experience of being a woman in a Savarna-Hindu family in a small town.

The transcript was subjected to narrative analysis. I started out by identifying coherent narrative segments following the Labovian (1972) tradition of structural analysis of transcripts. Then I designated a theme to each of these segments and sorted through the rest of the transcript to see if these themes are repeated elsewhere, in the form of structurally incomplete narrative fragments or stray statements and comments. On organizing all the material in thematic categories, it became apparent that five thematic elements had been recognized and there were several relational aspects to them. Two sets of thematic pairings were imminently wrought with mutual oppositional tendencies. I call these the first two contradictions of the narrative. The fifth theme did not have an explicit ‘other’ within the narrative in the same way. But coupled with my field notes from participant observation, it gave rise to a third contradiction. I elaborate on this analysis in the upcoming section.

“In the end all one wants is peace of mind”: the conflicted making of a small-town woman entrepreneur

The interview started on an awkward note. I had spent a good thirty minutes explaining my project to Mrs Agarwal, emphasizing the importance of speaking to women who had contributed to the urbanization process of the town and could comment on it. I thought she had been convinced and switched my recorder on, when she abruptly said:

‘Actually the thing is...if I don’t speak to my husband first, it might be troublesome for me to give an interview. Since I am a daughter-in-law (bou) in this place, I might say something wrong and they might take offence...’

The statement to me was both a blow to my assumption that I had successfully convinced her to participate in the interview, and an indication that I had successfully won her trust for her to be honest with me. Contrasting yet contemporaneous impressions of this kind were to become the marker of the entire interview, but at that moment I switched the recorder off and spoke to her for ten more minutes to assuage her fears.

The very first theme that I identified in the narrative had to do with the notion of the ‘good family’. This is a term that Mrs Agarwal employed frequently to describe her own and her children’s familial affiliations. She used it in reference to both her natal and marital families. The association she makes between ‘good’ and the class-caste position of the families in question is evident throughout, but particularly in the section where she articulates the well-entrenched urban-bourgeois position on caste based affirmative action. Speaking of what kind of support she would desire from the state government, she points to the perceived unfairness of the lack of institutionalized support for ‘upper caste’ students.

‘She (Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) is doing a lot but nothing for those like us from good families. The children from good families...this surname Agarwal...she doesn’t spend anything on them. Simply having the surname is not enough. Is it their fault they were born with this surname?...’

The theme that I read as being in contradiction to this construct of the ‘good family’ is what I have named ‘patriarchal family’. This is not a term that Mrs Agarwal uses at all, but she recurrently refers to ‘gharwaale’ or family in the context of describing the hurdles she had to face in starting her business. She refers to both natal and marital families as being discriminatory towards their women, but her ire is directed more strongly towards her husband and in-laws. The most damning quote comes towards the end of the interview when I asked her how she would summarize the condition of women in the town.

‘It is not a good condition because every man here is of the opinion that the wife stays under your feet and so women should remain under their feet. So even if a woman wants to rise in life, she receives no support. There is no help from the man and especially no help from the family.’

This paradox of the ‘good’ family as also one that is deeply patriarchal and oppressive to its women is a well-known occurrence in most of Indian society. However Mrs. Agarwal’s unabashed exposing of the entrenched oppression of the family while also maintaining its intrinsic ‘goodness’, derived largely from its class-caste position is the first contradiction that frames her experience as an entrepreneur in Jhantipahari.

The third theme I identified in the narrative has been named ‘social capital’. This is again not a term borrowed from Mrs. Agarwal, but broadly describes the idea of being able to use one’s position in society and the social networks one commands, as a leverage in moving ahead in life. Coming from an extended family of textile and garments traders on both natal and marital sides, the choice of enterprise for Mrs. Agarwal was almost pre-determined. Her insider position within this trade gave her knowledge about the networks of suppliers and wholesalers, the trends and tendencies, and the seasonality of pricings. In many ways it is this social

capital that enabled her venture into entrepreneurship. Yet, as she tried to navigate these very networks, she was met with hostility and outright sexism. This is what forms the fourth theme that I have called ‘hostile networks’. Mrs. Agarwal dwelt on this theme both emphatically and evocatively. The following quote is one of many illustrative examples:

‘...today, there are several problems. Where I go to buy my stocks, they just see me and from the very beginning think “that is a woman” and immediately say that there is nothing to sell. The Mahajan (wholesaler) would just see me and say there are no goods to sell.’

This paradox of access to social capital that is both enabling and hostile is the second contradiction that frames her experience.

The fifth theme that I saw emerging from the narrative is what I have labelled as ‘place making’. This encompasses all the attitudes and affective statements expressed in relation to the town as a place, building on the narrative segment presented here:

‘When I came, this place was a total village (dehaat). There was nothing here. It was not even a place where you could see people out on the streets after 7 pm. The moment the sun set, people would lock themselves up indoors. In the beginning ... I am habituated to the town life ... so in the beginning I did not like this place at all. Having to stay at home and everything revolving around the home...’

This place-making evidently takes place in comparative and relational terms. The perceptions around Jhantipahari town are shaped by references to Barakar, Kolkata, Asansol, Bankura and various other places. It is the dimension of space that allows all these different experiences to co-exist in time and for Mrs. Agarwal to navigate them, leading to the formation of ideas and opinions about particular places. Figure 1 below maps the different locations where her business related activities have taken her. As the figure reveals, the spatial extension of her mobility and experience is vast and varied. This is a figure of stark contrast to the mobility and experiences of the Adivasi women I met in the oil mills of the town. For the Adivasi women, the spatial extent of everyday mobility is restricted to the immediate surroundings of their hamlet and the adjacent town. However their experiences of navigating this limited spatial extent is substantively denser than Mrs. Agarwal’s extensive travels. Their navigations are daily and multifaceted. They interact independently (of familial interventions) with mill managers and co-workers. They bargain prices with shopkeepers and wages with ‘upper caste’ employers of domestic labor. They ride their bicycles back home through the congested streets of the town and walk the fields alone to gather firewood. For Mrs. Agarwal, the extensive travels are spread out in time and circumscribed by

the above mentioned conflicted frameworks of family and social network. The following quote is illustrative:

‘I can’t speak for all women but there are definitely restrictions on me. Anywhere I go, I must go with my husband’s permission. I have to inform him before-hand. I can’t just go. The days when I just go because I need to are the days when there are tensions between us. There are times when I get calls from my suppliers about stocks selling out quickly...items that are in high demand. It would mean that I should go immediately and pick up the goods. But I can’t without my husband’s permission.’

Thus both the spatiality and the quality of these two kinds of gendered mobilities experienced within the town are at contrast. I define this paradox of spatiality and density of mobilities as the third contradiction that frames the gendered experience of the town.

About forty minutes after I had started recording our conversation, Mrs. Agarwal hastily wrapped up and requested me to leave before her husband woke up from his afternoon siesta and came down to the shop. Not wanting to add to her already conflicted frame of mind, I did as she wished. Reading the concluding lines of the interview transcript, I was reminded of an analytical divide within feminist geography that Bondi and Rose (2003) have drawn attention to. In the concluding section I relate my empirical analysis to this and other aspects of feminist scholarship in geography.

Reflections for the feminist political project

Bondi and Rose have drawn attention to “a bifurcation between redistribution and recognition in the agendas of feminist urban geography” (2003: 238). By this they refer to the competing claims made on academic space and attention by those feminist scholars who seek to address agendas around the politics of redistribution and those who seek to emphasize the recognition of difference in lived experience based on gender and other dimensions. The sentiment is echoed by Sharp (2005: 304) when she notes that a focus on ‘gender’ furthers the cause of inclusive research in itself but “perhaps thus overlooks what is going on in terms of a feminist *political* project within the discipline”. To me, the most important lesson from this case study is the evident need to return to a redistribution-based politically informed approach towards studying and ‘doing’ gender in geography. Allow me to elaborate with reference to the policy disposition towards questions of gender in the wake of globalization in India.

Two of the most defining features of gender-related policy-making in post-liberalization India have been i) the emphasis on women’s political participation at the grassroots level and ii) the emphasis on making micro-credit available to women. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution (1992) mandated that at

least one-third of all elected seats in rural and urban local bodies be reserved for women. At the same time, since the 1990s, self-help groups (SHGs) and similar micro-credit organizations have become the predominant institutions of collective organization for rural women (NABARD 2000, Planning Commission 2008). The underlying rhetoric for these policies has revolved around ‘women’s empowerment’ but also around ‘grassroots democracy’, ‘efficient service delivery’, and ‘poverty alleviation’. Indeed, a closer reading of policy documents and reports would reveal that in many cases women are seen as ‘instruments’ in the hands of the state who can deliver better results when made the targets of health, education, and poverty related interventions (see for e.g. Batliwala & Dhanraj 2004). Much of this is derived from and legitimized by the discourse of essential gendered differences, that seeks to portray women as more sensitive, more responsible, more kind ‘mother’ figures. Examples of this abound from the *Janani Suraksha Yojana* to the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana*. However, what is obscured in this overarching policy climate is the issue of entrenched patriarchal power relations, especially within families, local communities, caste-based associations, and the state-civil society interface.

As the analysis above reveals, all of the three contradictions that frame the experience of being a woman-entrepreneur in a small town stem from the flows of patriarchal power at different scales and locales. The contradictions exist as powerful affective forces despite the fact that Mrs. Agarwal succeeded in securing a loan of 0.5 million INR from the local rural banking services, had access to rent-free space within her family residence, and lives in a town that is well-connected to district and regional centers by public and private transport services. While all of these material factors are important in shaping her lived experience, what stood out clearly as relevant in her narrative is the intangible, abstract, yet morally diminishing experience of discrimination and oppression based on gender. I argue that this is the notional space where feminist scholarship needs to enter and rally for change. This has been done to varying degrees with regard to big urban centers such as metro cities. Feminist urban geography has for long documented the gendered experiences of urban public space in cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore and this has led to sustained campaigns against street sexual harassment, for women’s right to safe public transport, and against morality policing. With regard to small towns and emerging urban centers, this is an opportune moment for feminist scholars to return to the original political agenda of dismantling patriarchy. Feminist scholarship therefore needs to delve into and deconstruct the dynamics of gendered power relations playing out in these places on the fringes of geography.

References:

- Batliwala, S. & Dhanraj, D. (2004) "Gender Myths that Instrumentalize Women: A View from the Indian Frontline", *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 35.4, IDS.
- Bell, D. & Jayne, M. (2009) "Small Cities? Towards a Research Agenda", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 33.3, 683-99
- Bondi, L. & Rose, D. (2003) "Constructing gender, constructing the urban: A review of Anglo-American feminist urban geography", *Gender, Place & Culture* 10:3, 229-245
- McDowell, L. (1993) "Space, place and gender relations: Part I Feminist empiricism and the geography of social relations", *Progress in Human Geography* 17:2. 157-179
- NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) (2000). "Task force on Supportive Policy and Regulatory Framework for Microfinance in India, Summary and Recommendations".
- Planning Commission (2008), *A Report on the Success and Failure of SHGs in India: Impediments and Paradigm of Success*, Government of India.
- Pradhan, K. (2012) "Unacknowledged Urbanization: The New Census Towns of India". Working Paper, Centre for Policy Research, 2012
- Robinson, J. (2002) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Routledge, London
- Robinson, J. (2006) "Global and World Cities: A View From Off The Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 26.3, 531-54
- Rondinelli, D. (1983) "Towns and small cities in developing countries", *The Geographical Review*, 73, 379-95
- Roy, A. (2009) "Why India Cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization", *Planning Theory*, 8:76.
- Samanta, G. (2014) "The Politics of Classification and the Complexity of Governance in Census Towns", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, No. 22, 55-62
- Sharp, J. (2005) "Geography and gender: feminist methodologies in collaboration and in the field", *Progress in Human Geography* 29,3. 304-309
- Sircar, S. (2010) *Exploring the Impact of Women's Political Participation on Gender Relations in Public and Private Realms*, Masters dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.
- Tacoli, C ed. (2006) *The earthscan reader in rural-urban linkages*, Routledge.

Author information: Srilata Sircar is a PhD candidate in Human Geography at Lund University, Sweden. She can be reached at srilata.sircar@keg.lu.se

MEDDELANDEN FRÅN LUNDS UNIVERSITETS
GEOGRAFISKA INSTITUTION.
AVHANDLINGAR

- I. *Herman Richter*: Skånes karta från mitten av 1500-talet till omkring 1700 : bidrag till en historisk-kartografisk undersökning. (1929)
- II. *Josef Westin*: Kulturgeografiska studier inom Nätra-, Näske- och Utbyåarnas flodområden samt angränsande kusttrakter. (1930)
- III. *Herman Richter* och *Wilhelm Norlind*: *Orbis Arctoi Nova et Accurata Delineatio* Auctore Andrea Bureo Sueco 1626. (1936)
- IV. *Sven Björnsson*: Sommen-Åsundenområdet : en geomorfologisk studie. (1937)
- V. *Arne Sandell*: Tektonik och morfologi inom dalformationen med omgivande urbergsterräng. (1941)
- VI. *Sven Dahl*: Torna och Bara : studier i Skånes bebyggelse- och näringsgeografi före 1860. (1942)
- VII. *Karl Erik Bergsten*: Isälvsfält kring norra Vättern : fysisk-geografiska studier. (1943)
- VIII. *Carl Erik Nordenskjöld*: Morfologiska studier inom övergångsområdet mellan Kalmarslätten och Tjust. (1944)
- IX. *Sven Björnsson*: Blekinge : en studie av det blekingska kulturlandskapet. (1946)
- X. *Karl Erik Bergsten*: Östergötlands bergslag : en geografisk studie. (1946)
- XI. *Tor Holmquist*: Den halländska vinterfiskehamnsfrågan. (1947)
- XII. *Olof Ångeby*: Landformerna i nordvästra Jämtland och angränsande delar av Nord-Tröndelag. (1947)
- XIII. *Axel Wennberg*: Lantbebyggelsen i nordöstra Östergötland 1600-1875. (1947)
- XIV. *Lars Bjerning*: Skånes jord- och stenindustri : dess utveckling, lokalisering och betydelse ur näringsgeografisk synvinkel. (1947)
- XV. *Allan Weinhausen*: Norbergs bergslag samt Gunnilbo och Ramnäs till omkring 1820 : studier i områdets närings- och bebyggelsegeografi. (1947)
- XVI. *Helge Stålberg*: Smålands skogs- och träförädlingsindustrier : en näringsgeografisk studie. (1947)
- XVII. *Folke Lågnert*: Veteodlingen i södra och mellersta Sverige. (1949)
- XVIII. *Yngve Nilsson*: Bygd och näringsliv i norra Värmland : en kulturgeografisk studie. (1950)
- XIX. *Olof Ångeby*: Evorsionen i recenta vattenfall. (1951)
- XX. *Karl Erik Bergsten*: Sydsvenska födelseortsfält. (1951)
- XXI. *Folke Lågnert*: Valmanskåren på skånes landsbygd 1911-1948. (1952)
- XXII. *Olof Nordström*: Relationer mellan bruk och omland i östra Småland 1750-1900. (1952)
- XXIII. *Arvid Bergdahl*: Israndsbildningar i östra Syd- och Mellansverige med särskild hänsyn till åsarna. (1953)
- XXIV. *Sven E Behrens*: Morfometriska, morfogenetiska och tektoniska studier av de nordvästskånska urbergsåsarna, särskilt Kullaberg. (1953)
- XXV. *Torsten Hägerstrand*: Innovationsförloppet ur korologisk synpunkt. (1953)

- XXVI. *Gunhild Weimarck*: Studier över landskapets förändring inom Lönsboda, Örkeneds socken, nordöstra Skåne. (1953)
- XXVII. *Ingemar Larsson*: Structure and landscape in western Blekinge, southeast Sweden. (1954)
- XXVIII. *Sven Godlund*: Busstrafikens framväxt och funktion i de urbana influensfälten. (1954)
- XXIX. *Folke Lågnert*: Syd- och mellansvenska växtföljder. Del I : de äldre bruknings-systemens upplösning under 1800-talet. (1955)
- XXX. *Olof Ångeby*: Toppkonstans, erosionsytor och passdalar i Jämtland och Tröndelag. (1955)
- XXXI. *Gunnar Johnsson*: Glacialmorfologiska studier i södra Sverige. (1956)
- XXXII. *Folke Lågnert*: Syd- och mellansvenska växtföljder. Del II : 1900-talet. (1956)
- XXXIII. *Olof Nordström*: Befolkningsutveckling och arbetskraftsproblem i östra Småland 1800-1955. (1957)
- XXXIV. *Sven Godlund*: Befolkning - regionsjukhus - resmöjligheter - regioner. (1958)
- XXXV. *Elis Pålsson*: Gymnasiers rekrytering och lokalisering. (1958)
- XXXVI. *Harald Svensson*: Glaciation och morfologi : en glacialgeografisk studie i ett tvärsnitt genom Skanderna mellan södra Helgelandskusten och Kultsjödalen. (1959)
- XXXVII. *Erik Ljungner*: Nahuel Huapi : ein geographischer Querschnitt durch die Anden in Patagonien. (1959)
- XXXVIII. *Nils Lewan*: Om pendling mellan bostad och arbetsplats : en undersökning med material från sydvästra Skåne. (1960)
- XXXIX. *Åke Mattsson*: Morphologische Studien in Südschweden und auf Bornholm über die nichtglaziale Formenwelt der Felsenskulptur. (1962)
- XL. *Stig Nordbeck*: Framställning av kartor med hjälp av siffermaskiner. (1964)
- XLI. *Olof Nordström*: Svensk glasindustri 1550-1960. (1962)
- XLII. *Jan Davidsson*: Littoral processes and morphology on scandian flatcoasts. (1963)
- XLIII. *Martin Markgren*: Detaljmorfologiska studier i fast berg och blockmaterial : geomorfologisk studie inom Fennoscandia med Skåne. (1962-1963)
- XLIV. *Martin Markgren*: Geomorphological studies in Fennoscandia. II : chute slopes in northern Fennoscandia. A : regional studies. (1964)
- XLV. *Martin Markgren*: Geomorphological studies in Fennoscandia. II : chute slopes in northern Fennoscandia. B : systematic studies. (1964)
- XLVI. *Lennart Améen*: Stadsbebyggelse och domänstruktur. (1964)
- XLVII. *Arvid Bergdahl*: Det glaciala landskapet. (1961)
- XLVIII. *Olof Nordström - Solveig Mårtensson*: Turism på Öland (1966)
- XLIX. *Jan O Mattsson*: The temperature climate of potato crops. (1966)
- L. *Nils Lewan*: Landsbebyggelse i förvandling. (1967)
- LI. *Gösta Nordholm*: Skånes äldre ekonomiska geografi. (1967)
- LII. *Sven Godlund - Torsten Hägerstrand - Bengt Svanström*: Samhälls-utvecklingen och samhällsplaneringen. (1967)
- LIII. *Tor Fr Rasmussen*: Storbyutvikling og arbeidsreiser. (1966)
- LIV. *Erik Fagerlund - Harald Svensson - Sven Lindqvist m.fl.*: Infrarödtermografi : principer och naturgeografiska tillämpningar. (1967)
- LV. *Lars Eldblom*: Structure foncière, organisation et structure sociale. (1968)

- LVI. *Knut Norborg*: Jordbruksbefolkningen i Sverige. (1968)
- LVII. *Gunhild Weimarck*: Ulfshult (1968)
- LVIII. *Rune Järvenstedt - Sven Lindqvist - Jan O Mattsson m fl*: Televisionssystem i naturgeografisk forskning. (1968)
- LIX. *Arne Jakobsson*: Omflyttningen i Sverige 1950-1960. (1969)
- LX. *Åke Hillefors*: Västsveriges glaciala historia och morfologi. (1969)
- LXI. *Sven Lindqvist*: Bebyggelseklimatiska studier. (1970)
- LXII. *Torsten Hägerstrand, Gunnar Törnqvist m fl*: Urbaniseringen i Sverige. (SOU 1970:14)
- LXIII. *Bengt Sahlberg*: Interregionala kontaktmönster : personkontakter inom svenskt näringsliv – en flygpasagerarstudie. (1970)
- LXIV. *Björn Hedberg*: Kontaktsystem inom svenskt näringsliv : en studie av organisationers externa personkontakter. (1970)
- LXV. *Mats G Engström*: Regional arbetsfördelning : nya drag i förvärsarbetets geografiska organisation i Sverige. (1970)
- LXVI. *Torsten Persson*: Geomorphological studies in the south-Swedish highlands. (1972)
- LXVII. *Dewitt Davis Jr*: A factorial ecology of Malmö 1965 : the social geography of a city. (1972)
- LXVIII. *Zoltan Petery*: Studier i svensk regionplanering : regionplanering enligt byggnadslagen i mindre regioner. (1972)
- LXIX. *Tommy Book*: Stadsplan och järnväg i Norden. (1974)
- LXX. *Hans Abrahamson*: Studier i jordbrukets omstrukturering. (1974)
- LXXI. *Christer Persson*: Kontaktarbete och framtida lokaliseringförändringar. (1974)
- LXXII. *Ulf Helldén*: Karst : en studie av Artfjällets karstområde samt jämförande korrosionsanalyser från Västspeetsbergen och Tjeckoslovakien. (1974)
- LXXIII. *János Szegő*: Befolkningsstäthet, markanvändning, planering (vol 1 o 2). (1974)
- LXXIV. *Raul Nino Guerrero*: Rural to urban drift of the unemployed in Colombia. (1975)
- LXXV. *Ulf Erlandsson*: Företagsutveckling och utrymmesbehov. (1975)
- LXXVI. *Sture Öberg*: Methods of describing physical access to supply points. (1976)
- LXXVII. *Bo Lenntorp*: Paths in space-time environments : a time-geographic study of movement possibilities of individuals. (1976)
- LXXVIII. *Richard Åhman*: Palsar i Nordnorge : en studie av palsars morfologi, utbredning och klimatiska förutsättningar i Finnmarks och Troms fylke. (1977)
- LXXIX. *Björn Gyllström*: The organization of production as a space-modelling mechanism in underdeveloped countries. (1977)
- LXXX. *Anders Järnegren - Fosco Ventura*: Tre samhällens förändringshistoria : exploateringen av den fysiska miljön i historisk belysning. (1977)
- LXXXI. *Tommy Book*: Stadsplan och järnväg i Storbritannien och Tyskland. (1978)
- LXXXII. *Jan O Mattsson - Leif Börjesson*: Lokalklimatiska temperaturstudier inom ett skånskt fruktodlingsdistrikt med särskilt beaktande av frostläntheten. (1978)
- LXXXIII. *Bjørn Terje Asheim*: Regionale ulikheter i levkår. (1979)
- LXXXIV. *Solveig Mårtensson*: On the formation of biographies in space-time environments. (1979)
- LXXXV. *Erik Wallin*: Vardagslivets generativa grammatik - vid gränsen mellan natur och kultur. (1980)

- LXXXVI. *Reinhold Castensson*: Välja för framtid - om markanvändningsval och förtroendemännainflytande i kommunal planering. (1980)
- LXXXVII. *Kerstin Montal*: Industri och vatten : den vattenförorenande industrins lokaliseringsproblem i Malmöhus län. (1980)
- LXXXVIII. *Tommy Carlstein*: Time resources, society and ecology : on the capacity for human interaction in space and time in preindustrial societies. (1980)
- LXXXIX. *Jonas Åkerman*: Studies on periglacial geomorphology in west Spitsbergen. (1980)
- XC. *Leif Engh*: Karstområdet vid Lummelunds bruk, Gotland, med speciell hänsyn till Lummelundagrottan. (1980)
- XC1. *Karna Lidmar-Bergström*: Pre-quaternary geomorphological evolution in southern Fennoscandia. (1982)
- XCII. *Lars-Olof Olander*: Staten, kommunerna och servicen : tiden kring kommunreformen i ett ekonomiskt – geografiskt perspektiv. (1984)
- XCIII. *Bo Malmström* och *Owe Palmér*: Glacial och periglacial geomorfologi på Varangerhalvön, Nordnorge : geomorfologisk kartering med analys av glaciala former och blockhav. (1984)
- XCIV. *Franz-Michael Rundquist*: Hybrid maize diffusion in Kenya : policies, diffusion patterns and consequences. (1984)
- XCV. *Girma Yadeta*: Dynamic processes of development in marginal areas : a case study from the pokot of north west Kenya. (1985)
- XCVI. *Anders Sporrek*: Food marketing and urban growth in Dar Es Salaam. (1985)
- XCVII. *Rolf Nyberg*: Debris flows and slush avalanches in northern Swedish Lapland : distribution and geomorphological significance. (1985)
- XCVIII. *Lennart Olsson*: An integrated study of desertification - applications of remote sensing, GIS and spatial models in semi-arid Sudan. (1985)
- XCIX. *Mikael Stern*: Census from heaven? : population estimates with remote sensing techniques. (1985)
- C. *Katarina Olsson*: Remote sensing for fuelwood resources and land degradation studies in Kordofan, the Sudan. (1985)
- CI. *Göran Loman*: The climate of a sugar beet stand - dynamics, impact on the crop and possibilities of improvement. (1986)
- CI. *Eric Clark*: The rent gap and urban change : case studies in Malmö 1860-1985. (1987)
- CII. *Karin Hall-Könyves*: Remote sensing of cultivated lands in the south of Sweden. (1988)
- CIII. *Eva Ahlcrona*: The impact of climate and man on land transformation in central Sudan : applications of remote sensing. (1988)
- CIV. *Kerstin Cederlund*: Offentlig verksamhet : sysselsättning territoriellt och funktionellt. (1988)
- CV. *Per Olof Hallin*: Tid för omställning : om hushålls anpassningsstrategier vid en förändrad energisituation. (1989)
- CVI. *Jens Möller*: Godsen och den agrara revolutionen : arbetsorganisation, domänstruktur och kulturlandskap på skånska gods under 1800-talet. (1989)
- CVII. *Juha Uitto*: The Kenyan conundrum : a regional analysis of population growth and primary education in Kenya. (1989)

- CVIII. *Ola Jonsson*: Informationsteknologi och arbete : fallstudier inom svensk sjukvård. (1989)
- CIX. *Tora Friberg*: Kvinnors vardag. Kvinnors arbete och liv : anpassnings-strategier i tid och rum. (1990)
- CX. *Tomas Nihlén*: Eolian processes in southern Scandinavia and the Mediterranean area. (1990)
- CXI. *Anders Löfgren*: Att flytta hemifrån : boendets roll i ungdomars vuxenblivande ur ett situationsanalytiskt perspektiv. (1990)
- CXII. *Irma Guillén*: Ciudad Guayana – en stad, två världar : en studie av ett regionalt utvecklingsprojekts lokala effekter. (1991)
- CXIII. *Hans Holmén*: Building organizations for rural development : state and cooperatives in Egypt. (1991)
- CXIV. *Petter Pilesjö*: GIS and remote sensing for soil erosion studies in semi-arid environments : estimation of soil erosion parameters at different scales. (1992)
- CXV. *Ann-Cathrine Åquist*: Tidsgeografi i samspel med samhällsteori. (1992)
- CXVI. *José da Cruz*: Disaster and society : the 1985 Mexican earthquakes. (1993)
- CXVII. *Tomas Germundsson*: Landsbygdens egnahem : egnahemsrörelsen, småbruket och landskapet i sydsvenskt perspektiv. (1993)
- CXVIII. *Ann-Katrin Bäcklund*: JUST-IN-TIME : hur industriella rationaliseringsstrategier formar arbetsdelning och kompetens. (1994)
- CXIX. *Jon Knudsen*: Kulturspredning i et strukturelt perspektiv : eksemplifiseret ved politisk og religiøs endring under moderniseringen av det norske samfunn. (1994)
- CXX. *Tone Haraldsen*: Teknologi, økonomi og rom : en teoretisk analyse av relasjoner mellom industrielle og territoriale endringsprosesser. (1994)
- CXXI. *Peter Jönsson*: Wind climate during the instrumental period and recent wind erosion in southern Scandinavia. (1994)
- CXXII. *Peter Schlyter*: Palaeo-wind abrasion in southern Scandinavia : field and laboratory studies. (1995)
- CXXIII. *Jun Yamashita*: Spatial interaction and spatial structure : a study of public facility location. (1995)
- CXXIV. *Mats Riddersporre*: Bymarker i backspegel : odlingslandskapet före kartornas tid. (1995)
- CXXV. *Anders Schærström*: Pathogenic paths? : a time geographical approach in medical geography. (1996)
- CXXVI. *Lars Eklundh*: AVHRR NDVI for monitoring and mapping of vegetation and drought in east African environments. (1996)
- CXXVII. *Magnus Jirstrom*: In the wake of the green revolution : environmental and socio-economic consequences of intensive rice agriculture – the problem of weeds in Muda, Malaysia. (1996)
- CXXVIII. *Stefan Anderberg*: Flödesanalys i den hållbara utvecklingens tjänst : reflektioner kring en ”metabolism” – studie av Rhenområdets utveckling. (1996)
- CXXIX. *Karl-Johan Lundquist*: Företag, regioner och internationell konkurrens : om regionala resursers betydelse. (1996)
- CXXX. *Badr-Eldin Taha Osman*: GIS-hydrological modelling in aridlands : a geographical synthesis of surface waters for the African Red Sea region in the Sudan. (1996)

- CXXXI. *Marie Stenseke*: Bonden och landskapet : ägares och brukares relationer till markerna och förutsättningarna för en uthållig markanvändning. (1997)
- CXXXII. *Kristina Blennow*: Spatial variation in near-ground radiation and low temperature – interactions with forest vegetation. (1997)
- CXXXIII. *Lennart Runesson*: Tomträtt : ett markpolitiskt instrument i upplösning. (1997)
- CXXXIV. *Johan Hultman*: The eco-ghost in the machine : reflexions on space, place and time in environmental geography. (1998)
- CXXXV. *Jonas Ardö*: Remote sensing of forest decline in the Czech Republic. (1998)
- CXXXVI. *Per Hillbur*: The knowledge arena : approaching agroforestry and competing knowledge systems – a challenge for agricultural extensionl (1998)
- CXXXVII. *Tom Mels*: Wild landscapes : the cultural nature of Swedish national parks. (1999)
- CXXXVIII. *Carolyn Hannan-Andersson*: Promoting equality between women and men in bilateral development cooperation : concepts, goals, rationales and institutional arrangements. (2000)
- CXXXIX. *Nikolaus Solakius*: The parnassus zone, central Greece. (2000)
- CXL. *Jonathan Seaquist*: Mapping primary production for the west African Sahel using satellite data. (2001)
- CXLI. *Karin Book och Lena Eskilsson*: Stadens struktur : varför och hur? (2001)
- CXLII. *Maria Wikhall*: Universiteten och kompetenslandskapet : effekter av den högre utbildningens tillväxt och regionala spridning i Sverige. (2001)
- CXLIII. *Rannveig Olafsdottir*: Land degradation and climate in Iceland : a spatial and temporal assessment. (2002)
- CXLIV. *Marie Ekström*: Relationships between atmospheric circulation and wind erosion in southern Sweden and Australia. (2002)
- CXLV. *Maj-Lena Finnander Linderson*: The spatial distribution of precipitation in Scania, southern Sweden : observations, model simulations and statistical downscaling. (2002)
- CXLVI. *Richard Ek*: Öresundsregion - bli till! : de geografiska visionernas diskursiva rytmer. (2003)
- CXLVII. *Olivia Louw*: Exploring the culture of non-payment in the post-apartheid South Africa. (2003)
- CXLVIII. *Cecilia Kjellman*: Ta plats eller få plats? : studier av marginaliserade människors förändrade vardagsliv (2003)
- CXLIX. *Christina Scholten*: Kvinnors försörjningsrum : hegemonins förvaltare och murbräckor (2003)
- CL. *Micael Runnström*: Land degradation and mitigation in northern China : evaluated from the biological production (2003)
- CLI. *Sara Brogaard*: Recent changes in land use and productivity in agro-pastoral Inner Mongolia, China (2003)
- CLII. *Jan_Henrik Nilsson*: Östersjöområdet : studier av interaktion och barriärer (2003)
- CLIII. *Thomas Hickler*: Towards an integrated ecology through mechanistic modelling of ecosystem structure and functioning (2004)
- CLIV. *Andreas Persson*: Hydrological modelling, topographical influence and yield mapping in precision agriculture (2004)
- CLV. *Maria Olsrud*: Mechanisms of below-ground carbon cycling in subarctic ecosystems (2004)

- CLVI. *Sandra C. Fernández*: Farewell to the peasantry? : (Post)modernising rural Mexico : the case of the ejido peasants in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (2004)
- CLVII. *Andrés P. Leskó*: To own the phone : spatial diffusion, ownership and regulation of telephone service in Argentina, 1878-1990 (2004)
- CLVIII. *Henrik Svensson*: Öppna och slutna rum : enskiftet och de utsattas geografi : husmän, bönder och gods på den skånska landsbygden under 1800-talets första hälft (2005)
- CLIX. *Pablo Morales*: Modeling carbon and water fluxes in European terrestrial ecosystems (2006)
- CLX. *Emmanuel S. Gritti*: Global changes and European terrestrial ecosystems (2006)
- CLXI. *Ola Thufvesson*: Kreativitetens yttre villkor : miljöer, rörlighet och nobelpristagare (2006)
- CLXII. *Deniz Koca*: Impacts of regional climate change on Swedish forests : an evaluation using process-based regional ecosystem modelling approach (2006)
- CLXIII. *Bodil Elmqvist*: Livelihood diversification and land use change in the Sahel : an interdisciplinary analysis of gum arabic in Sudan (2006)
- CLXIV. *Jan Vang-Lauridsen*: Industrial dynamics and the spatial organization of industries (2006)
- CLXV. *Heidi Wiig Aslesen*: Innovation in an urban context (2006)
- CLXVI. *Torbjörn Johansson*: Temporal and spatial variability of carbon cycling in a subarctic landscape (2006)
- CLXVII. *Anders Lund Hansen*: Space wars and the new urban imperialism (2006)
- CLXVIII. *Lars Coenen*: Faraway, so close! : the changing geographies of regional innovation (2006)
- CLXIX. *Pontus Olofsson*: Remote sensing of carbon balance across Scandinavian forests (2007)
- CLXX. *Margareta Rämgård*: The power of place : existential crises and place security in the context of pregnancy (2006)
- CLXXI. *Helena Eriksson*: Leaf area index of Scandinavian forests : methods using in situ and remotely sensed data (2007)
- CLXXII. *Ransom Lekunze*: Corporate social responsibility and development : the case of the Chad Cameroon Oil Pipeline Project (2007)
- CLXXIII. *Alla Yurova*: Hydrological aspects of the carbon balance in a boreal catchment : a model study (2007)
- CLXXIV. *Jerker Moodysson*: Sites and modes of knowledge creation : on the spatial organization of biotechnology innovation (2007)
- CLXXV. *Yahia Mohamed-Mahmood*: Chinese development assistance and West African agriculture : a shifting approach to foreign aid? (2007)
- CLXXVI. *Høgni Kalsø Hansen*: The urban turn and the location of economic activities (2008)
- CLXXVII. *Helene Bogren*: Flytta eller stanna? : betydelsen av plats och platsförankring för den kvalificerade arbetskraftens internationella migration (2008)
- CLXXVIII. *Lotten Jönsson Johansson*: Semi-natural grasslands : landscape, history and plant species diversity : a spatio-temporal study of an agricultural landscape on Öland, Sweden (2008)
- CLXXIX. *Carin Nilsson*: Windstorms in Sweden : variations and impacts (2008)

- CLXXX. *Margareta Johansson*: Changing lowland permafrost in northern Sweden : multiple drivers of past and future trends (2008)
- CLXXXI. *Martin Svensson Henning*: Industrial dynamics and regional structural change : geographical perspectives on economic evolution (2009)
- CLXXXII. *Brynhildur Bjarnadóttir*: Carbon stocks and fluxes in a young Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica*) plantation in Iceland (2009)
- CLXXXIII. *Magnus Lund*: Peatlands at a threshold : greenhouse gas dynamics in a changing climate (2009)
- CLXXXIV. *Marcin Jackowicz-Korczyński*: Land-atmosphere interactions of a subarctic peat mire (2009)
- CLXXXV. *Nicklas Guldåker*: Krishantering, hushåll och stormen Gudrun : att analysera hushålls krishanteringsförmåga och sårbarheter (2009)
- CLXXXVI. *Nicodemus Mandere*: Alternative agriculture and rural development: a case study of sugar beet cultivation in Kenya (2009)
- CLXXXVII. *Anna Wramneby*: The role of vegetation-climate feedbacks in regional earth system dynamics (2010)
- CLXXXVIII. *Mikhail Mastepanov*: Towards a changed view on greenhouse gas exchange in the Arctic : new findings and improved techniques (2010)
- CLXXXIX. *Evelin Urbel-Piirsalu*: The Estonian forest sector in transition to sustainability? : capturing sustainability with the help of integrated assessment (2010)
- CXC. *Marie Vandewalle*: Effects of past and current land use on biodiversity : from a semi-natural grassland on Öland (Sweden) to a European perspective (2010)
- CXCI. *Maria Andrea Nardi*: Rural development and territorial dynamics in the province of Misiones, Argentina (2011)
- CXCII. *Torbern Tagesson*: Land-atmosphere exchange of carbon in a high-Arctic wet tundra ecosystem (2011)
- CXCIII. *Per Schubert*: Model development for estimating carbon dioxide exchange in Nordic forests and peatlands with MODIS time series data (2011)
- CXCIV. *Mabel Ndakaripa Munyuki-Hungwe*: In search of 'community' in Zimbabwe's fast track resettlement area of Mazowe district (2011)
- CXCV. *Oliver Purschke*: Plant community assembly and biodiversity : a spatio-temporal perspective (2011)

MEDDELANDEN FRÅN INSTITUTIONEN FÖR KULTURGEOGRAFI OCH
EKONOMISK GEOGRAFI.
AVHANDLINGAR

- I. *Johanna Bergman Lodin*: Engendered promises, gendered challenges. Changing patterns of labor, control and benefits among smallholder households growing NERICA in Uganda (2012)
- II. *Dobloug Tore Anstein*: Høyvekstbedrifter og regionale finansieringssystemer (2012)
- III. *Patrik Olsson*: Ömse sidor om vägen; Allén och landskapet i Skåne 1700-1900 (2012)
- IV. *Ingrid Helene Garmann Johnsen*: Social Capital and Regional Innovation Systems – Bridging approaches and broadening understanding of knowledge sharing and innovation (2012)
- V. *Roman Martin*: Knowledge Bases and the Geography of Innovation (2012)
- VI. *Monica Plechero*: The changing geography of innovation – Chinese and Indian regions and the global flows of innovation (2012)
- VII. *Erik Jönsson*: Fields of Green and Gold: Territorial hunger, rural planning, and the political ecologies of high-end golf (2013)
- VIII. *Elena Zukauskaitė*: Institutions and the Geography of Innovation: A Regional Perspective (2013)
- IX. *Carl-Johan Sanglert*: Att skapa plats och göra rum – Landskapsperspektiv på det historiska värdets betydelse och funktion i svensk planering och miljövard. (2013)
- X. *Tiina Lovisa Solbär*: Anthropogenic Open Land in Boreal Landscapes – Investigations into the Creation and Maintenance of Arable Fields on Swedish Farms (2014)
- XI. *Ståle Holgersen*: The rise (and fall?) of post-industrial Malmö – Investigations of city-crisis dialectics (2014)
- XII. *Wim Carton*: Fictitious Carbon, Fictitious Change? Environmental Implications of the Commodification of Carbon (2016)
- XIII. *Hanna Martin*: Innovation for tackling grand challenges: Cleantech industry dynamics and regional context (2016)
- XIV. *Srilata Sircar*: Between the highway and the red dirt track: Subaltern Urbanization and Census Towns in India (2016)



In the 2011 Census of India, more than 2500 settlements were inducted into the category of 'census towns' – the lowest size-class of urban settlements in India. Aerial images have established that a vast majority of these towns are situated away from million-plus metropolitan areas and have developed independently. Taking this geographical phenomenon of subaltern urbanization as a point of entry, this thesis attempts to make an empirical and conceptual intervention into our understanding of urbanization processes. Based on discourse analysis, narrative analysis of personal interviews, participatory mapping exercises and a household survey (carried out in two towns of West Bengal, the state with the largest number of new census towns) this thesis explores what can be learnt about the experience of small-town urbanization from a subaltern studies perspective.