

Narratives of Development in South Asia: Kolkata, South City and Solace.ⁱ

By Madhuja Mukherjee

Kichui simple roilo na, sobyie complex hoye gelo.

Or

No structure is simple anymore; it's all [housing] complex now.

(Anonymous).

Part I: The Framework of the City

This paper explores the heterogeneous nature of a south-Asian city namely Kolkata, East India, and studies the conflicting nature of development in a post-colonial condition, as well as closely looks into how various 'sub-cities' coexist within such eco-political conditions.ⁱⁱ

The purpose here is to produce a critical narrative and visual accounts of the multiple stages development in India, followed by different projects towards globalization in the sub-continent. However, within this framework, I especially examine a particular and contemporary phenomenon, that is, the emergence of South City Mall and Housing Complex in South-Kolkata as an economic, cultural, and visual rupture within 'our' everyday experiences.ⁱⁱⁱ I analyse the overpowering nature of the mall façade, it's glazed and glassy interiors, the multiplexes with reflective floor, and analyze the recent phenomenon of 'being

present and seen' in the mall. This paper tries to historicize the dynamics of urban life, and understand the implications of such unprecedented contemporary developments.

While Kolkata was designed as a port-city in the colonial period, and during the 18th and the 19th Century, certain sections of the city (central) emerged as a crucial site for political and cultural subversions in India. Nevertheless, the city changed drastically after Independence and Partition^{iv}, experiencing one of the largest immigration in South-Asia.^v Endless streams of refugees 'poured' in, and as people migrated, severe housing problems cropped up.^{vi} Kolkata streets, which were earlier marked with colonial stateliness, became a glaring testimony of the history of migration, cultural uprootment and economic problems in South-Asia. From the 'city of sahibs' and Bengali 'intellectuals', in a short span of time Kolkata re-emerged as the 'city of refugees'. The architecture and maps altered as 'south' Kolkata re-surfaced as a 'central' or more significant locality. During this period the lanes and the by lanes of Kolkata charted the history of political struggle in the Bengal.

The southern sections of the city got marked with small factories, and lines of make shift shops and houses, which were remarkably different from the milieu of 'north' Kolkata or the *pucca* (permanent) structures of the 'Brown sahibs'. The location discussed here, Usha (literally 'Sunrise') Factory in south Kolkata, on the Prince Anwar Shah Road, near the Tipu Sultan's Masjid and was in fact, one of the big factories of the city. It was owned by Jay Engineering Works, and produced electrical consumers' articles (particularly sewing machines) since the nineteen fifties. Its labour force comprised people from neighbouring provinces, as well as refugees from Bangladesh. Usha Factory also produced a fervent trade union movement, which was part of the Left political culture in Bengal. However, in 2003 it

was declared 'sick' or unprofitable, and was made defunct. It was then sold off to a real estate consortium. The 'factory' per se was demolished; large water bodies or lakes filled up with rubbish, and the construction of the South City began around 2004.

While the entire project is barely complete, on the land of this defunct factory now stands a colossal, overwhelmingly large shopping mall or the South City Mall (cum housing estate), that underlines our economic shifts from a rambling industrial condition to an arguably (ill-considered) post-industrial condition. However, this paper is not a theoretical enquiry into either eco-political history or urban sociology. The approach here is inter-disciplinary, as it aspires to read the transformations of our spaces and cultures; streets, memories and images, from the perspective of visual culture studies. I use images (films, photographs etc.) as a source to make meaning of Kolkata's transmutations from the colonial period to its present state. As mentioned earlier, I specifically consider one distinct aspect of the present moment that is, the emergence of the South City Mall with multiplex cinemas (where the new 'Bollywood' films are screened), at what used to be in popular parlance the 'Usha Gate' bus stop. Appearing like large ship the 'South City' consists of new housing (Kolkata's tallest buildings), and is located on one hand near slums (or Muslim ghettos) on the other near Bengali Hindu middle-class houses. At a distant a single cinema (ironically named 'Navina' or New); a make-shift bazaar selling fish and vegetables, and opposite to the mall a small liquor shop –unintentionally named 'Solace'– still survives. Briefly, the meaning of a 'city',^{vii} and particularly the ways in which a South-Asian city like Kolkata, has been imagined, realised, traversed and experienced is deeply linked to the manner in which one negotiates colonial violence and modernity. This paper addresses the problem of space in the contexts

of our modernity or various stages of ‘semi-modernities,’^{viii} by looking into the contemporary transformations of the city.

The name of a city: Synonyms and sub-cities

Kolkata a city by the ‘Ganga’ (or Hugli river, as mentioned on the map), has accounts about the name itself. There are certain local jokes that suggest it got the name when a grass-cutter misunderstood the question by his British master and said unknowingly ‘kal kaata’ (or cut the grass yesterday), while he was actually being asked ‘what place is this’. There are other curious yet ironic stories, which indicate that it got the name from ‘gol gatha’, the land of skulls, because of the numerous deaths that happened during the colonial period. In the late 17th century, Kolkata was produced from three little hamlets in Bengal,^{ix} with weavers particularly (around the Sutanuti area) and their local business practices^x. It was turned into a port-city and remained the capital city of the British Raj until 1911. The early notes and images of the city are largely documents of the colonial forces, and are predominantly ethnographic images of the ‘natives’ and their cultures, which are represented through the ‘colonial gaze’.^{xi} However, such images transformed radically in the 19th century, as the English educated Bengali middle class strived for freedom and selfhood.

The city was mapped and segregated broadly as the ‘White town’ and the ‘Black town’, with least amount of amenities supplied to the Black Town, which eventually created dire conditions that are perceptible even today. Therefore, all those ‘poor’ images of Kolkata^{xii} (of impoverished people, polluted air, dilapidated houses, and hand-pulled rickshaws) somehow became representative images of the city since its inception, even when British in actuality

tried to control South-Asia from Kolkata. Hence, as Kolkata's White Town shone with colonial grandeur, its other parts suffered in more ways than one. Nevertheless, the city 'grew', in every sense of the term, in tandem with colonial rule, through the political interventions by its people who generated a cultural milieu that is crucial in the context of the political history of modern India^{xiii}.

Mapping the city: White town/Black town

I

Since the late 17th Century, the landscape of the place has transformed beyond recognition.^{xiv} The tropical land, with mangrove swamps and lush green horizons, receded to incorporate houses and fort for soldiers (or Fort William), just as the city got intersected with creeks^{xv} and *maidans* (parks). But most of the natural ditches were filled up with rubbish produced by the city itself. Thus, in a sense the city was built on a dumping ground or unfortunately in the course of history became one. However, the fact of the matter is, it is not only the tigers which treaded this part of the world, at the time when the British came in as traders. The Portuguese had started a factory in as early as 1535; the Dutch were doing business here by 1636, just as the British came in around 1651. It (the Sutanuti area) was a promising textile hub in an indigenous way when the British traders (particularly Job Charnock)^{xvi} foresaw the potential of the locality and set up the headquarters of the East India Company. The land was bought from the Sabarna Raychoudhuri of south-suburban Kolkata, and the British paid regular rents to the Mughals until 1757, after which the British Raj was established in the sub-continent.^{xvii}

The English section of the city or the White Town was set up at what is now central Kolkata. What is now referred to as north became the Black Town for the ‘natives’. There were some ‘native’ settlements around the south as well (referred to as the ‘backward’ or *dber-dhere* Gobindapur). Nevertheless, Kolkata had no definite mapping until 1794. The Fort William Area was chiefly referred to as ‘Kolkata’, while the other sections were White or Black residential areas. The most significant public buildings of the 18th Century, located near the Esplanade area appear very much ‘neo-classical’ with tall pillars and pediments. However, several hybrid styles emerged later, like the Prince Gulam Muhammad Shah mosque built in 1830, in Tollygunge, which included Indo-Islamic structures, as well as Gothic *minars* in place of Islamic pointed arches. In the 19th Century a new kind of architectural amalgamation projecting the aspirations of the rich natives (of north Kolkata) developed rapidly.^{xviii}

Tollygunge^{xix} or formerly Tollyganj, in south Kolkata, was a ‘jungle’ dotted with garden houses of the English in the 18th Century. Colonel William Tolly made the tributary of Ganga navigable, and transformed Adi Ganga into waterway from Dhaka to the salt lakes of the city. The princes from Mysore, the sons of Tipu Sultan, settled here after the Vellore Mutiny in 1806, and a small Muslim ghetto grew around this area. South Kolkata also became the section where the migrants from East Bengal settled during post-Independence and partition. The ‘South City Mall’ is located in this neighbourhood.

Furthermore, Lord Macaulay's education policies produced a Bengali middle class^{xx} whose class character was not marked by its associations with business, but by education. They were primarily the English educated High-caste Hindus,^{xxi} and this group comprised largely of small landowners and professional (like lawyer, doctor, teacher, writer, or clerk etc.) who were located mostly in Kolkata. However, many of these people, referred to as the Bengali *Bhadralok*, were the first generation immigrants, who came to this burgeoning city for work and education. Hence, 19th Century Kolkata appear like "a real metropolis for the bhadralok, providing education, opportunities for jobs, printed books, a taste for new cultures. It was also, by and large, a city, where the bhadralok did not feel at home...." (Sumit Sarkar (1997, p. 176)).^{xxii}

The majority of the poor immigrants who travelled from the villages often transported their living styles into the city. One English official disgusted by this condition reported that "[t]he tiled hut or mud "baree" that in the mofussil would be occupied by a single family, is in Kolkata the constant home of eight or ten households; while the sanitary precautions that would render such a state of things wholesome are altogether wanting" (Sumanta Banerjee, 1989, p. 62). Most certainly, the labourers couldn't afford the 'pucca' (permanent) colossal mansions like the ones built by the rich *babus*. In fact, Kolkata generated a heterogeneous cultural milieu, throbbing with various forms of (urban) folk cultures and thus, the city could be actually mapped beyond the White Town/ Black Town dichotomy.^{xxiii} For instance, and the clusters of the huts set up by the villagers also produced the 'bazaars'. Referring back to the village community and living practices, these labourers inserted new designs into the blue-print of the colonial city. Hence, the palatial houses of the rich Bengalis were encircled by bazaars and slums, creating a 'trend towards urban heterogeneity' (Sumanta Banerjee,

1989, p. 29). For instance, Kalipada Dass's remarkable comedy *Jamai Babu* (Silent, 1931), depicts such entries of sub-urban persons into the city, the ways in which he was marvelled and troubled by the big city, as he traverses from North to central Kolkata and encounters wide streets with cars and trams, Victoria Memorial, etc. The exterior location shots juxtaposed with interior tableaux make the film an atypical example of early Indian cinema.

III

At the heart of the White Town or Dalhousie Square was the administrative centre as well as commercial blocs. Little southwards, opposite to the vast expanses of the *maidan* (central park), were big facades and splendid shops of New Market (built in 1870s), and of Esplanade and Chowringhee area. Further down was/is Park Street, with breath-taking Bungalows, parks, school, church, cemetery etc. This became the chief residential area of the *sahibs*.^{xxiv} Kolkata experienced certain civic improvements during this period (that had some ripple-effect up to the 'brown-sahibs' localities), which comprised a bridge across the Hugli river in 1874, introduction of horse-drawn trams in 1880, the street gas lights transforming into electric lights from 1891, telephones in 1882, motor cars from 1896, so on and so forth. Evidently, the city was changing and acquiring very specific marks of modernity. Incidentally, around this time Kolkata was referred to as the 'City of Palaces'.^{xxv} It is crucial to highlight the fact that, right from its inception this city was divided into two broad regions. The English settlers carefully guarded their quarters by (at times) banning entry of the 'Black natives' into their spheres. The Black Town in the northern part, between Bow Bazaar and Muchua Bazaar comprised, to quote from Sumanta Banerjee (1989, p.23, 4):

[P]erhaps the most dense part of the native population of Calcutta...The houses of the wealthier classes are brick-built, from two to three stories high, closely constructed and divided only by dirty, narrow and unpaved streets; the roofs are flat and terraced... .

The binary of White Town/Black Town, however, was often challenged by the presence of heterogeneous groups in and around the sahib localities. For instance, Sumit Sarkar suggests that (1997, p.165):^{xxvi}

[t]he city in many important respects, was, and remains, not one but many: distinct in residential areas, languages and cultures, self-images, but interacting in everyday life in relationships of inequality – and occasional conflict.

Moreover, there were poor white men, Eurasians, as well as small communities of Jews, Armenians, and Chinese. Also, there were the Muslim working class along with rich Muslims, particularly around Tollygunge and Garden Reach area in the south-west. These were the ‘non-Bengali’ Muslims, who had immigrated with Tipu Sultan’s family from Mysore as well as with Wajid Ali Shah of Avadh after their defeats and the acquisition of their property by the British. Furthermore, as railways commenced migration increased, and villagers from adjacent provinces moved to the city for work (particularly in the Jute Mills). To quote Sumit Sarkar (1997, p. 166, 7)^{xxvii}:

Barabazaar was the lynchpin of Calcutta's commerce with parts of the subcontinent and beyond by river, land and then railways. Here Colesworthy Grant in 1850 found 'Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwaris, Armenians, Madrasees, Sikhs, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmese and Bengalees.' Bengali merchant-princes quite prominent in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-centuries...were gradually eased out from the kind of business life that Barabazaar symbolized.

IV

Among other things, the question of migration is one of the most significant aspects that transformed and reproduced the city architecture. 20th Century Bengal experienced unprecedented political shifts and movements that included larger political movements like Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement, followed Civil Disobedience Movements and the different phases of the Quit India Movement between nineteen twenties and nineteen forties. In fact, there were multiple 'trends' in the political movements of the period, like the extremists (particularly during 1928-34) the revivalists (the Hindu Mahasabha Group etc.) along with the Communist, who created the basis for the awareness of working class rights and international politics in the thirties.^{xxviii} This was followed by the cross currents of the Second World War, and the Quit India Movement that turned gory in 1942. Moreover, in 1943 Bengal experienced one of the most dreadful man-made Famine in socio-political history that, triggered the death of five million people, and forced the migration of thousands of peasants to the city. As toilers turned beggars, millions of people begging on

the streets of Kolkata (amidst decomposing bodies) no longer asked for ‘rice’ but for the water in which it was cooked. The Famine also imposed an understanding of the meaning of modern colonial forces. Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) a left cultural outfit that was remarkably influential was setup under such conditions.^{xxix}

Nevertheless, what came in 1946 was somewhat unforeseen by both the politicians as well as the people. Starting from Kolkata in August, 1946 the communal frenzy and blood bath submerged both East and West Bengals, and by March, 1947 it had spread unto Punjab, leaving thousands dead (or killed) and even more uprooted from their homes and cultures. While India became independent, two nations were produced on the basis of religion, and Bengal-Punjab provinces perhaps experienced world’s largest forced migration.^{xxx} The post-independence Kolkata was transformed for once and all. The city was certainly not built to tackle an inflow of refugees of this magnitude. Thus, people encroached upon vacant lands, on the land besides the railway tracks, on foot paths and so on, producing what is known as *jabar dhakhal* (forcefully captured) colonies and thereby stretching the limits of the city particularly southwards. Throughout the political movements of 1967 (radical ultra-left youth or ‘Naxalite’ movements), and that of 1977 when the Left Front Government eventually came to power in Bengal, these ‘colonies’ became a stronghold of left and radical politics. In short, the post 1947 Kolkata needs to be viewed from a new perspective.

Narratives of the city: Images of political change

Curiously while there are numerous studies on 19th Century Kolkata,^{xxxi} enquiries on the political history of Kolkata from the partition years to the political upheavals of the late

sixties and early seventies are rare.^{xxxii} In this context, cinema becomes an important visual evidence of the changing cityscapes. For instance, *Chinnamul* (*Rootless*, Nemaï Ghosh, 1951) was an IPTA collective production that addressed the ‘gaze’ of the immigrant, who entered the city from far off villages (another country now) to ‘lay claim to the reality and the time in question’ (Moinak Biswas, 2002, p. 29).^{xxxiii} The film is regarded as the sole cinematic document of partition and migration. It begins with a voice-over speaking about the Muslim peasants and Hindu professionals who lived ‘happily’ by the river. In fact, in a leisurely pace it shows various workers, the potter, the goldsmith, the jute farmer, et al. Then through an evocative montage, juxtaposing shots of waves and storm with a lamp going off, and people being misled by their leaders (who shout ‘Hindustan’ and ‘Pakistan’ respectively), and by dissolving a shot of a knife onto it, the fear and trauma of partition is created. While the masses remain somewhat unsure of the meaning and implications of Independence and partition, in one of the most striking moments of the film an old lady clutches a bamboo pillar of her house (in Bangladesh) and cries endlessly, ‘*Jaamu na, Jaamu na, Jaamu na, Jaamu na,...*’ (Won’t go...). Yet, families eventually migrate to Kolkata leaving behind their homes and land, and as filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak would put it by abandoning an entire ‘landscape’, to traverse onto unknown territories and a new cityscape. As they enter Sealdah station to use Moinak Biswas’s words (2002, p.34).^{xxxiv}

[T]he top angle shot of the maze of tracks and the low angle shots of the platform shades-has almost a dream-like[nightmarish?] quality as a new reality dawns on the characters, as it invades the film’s frame. They land in a sea of humanity; many of them displaced people, on the platform.

This will be the temporary home for them and they will have to forge their new community with the refugees. For decades since this community would be a new and politically extremely important demographic entity. They have not come to marvel at the big city as peasants, nor to climb the ladder of individual success as we find in countless films and popular fiction. They are here to take part in the making of the city anew. Post-independence Calcutta would be shaped through them.

After a series of difficulties the family of the protagonist (Srikanta) would go on to live in a mansion they capture along with other families. The film ends with the death of Srikanta's pregnant wife after the birth of their son. It also has extensive shots of the beautiful city intercepted with the 'gaze of the refugee' (Srikanta) looking for his wife and family. However, partition perhaps also meant a new beginning through violence and pain, as the young boy of the family looks at the picturesque city from their terrace, and is marvelled by its scenic qualities. He looks at the cars and licks a lollipop while the gaze of the director also shows us hungry toddlers, starving mothers and more hungry children crawling around at the Sealdah station.

Ritwik Ghatak in his essay on 'Film Making' writes about such 'lost landscape', and the 'lost faces' and the 'lost language.'^{xxxxv} He writes about partition and our moral bankruptcy, and how filmmaking is difficult because we no longer 'stand on our own land'. He insists with partition 'words/language and images are lost' forever. Moreover, we have lost an 'entire way

of being'. Therefore, he craves for an imaginary re-union. In *Komal Gandhar (E-flat, 1961)*^{xxxvi}, Ghatak brings up these issues and creates a thematic triad, which deal with problems of re-union of the individuals,^{xxxvii} of theatre groups,^{xxxviii} and of two nations. In a particular scene, when the two rival theatre groups come close for a play (Kalidas's *Shakuntala*) and go to Lalgola for rehearsals, Bhriгу (the protagonist) and Anasua look across the river and point towards their lost homes. They stand on an out of use railway track, which until the recent past was the bridge between the two Bengals. 'What use to be sign of union has now become the mark of division', say the characters. The camera tracks uneasily over these lost tracks, until the screen turns black and we hear a screeching sound. Ghatak uses multiple sound tracks and songs (marriage song, boatmen's song, IPTA songs etc.) to reinstate the theme of unification.

Like the thematic, the camera in his film searches for a lost territory. It pans over tall grass and bleached-out sky, in frenzy, like a madman looking for his lost object. Borrowing from a Bengali poem by Bishnu Dey, the *E-flat* musical note is used to describe the beauty of the lost terrain. Towards the end of the film when Anasua has to decide whether she wants to stay back or leave for France (with her fiancé), Brighu describes Kolkata as a mythical garden, where political rallies seem like beautiful creepers, or a little beggar boy appear like deer calf. Somehow, through such political interventions even this devastated city re-appears anew, and becomes a fascinating landscape.

In Mrinal Sen's films,^{xxxix} the post-colonial, the post-partition, ravaged city, with refugees, beggars, street dogs, footpaths, dustbins, hi-drains etc., re-emerge with a certain kind of vitality. The beginning Sen's of *Interview* (1970) show these emergent spaces; or even its last

sequence, deploys rapid cuts, and juxtaposes shots of city toilers, bazaars, bridges etc., with the smiling face of the protagonist. Alternatively, in *Calcutta 71*(1972), the young political activist is shown running through the Kolkata by lanes. These images are then compared with images of Bangladesh, and Vietnam War. His famous documentary style is evident in these films as he uses photographs from newspapers etc. Sen's progressive background forces him to locate national and local politics within the larger international politics and bloodshed. In fact, he uses various forms, like the mime or uses the sound of radio and other location sounds to make meaning of contemporary conditions. In many of his films 'fictitious' moments merge into 'real' images of political rallies, of the raised fists, and intense faces of men and women, and political activists. As opposed to several films on Kolkata (including recent international productions like *Namesake*, 2007),^{x1} which repeatedly show Kolkata as an old colonial town with a lost world grandeur, or several other popular films which are predominantly shot within the studios, some of the films of period (as discussed above) show the political vitality and the emergent cityscapes.

Part II: Contemporary complexes and complexities

The city in the new league: The big leap through global imaginaire

The Indian nation-state had strong socialist inclinations and public sector investments were enforced during the Nehruvian era, even when it safeguarded the interests of the petty capitalists. Moreover, after the Left Front Government was elected to power in Bengal in 1977, one of its key successes became the land reform programmes and the empowerment of the working class people. Amidst such socialist aspirations there seems to be significant

shifts in the economic policies of both Congress Government at the centre^{xii}, and the erstwhile Left Front as well as the present Trinamul-Congress Government in the province. India's neo-liberal policies in the nineties, the ways in which cities like Bangalore (in South India) have transformed, the setting up of call-centres in various metro cities etc., and formation of places like Noida (near Delhi)^{xiii} underline how globalisation function as a both economic and cultural condition.^{xiii} In Kolkata for instance, the stretch from Jadavpur to Garia, was dotted with small-scale factories like Bengal Lamp, Sulekha (ink) factory, Dabur etc., which have now all become defunct, and have either already become or are in the process of becoming housing complexes with shopping malls.^{xiv} While this paper is not a study in economic-history of Bengal, nonetheless, it is crucial for visual culture studies to understand the implications such social change.

David Harvey^{xlv} writes how a neoliberal state 'surrenders to the global market', and favours 'governance by elites'. He suggests (2005, p.78):

[t]he period in which the neoliberal state has become hegemonic has also been the period in which the concept of civil society...has become central to the formulation of oppositional politics. The Gramscian idea of the state as a unity of political and civil society gives way to the idea of civil society as a centre of opposition, if not an alternative, to the state.

While, India is not neoliberal ‘state’ per se, nevertheless, its neoliberal aspirations and shifts are self-evident. For example, in the recent past while the Government in Bengal tried to set-up technical hubs (in association with Multinational companies) in the villages of Medinipur *zilla* (district), a forceful resistance came primarily from the civil society (described as ‘*Sushil Samaj*’ by the left), just as the peasants fought against land acquisition.^{xlvi} The role local media played in this context (in forming public opinion), apparently resulting in the unprecedented success of the Trinamul-Congress in the recent elections (2011), is worth examining. It is within such frameworks of uneven geo-political developments that, I wish to explore the spatial meaning of global cultures.

Appadurai (1990)^{xlvii} has written about *ethnoscapes* (spaces produced through inflow of people, like immigrants etc.), *technoscapes* (inflow of technology etc.), *finanscapes* (flow of global capital etc.) *mediascapes* (the ‘repertoires of images and information’), and *ideoscapes* (ideological shifts connected to western world-views), as he elaborated on the Global/Local dichotomies. However, it also imperative to study the *cityscape* or the physical structural changes that occur when migration takes place, or the physical transformations that take place (with globalisation of economy and culture) when flyovers, multi-storeyed buildings, or shopping malls are built by devouring old houses, parks, water bodies; or when neon signs, digital bill boards etc., are erected like patchworks in the blue sky. All of a sudden, known localities, serpentine lanes, the grumpy grocer’s shop across the road, the old house built by forefathers, seem to be demolished by other geometric structures. Certainly, it is a matter of nostalgia, but not without a sense of history. As a matter of fact, it may be fruitful to examine contemporary Kolkata from such point of view of change.

A city within a city: Labyrinth of desire

Located on the Prince Anwar Shah Road, 'The South City', has been described as a city within the city. At the entrance of the gigantic structure is the shopping mall, with an overwhelming façade. Built on 31-acres of land the 35-storeyed residential buildings with high-speed elevators are the tallest buildings in Kolkata (and eastern India). Technical innovations like the use of shear walls in place of columns were requisite for such tall buildings because of the soil quality of Kolkata. Opposite this 'South' city, is a predominantly Hindu middle class locality (Jodhpur Park), and a little further on the right, there is a Hospital. On South City's left there is the slum-area which comprises largely Muslims. Further down, there is a College, a single theatre, a flyover (towards the Lake area), a Mosque, and beyond that a cemetery. In fact, there is Mosque structure built in 1830s, and a cemetery ground within half a kilometre of South City.

The South City constructed by the Merlin Group on the grounds of the defunct Usha Company (which had about 1,600 employees), was designed by an USA based company while the 'landscape design' was done by a company based in Singapore. Besides housing eastern India's largest shopping mall, with six screen multiplexes, the project also includes swimming pools, school, car parks (for eight hundred cars) etc. South City promises a 'different life style', and is projected as 'Singapore in South Calcutta' or 'NY shifting to the East' etc. In short, it is seen as 'an oasis in the midst of chaos'.^{xlviii} The total investment for this project is about seventy Million Rupees, which could employ up to 10,000 people and

generate 10 Millions Rupees through taxes. Non-Resident Indians booked more than twenty percent of the flats, and the prices for the apartments are up to five Million Rupees. While, the Sunday, 7th September, 2003, issue of *The Economic Times*, put the South City mall as ‘a shoppers’ paradise,’ the South City itself stands tall like a space ship amidst narrow roads, bustling slums, local bazaars and working class people. It aspires for ‘life style revolution,’ which would necessarily encourage widening of the roads, and construction of flyovers etc. Briefly, it ensures certain permanent changes in our urban geographies, by dislocating workers, factories, and local houses. For instance, a friend of mine who lived in a three-storied house adjacent to this structure shifted elsewhere (towards New Town, East Kolkata) primarily being unable to cope with such violent ruptures in her everyday existence. Moreover, her little daughter looking at the construction of South City and the huge lights from their second floor, constantly mistook the neon light for the full-moon. For us, who have visited her place several times in the last fifteen years and more, it’s a sharp break in the stream of memories of friendly gatherings, fervent political discussions, discourses on art, history, and literature, as well as heady parties with drinks brought from the opposite liquor shop -‘Solace’. For instance, the way in which a feature in *The Times of India*, Wednesday, 15th December 2005, re-maps the emergent changes, the building of ‘wide roads’, flyovers etc., exemplify the physical alterations that happened post-South City mall.

A waterscape vanishes: Cries and Whispers

While the South City has recently been (almost) completed, in the last few years the construction was interrupted by to various protests linked to issues of land, labour, and environment (specifically the destruction of a huge water body located within its premises).

For instance, the director of the project issued the following in defence of the protests and legal complications:^{xlix}

Dear All,

This is with respect to the recent Press reports regarding our project "SOUTH CITY" published in some newspapers of Kolkata on 17th December 2005.

We would like to clarify certain facts to our esteemed customers in connection with the same, which are as follows:

South City Projects (Kolkata) Ltd. has taken all necessary permissions from the concerned Government Agencies and its construction activities are in conformity with applicable statutory norms.

The Public Interest litigation filed by one Mr. Javed Khan, who is the councillor of the opposition party in West Bengal, is totally invalid since they are based upon facts, which are baseless and malicious. Mr. Khan has filed the PIL for his personal interest and gain....

Meanwhile, we would like to reiterate that the PIL has been challenged by us in the Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta and we trust the matter will be sorted out very soon and

in our favour. Further, kindly note that the construction at site is going on in full swing and there is no obstruction whatsoever.

Finally we would like to state that South City is a landmark project planned and being constructed in conformity with all applicable statutory norms.

Thanking You,

Yours truly,

For South City Projects (Kolkata) Ltd.,

Sushil Mohta,

Director.

Moreover, another major case that came up regarding the South City is connected to the question of environment. A huge water body was situated adjacent or behind the South City, while about 1.31 acres of this water body was located within the premises of the Usha factory. By the end of 2005, *Vasundhara*, an environmental activist group, marked that a large section of the water body had vanished and the towers III and IV were being constructed on that space. *Vasundhara* wrote to the Governor, the Chief Minister, to the Fishery Department, as well as to the Pollution Control Board. Eventually in January 2006, the Pollution Control Board summoned both the *Vasundhara* activists and the South City officials for a hearing. The South City body claimed that they had permission from the State Board 'to fill 1.31 acres of the water body on the condition that they would recreate 1.41 acres of a new water body.' Thus, the Pollution Control Board (PBC) ordered a probe and

later the PBC committee submitted a report, which was not particularly in favour of the builders, nevertheless, the constructions within the South City premises continued.¹

Ranu Ghosh, a cinematographer working on a project (2007) for Sarai (CSDS, Delhi) laments:

In appearance, it has never matched the idyllic image that the idea of a 'jheel'[water body/Lake] conjures up in our mind. Located in the densely populated Bikramgarh area, on its west side is the cluster of garages, on one side the tall towers of South City and all around it settlements of encroachers. The jheel itself is used as a dumping ground for wastes generated by these varied settlements. Yet, Kaustav Basu, a student of environment, has spotted 22 species of birds and 32 species of flora around this jheel – and several species of butterflies and grasshoppers. Among the species of birds, at least one, according to him, is an endangered species and among the plants, he has spotted a cluster of shrubs that are rapidly vanishing from the Kolkata landscape. In the good old Usha Factory days, when Joy Engineering Works had not sold off the property to South City, young boys used to spend their time catching fish in this jheel. They even remember seeing turtles in this biosphere. People's crass negligence and now

the advancing grip of South City is slowly suffocating the Jheel and snuffing out the biodiversity it supports.

Among other things, Ghosh's work (which includes an interview with an out of job labourer from the Usha factory) underlines the massive structural changes of our city. For instance, while South Kolkata was an extended part of the Black Town, it apparently did not lose much of its natural geographical patterns (unlike the Black Town in the north), until very recently. And, this was despite the inflow refugees over the years, and the ways in which they set up small houses, shops, and indigenous industrial units on various kinds of vacant land. Hence, the present shifts in our social spaces through the construction of the South City are significant in more ways than one.

Multiple images and reflections of the present: A plethora of meanings

I

In her introduction to 'Culture of Display' Bella Dicks (2003, p1)^{li} says:

Places today have become exhibitions of themselves. Through heavy investment in architecture, art, design, exhibition space, landscaping and various kinds of redevelopment towns, cities and countryside proclaim their possession of various cultural values- such as unchanging nature, the historic past, the dynamic future, multiculturalism,

fun and pleasure, bohemianism, artistic creativity or simply stylishness. These cultural values have come to be seen as a place's identity, the possession of which is key to the important task of attracting visitors. And this identity is expected to be easily accessed by those visitors or, to use a currently favoured term in urban design, to be *legible*.

While cultures of display are not new, the exhibition culture is very specific to European cultures and perhaps came to us through colonial encounters. For instance, Paris was reproduced, as 'display-cases' of 'modernity and Empire'; moreover, the first large scale exhibition (outside museums) was London's Great International Exposition held at Crystal Palace in 1851. Within our cultures (especially in Bengal), there is apparently nothing particularly comparable to this excepting the religious parades, which are largely very carnivalesque and subversive by nature, like the *Jele Parar Song*, where fishermen would dress up in ridiculous ways, and took out processions in the late 19th and early 20th Century, to caricature the *Bhadraloks*. Alternatively, perhaps more recently the *Durga Puja* decorations and cultures of visiting the *pandals* (make shift temples) portray emergent cultures of display.^{lii} However, the shifts in the present times or since 1980s show how 'visitability' and 'visibility' are also important features of the planning of public spaces. For instance, the use of glass in contemporary buildings, and presence of mirrors within such interiors, and also the use of close-circuit TV within these public domains reveal the underlying problems of cultures of seeing/being seen.^{liii} Once we enter these spaces we become aware that we are being 'seen', and therefore, we are expected to behave in specific ways, just as we indulge in various forms of window-shopping. Technology indeed is 'at the heart of contemporary cultural display.'

Structured like a ship or whatsoever, there are ‘decks’ or rather various levels at the South City Mall. The centre is left vacant; and the shiny floors reflect the starry lights placed above. There are shops, and rows of shops, with mannequins and men and ‘queens’; glass windows and mirrors, as well as other reflective panels that hold up to us our idealised self-images. Then there are (secret) CCTVs and (spectacular) digital billboards, which screen us and play with moving images. There are also multiplexes that showcase recent Bollywood films and Hollywood blockbusters. More recently, certain Bengali films are also being screened in the multiplexes.^{liv} Often several working class families living in close proximity visit (dressed up ‘for the mall’) this labyrinth of desire on the weekends or during the festivals. These visits which were particularly popular when the Mall was open for public in January 2008 seem to emulate cultures of visiting local fairgrounds. The variety of people and their costumes and gestures, remind one of the reminiscent sub-cultures, which are deeply connected to the vibrant cultural practices and fair-ground cultures associated with of *Durga Puja* or *Eid*.

Lefebvre (1974) writing about ‘social space,’ insisted that *‘(Social) space is a (social) product’*. He elaborated on the ‘science of space’ (underlining the physical space as well as the mental space) and highlighted how we confront ‘an indefinite multitude of spaces’. He asserts (1974, p.8):^{lv}

[E]ach one plied upon, or perhaps contained within, the next:
 geographical, economic, demographic, sociological,
 ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global.

Not to mention nature's (physical) space, of (energy) flows,
and so on.

In response to this, Harvey (1979)^{lvi} had written about 'Social Justice and the City,' and had theorized problems of geography and 'ghetto formation.' Interestingly, while globalisation tries to repress such spaces (the ghetto for instance) in its attempt to form a shopping mall, or a multiplex cinema perhaps, such large zones are seldom a space of total control. Sometimes, as we see in the case of the South City mall the repressed returns with great vibrancy to lay its claim as it were, on this 'space-ship,' that has 'landed' in their locality.

II

The neo-liberal economic policies of the Indian Government are projected through the interconnections between the spatial transformations of urban spaces, inflow of multinational investments, and the changes in everyday living, and consumption habits. Certainly, there is an unprecedented boom in land and property business and associated fields. The upwardly mobile neo middle-class (specifically the double income group), their spending habits and so called needs seem to have played a crucial role in the ways in which big cities are changing, and in the construction of housing complexes, shopping malls, and multiplex cinemas.^{lvii} The growth of multiplexes is certainly associated with the new economic policies that encourage new middle class lifestyles. To quote (Fernandes, 2004, p. 2415)^{lviii}:

The growing cultural visibility of the new Indian middle class marks the emergence of a wider national political culture in liberalising India. This visibility represents a shift from older ideologies of state socialism to a political culture that is centred on a middleclass-based culture of consumption. Middleclass consumers represent the cultural symbols of a nation that has opened its borders to consumer goods that were unavailable during earlier decades of state-controlled markets.

Therefore, within the structure of urban developments and emergent consumption economy, new leisure systems grow for the urban middle class. For instance, the Housing complexes and shopping malls also include Multiplex cinemas to increase ‘footfalls’ in a shopping mall. In addition, the policies to permit the multiplexes to deploy ‘dynamic ticket pricing’ outside of the taxes set for single theatres, as well as low or even zero degree of taxation during the first five years posit the multiplexes in an advantageous position compared to the single theatre with blurred projections, unclear sound, seats with bugs, dirty toilets and stale popcorns.^{lix}

Arguably, multiplexes are producing new kinds of cinema cultures and cinematic forms within the Bollywood^{lx}. Beyond the mainstream blockbuster mould (popularised by Yash Chopra productions, and Karan Johar and company) a new form of cinema with relatively smaller budgets, and realistic inclinations seem to become popular particularly with this new middle class. While Prasad (1998) wrote about the Hindi middle class cinema of the nineteen

seventies, he analysed how the neo-realistic mode played a crucial role in the formation of such aesthetics. In this context, the role of Bengali middle class and its ideologies were thought to be particularly significant. He argued that the 'feudal space' is relocated in these films 'in the space of modernity'; just as the class learns to address itself, beyond the community grid. While women's issues became crucial, problems of urban spaces, housing, jobs etc., that is the entire middle class experience of the city with its fears and aspirations became imperative in these films.^{lxi} The recent films, often described loosely as 'multiplex films' or films from the 'edge' (because of their production strategies), may actually be categorized as the 'neo middle class cinema,' as new urban spaces (particularly the shopping mall) and new corporate jobs as well as neo middle class ideology come up in films by Madhur Bhandarkar (like *Page3* (2005) *Corporate* (2006), or *Fashion* (2008)) et al. In fact, most of these films borrow TV aesthetics and its renditions of various modes of realism.^{lxii} For instance, the use of the news mode in *Black Friday* (Anurag Kashyap, 2007) and in *Dhobi Ghat* (Kiran Rao, 2011), or the TV serial's episodic narrative mode in *Life in a Metro* ((Arurag Basu, 2007), or the sport telecast structure in *Chakde! India* (Shimit Amin, 2007) or the MTV musical style in *Rock On* (Abhishek Kapoor, 2008) etc., are points for deliberations. In fact, *Love Sex Aur Dhoka* (Dibakar Banerjee, 2010), goes a step further and thus, both situates a murder-plot in a store, as well as uses images which refer to the CCTV resolutions, compositions etc. Moreover, the first episode refers to the cheap, locally made (and consumed) B-movies, just as the protagonist records his daily (love) life as a video-letter addressed to the filmmaker Aditya Chopra. Eventually the couple are brutally murdered by their kin, and the incident gets recorded in 'night-mode' on his video camera.

However, writing about the neo-middle class cinema and multiplexes it is crucial to note that, the multiplex/single theatre distinction is not as rigid as it is made out to be. For instance, Navina Cinema, which is located within a kilometre from the South city, and has ticket prices, which are one fourth of multiplex cinemas, in reality screens more or less the same films. Moreover, the distributors in Kolkata (like Shree Venkatesh Films) are mostly the same. Hence, this re-positions the point that when a gigantic shopping mall cum housing complex comes up in a locality, the matter is somewhat indeed complex, as it demonstrates rather complicated Global/Local tensions.^{lxiii}

Partha Chatterjee (2004)^{lxiv} writes about the urban structures and cultures of Kolkata, from the 1950s and 1960s, and the nature of its growth through the 1970s and 1980s. Further, he describes (2004, p. 145) how in the (imagined) post-industrial, global, ‘Bourgeois’ metropolis, “globally urban, consumer lifestyle and aesthetic will take root. There will be segregated and exclusive spaces for shops, restaurants, arts, and entertainment....” Of course, he hopes that, our social conditions will ‘corrupt’ such cities, which then will be ‘impure’ and ‘inefficient’. In point of fact, the conclusive section of the paper looks into the ‘corrupted’ nature of the South City, which so self-evidently aspires to be a global pad.

Structural transformation of the cityscape: Solace survives

While Partha Chatterjee’s recent article (2009: 263-283) on ‘An Equal Right to the City: Contests over Cultural Space in Calcutta,’^{lxv} is an interesting summation of the city’s development and the tussles over the social space (through theatre, various social groups, *Pujas*, and the game of football etc.); broadly speaking, in ‘Of Other Spaces’ Foucault^{lxvi}

criticizes our reading of histories predominantly through the temporal axis, and emphasizes on our need to ‘notice space’, and understand that it is not a ‘homogenous and empty space’ but ‘the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself a heterogeneous space’. Foucault proposes the concept of Heterotopias (as opposed to Homotopias or even Utopias), and writes about the various principles like the strangeness of ‘cemetery’, multiplicity of theatre (perhaps cinemas as well), as he links heterotopias with ‘slices of time’, like the museum or its opposite the fairground, as well as brothels and colonies etc. Finally he writes, ‘[t]he ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionages take the place of adventure, and police take the place of pirates.’ Briefly, in a sense, the South City mall is Foucault’s ship of sorts, or at least it is located on a ‘fairground’ which entails middle class apartments, as well as local shops, bazaar, mad men, dirty huts, old Mosques, college, and cemeteries.

Indeed, a recent Bengali film *Herbert* (by Suman Mukhopadhyay, 2006)^{lxvii} as well as *Mahanagar @Kolkata* (by Suman Mukhopadhyay, 2010) seem to address the mutations of the Kolkata cityscape, and acknowledge the heterogeneity of our urban landscapes. *Herbert* is a story of an under-educated orphan who is a ‘failure’ of sorts, but eventually becomes ‘successful’ as he learns to talk to ghosts, and ‘becomes’ a revolutionary through a series of unintentional events. *Herbert* chooses locations of north Kolkata, the old wrecked houses, railways tracks, river ways where signs of ‘modernity’ (like the dish antenna) leave a stain. More recently, *Sthaniya Sambaad* (Moinak Biswas and Arjun Gourisaria, 2010) tries to produce a historical trajectory of this development and violent changes. Referring back to Ghatak, and shooting in south Kolkata, Biswas and Gourisaria show the everydayness of

refugee live, and its vitality despite the moments under-developments. Presenting three major locations (including the ‘White Town’ and the ‘New Town’), and by using a language (*bangal bhasa*) that is lost in transition, the film produces a cinematic language, which is polyphonic, innovative and relevant.

Within these frameworks, the mall may be seen as the ‘populist insertion into the city fabric’. Jameson (1984)^{lxviii} may describe a place like the South City mall as a ‘new total space’ that ‘corresponds a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd’. Nevertheless, this space is a space of everyday negotiations, where besides the obvious environmental and structural ruptures the housing is also causing water, electricity and traffic problems. Moreover, while the gigantic ship/mall with sweet perfumed air as well as pleasant music draws us in; and as the ever burgeoning middle-class armed with credit cards head towards the mall, the outside, which it aspires to cut off, or ignore and repress, returns like the ‘real’ leaving its marks on the glossy glass skin of the mall.

The heterotopias Foucault writes about is not about a harmonious coexistence of the odds. In this/our case, different worlds are posited next to each other through a history of violence, rifts and struggle.^{lxix} Therefore, if the Global *imaginaire* hopes to suppress and dominate the local, sometimes this hierarchy is destroyed as sub-cultures (like *melas*, or loud programmes at the street corners etc.), and sub-spaces (like the local bazaar, and cemetery etc.) come flooding back with unpredictable dynamism. Moreover, a huge labour force that resides in the neighbouring colonies seem seize their rights to enter such spaces by joining in as sales persons in the numerous shops and restaurants. Seemingly, it is no longer about

horizontal positioning of different places and practices, but rather a vertical placement of diverse layers constantly fighting out each other, and reworking the binaries of White Town/Black Town, Elite/Working Class, and Global /Local.

Finally, it may be fruitful to use Michel de Certeau (1984, p.91-110) from *The Practice of Everyday Life* where he describes how ‘walking’ in the city re-produces its own topography. ‘They walk-...they are walkers...,’ he insists. ‘[W]hose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an “urban text” they write....’ He reads such walking as ‘speech acts’ as walking ‘creates a mobile *organicity* [emphasis added] in the environment, a sequence of phatic *topoi*.’^{1xx} Indeed, as a huge number of ‘non-buying’ working class families queue up on the weekends to mark their presence, and enter elitist power zones; one can hear their footsteps whispering as it were, as they leave their soiled footprints on middle-class aspirations.

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ⁱ A truncated version of the writing has been published as ‘The city in cinema, and cinemas in the city: South City Mall and locations of display’, in *Silhouette*, Vol. VIII, January 2010, Amitava Nag (ed), Kolkata and a shorter version has also been published in the Reader *Persistence of Vision: Pasts and Futures of Indian Cinema* (for the ‘You Don’t Belong: Pasts and Futures of Indian Cinema, Indo-China Dialogue on Film and Social Thought’ project, November, 2011, China). Visit: <http://westheavens.net/en/youdontbelongreader/>.

ⁱⁱ While the city is now known as Kolkata (its original Bengali name), it was formerly known as Calcutta.

ⁱⁱⁱ For further deliberations on the point of Indian modernity and its uneven growth see Chatterjee, Partha, 1997, *Our Modernity*, SEPHIS & CODESRIA, Rotterdam/Dakar.

^{iv} Pakistan and India were created on 14th and 15th August, 1947, respectively. Bangladesh then was part of Pakistan and was referred to as East–Pakistan, after its initial name East–Bengal. Bangladesh was formed in 1971, and remains a significant example of a nation-state that was formed on the basis of language and culture.

^v 2, 58,000 migrants sought shelter in West Bengal after the partition in 1947. This increased by 5, 90,000 people in 1948, and by 1,82,000 people in 1949. The census of 1951 put the Kolkata population as 2.7 Million. And, by 1961 the slum population was roughly about 6, 50,000. Many of the refugees worked in unorganised sectors, such jobs were remarkably different from their traditional occupations.

^{vi} This resulted in ‘encroaching’, which included ‘forcible occupation’ of vacant lands, railway lands, footpaths and so on, by families or by groups who seized private houses, waste lands and established ‘colonies’ with names like *Shaktigarb*, *Bijoygarb* etc. By 1949, there were 40 such colonies in the south-east of Kolkata. Many of these colonies were set up near Tollygunge where film studios and golf clubs occupied huge areas.

^{vii} Henri Lefebvre (1974), Michel Foucault (1977), and David Harvey (1989), Edward Soja (1989), Mike Davis (1990) as well as Fredric Jameson (1991) et al, are major thinkers on issues of space. Most authors writing on problems of space also refer back to the Marxian and Hegelian discussions of history and space. Writing about ‘The South City’ phenomenon I am covering multiple theoretical zones, which include issues of space in a more experiential and philosophical sense, as well as the politics of urban planning and geographies in a Global context, along with the questions of visual and popular cultures.

^{viii} I use the term ‘semi-modernities’ because the ways in which the Indian socio-economic conditions have developed and are caught up between various stages of semi-feudal orders, and industrialization as well as the present condition of (aspired) ‘post-industrial’ situation (to use E. Mandel’s 1978 formulations on ‘Late Capitalism’); and the historical juncture where factories are being shut down, moreover, on the same premises housing estates cum shopping malls are cropping up. Furthermore, the growth in various regions remains remarkably disparate (or underdeveloped) compared to the progress in urban sectors.

^{ix} Namely Kolikata, Sutanuti, and Gobindapur.

^x Sumanta Banerjee (1989, pp.19, 20) writes:

Sutanuti in those days was a major centre of handloom weavers who produced exquisite chintz. Rich Indian merchant families – the Basaks and the Setts- who had been trading in the community long before the advent of the British, used to operate from the village Gobindapur, While the majority of the inhabitants of the three village were agriculturalists or fishermen, the weavers and traders could be described as the first non-agricultural communities whose collaboration led to the emergence of the ‘bazaar’ or market settlement that was to remain the basic model of the urban development of the indigenous part of Calcutta,....

See Banerjee, Sumanta, 1989, *The Parlour and the Streets, Elite and Popular Cultures in the Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, Calcutta.

^{xi} On issues of colonial gaze and photography see ‘Photography and Colonial Modernity in Kerelam’, by Parayil, Sujith, in Manas Ray (Ed.), 2003, *Space, Sexuality and Postcolonial Cultures*, CSCS, Kolkata. Moreover, visiting either the colonialfilm.org.uk website or the paintings housed in the Victoria Memorial, Kolkata (especially works created by Mrs. Belnos and A. Colin as well as the landscape paintings), will show the manner in which the colonial gaze framed the natives as ethnographic specimens.

^{xii} The pun is intended, and is with reference to the book *City of Joy* (Dominique Lapierre, 1985) and the film with the same name (by Roland Joffe, 1992), and the ways in which these works represented Kolkata and its poverty, slums, rickshaw pullers, and semi-naked hungry people who are ‘rescued’ through White philanthropy.

^{xiii} For a primary study in history of ‘modern’ Indian see Sarkar, Sumit, 1984, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi.

^{xiv} See Nair, P. Thankappan, 2005, ‘The Growth and Development of Old Calcutta’ in Chaudhuri, Sukanta (Ed.), *Calcutta, The Living City*, Vol. 1, OUP, New Delhi, (First published in 1990), pp. 10-23.

^{xv} See Das Gupta, Siva Prasad, 2005, ‘The Site of Calcutta, Geology and Physiography’, in Chaudhuri, Sukanta (Ed.), *Calcutta, The Living City*, Vol. 1, OUP, New Delhi, (First published in 1990), pp. 2-4.

^{xvi} Job Charnock was the company agent who bought the land and produced the city of Kolkata.

^{xvii} The Nawab of Bengal had captured Fort William in 1756. But later that year Lord Clive and others arrived with large forces. While the British ‘recaptured’ Kolkata and also Chandernagore (which was a French colony then), it was at the battle ground of Plassey that the fate of India was sealed. In June 1757, the Nawab of Bengal lost to the British, and the British Raj was established in India.

^{xviii} In the 19th Century Kolkata was dominated by what is known as the ‘Babu Culture’, which primarily comprised the Hindus based in Kolkata living in the Black Town. The term *Babu* had more than one connotation, and was added to a name like the pre-fix ‘Mr’. However, *Babu* Culture was thought to be derogatory and different from *Bhadralok* or the English educated urban middle-class/professionals and their progressive practices. The ‘Babu Culture’, was at first dominated by landlords (particularly by the *Shobhabazar Raj-bari*); however, the leadership eventually passed on to the western-educated professionals or the middle-class. In everyday parlance, the term meant the extravagant and decadent ways of life of the *nouveaux riches*. This group comprised the absentee landlords, the business class, and agents of the British etc., who had large mansions, and Garden houses with mistresses et al. In fact, even when the professionals were often referred to as ‘*babu*’, he may not actually subscribe to the ‘distasteful’ *Babu* Culture. The *Babu* culture was also a sort of a reminiscent of the Nawabi culture, and was marked by an excessively life-style, even though the *babus* were also the connoisseurs of art, music, and theatre. The ‘*Babu* culture’ or the ‘cultural space of the *Babus*’ is popularly understood as a culture of urban, rich, with a penchant for women, wine, music and theatre. Recently, one of the curious readings of the ‘*Babu* culture’ has been done by Sarnath Banerjee in his graphic novel, 2007, *The Barn Owl’s Wondrous Capers*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

^{xix} Tollygunge is also the place where most of the film studios are located. The Bengal film industry is popularly known as ‘Tollywood’.

^{xx} While, they were initially ‘educated’ or trained to run the colonial state, (in Macaulay’s words ‘English in taste’ and ‘Indian in blood’) they eventually emerged as a forceful and influential group that questioned and resisted colonial exploitations. Thus, in the 19th Century, the growth of organised politics in Kolkata was associated with the rise of the educated middle class or the Bengali *Bhadralok*. Encounters with liberal-democratic bourgeois values through western education, literature, social organisations, and political parties gave the *Bhadralok* an ideological focus that eventually changed the power relations. The general category *Bhadralok* is perhaps best translated as the ‘English Educated Urbanized Gentlemen’ whose class, caste, and regional identities were often displaced in obscure ways on to the sphere of ‘culture’ and work. The outward manifestations of the *Bhadralok* to quote Sumanta Banerjee (1989, p.54) were:

(i) residence in a ‘pucca’ house...; (ii) attention to one’s sartorial style in public; (iii) use of chaste Bengali...; and (iv) a noticeable knowledge of English knowledge and manners.

^{xxi} Schools and college set up for educating the ‘natives’ in western thoughts and rationalism, enabled the *Bhadraloks* to understand the nuances of British political and legal structures, history of Europe; moreover, they read classics that included Shakespeare etc. Such encounters with western philosophy in the ‘Hindoo’ school and college eventually produced a liberal, politically aware Bengali middle class that in the course of time challenged British dominance.

^{xxii} Sarkar, Sumit, 1997, *Writing Social History*, OUP, Delhi.

^{xxiii} For further reading on the heterogeneity of Kolkata’s elite and popular cultures see Banerjee, Sumanta, 1989, *The Parlour and the Streets, Elite and Popular Cultures in the Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, Calcutta and also -----, 2000, *Dangerous Outcast, The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Seagull Books, Calcutta.

^{xxiv} Sumanta Banerjee (1989, p.23) writes:

Fort William where the ‘English settlers by degrees built themselves very neat, useful, if not elegant houses, laid out walks, planted trees, and made their own little district neat, clean, and convenient.’

^{xxv} Such phrases describing the city is part of its urban-folk lore, as books and films often refer to it as ‘The City of Joy’, while the Late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was severely criticised for naming Kolkata ‘A Dead City’,

which is supposedly steeped in its colonial past. Kolkata has also been depicted as ‘The City of Rallies’ (or ‘michiler nagari’).

^{xxvi} From Sarkar, Sumit, 1997, *Writing Social History*, OUP, Delhi.

^{xxvii} See Sarkar, Sumit, 1997, *Writing Social History*, OUP, Delhi.

^{xxviii} See Sarkar, Sumit, 1984, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi.

^{xxix} See Bhattacharya, Malini, 1983, Jan-March, ‘The IPTA in Bengal’ in *Journal of Art and Ideas*, No. 2, Delhi, pp. 5-22, also Biswas Moinak, 2002, ‘The City and the Real: Chinnamul and the Left Cultural Movement in the 1940s’, in Kaarsholm, Preben,(Ed.), *City Flicks, Cinema, Urban Worlds and Modernities in India and Beyond, Occasional Paper, no.22*, Roskilde University, Denmark.

^{xxx} Alok Bhalla (1994, 2006), Urvashi Butalia (1998), Veena Das (1990), Suvir Kaul (2001), Gyanendra Pandey (1994, 1997), and others have studied the issues of partitions with specific references to the case of Punjab. See Chatterji, Joya, 1994, *Bengal divided, Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947* (SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES 57), Cambridge University Press, UK, for further studies on Bengal.

^{xxxi} Most well known ones being and Partha Chatterjee’s (1985) and Sudipta Kaviraj’s(1995) works.

^{xxxii} See Chatterjee, Joya, 1994, *Bengal Divided, Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*, (SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES 57), Cambridge University Press, UK.

^{xxxiii} In ‘The City and the Real: Chinnamul and the Left Cultural Movement in the 1940s’, in Kaarsholm, Preben,(Ed.), *City Flicks, Cinema, Urban Worlds and Modernities in India and Beyond, Occasional Paper, no.22*, Roskilde University, Denmark.

^{xxxiv} From ‘The City and the Real: Chinnamul and the Left Cultural Movement in the 1940s’, in Kaarsholm, Preben,(Ed.), *City Flicks, Cinema, Urban Worlds and Modernities in India and Beyond, Occasional Paper, no.22*, Roskilde University, Denmark.

^{xxxv} From 1984, *Chitrabikshan* (Bengali), no. 18, 1-2; also see interviews of Ghatak in the 2000 edition of *Rows and Rows of Fences*, Seagull, Calcutta.

^{xxxvi} *Komal Gandhar* is part of Ghatak’s trilogy on partition made in the early sixties.

^{xxxvii} Apparently this film also negotiates Ghatak’s personal relationships with IPTA and his wife Surama Ghatak, which is seemingly also taken up in a more caustic way in his somewhat discursive film, *Jukti Tokko Aar Golpo* (1974).

^{xxxviii} See Sudhi Pradhan (Ed.), 1979, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, pp. 294-304, on the rifts within the front.

^{xxxix} See Mukhopadhyay, Deepankar, 1995, *The Maverick Maestro, Mrinal Sen*, Indus (An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers), New Delhi. Moreover, see Mrinal Sen’s interviews published in 2002, as *Montage, Life. Politics. Cinema.*, by Seagull books, Calcutta.

^{xl} In my paper titled ‘Calcutta, *Namesake* and the nostalgia for the present’, presented at the 32nd Annual American Studies Conference on ‘Perceptions of Space and the American Experience’ held in Ankara, Turkey, 2007, I discussed representations of certain Indian cities in the films made especially by the Indian Diaspora. In this paper, one of the key films used as a point of departure was *Namesake* (Mira Nair, 2007). Pitted against the North American cities, Kolkata appears as the ‘landscape of nostalgia’ through the compositions and juxtapositioning of the shots. Unlike New York (and its chilly winters), Kolkata it is not ‘normal’ as it were, and therefore cannot be addressed as a general way of being; instead it needs to be signified or ‘quoted’ through iconic outdoor shots or by evoking memories of typical images from other Indian melodramas. In short, there is an ‘aesthetic of the city’ as it were, which is repeated in *Namesake*.

^{xli} The present Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, (who was earlier the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India) during his tenure, as Finance Minister in the early nineties was instrumental in implementing neo-liberal policies and opening its door for the MNCs.

^{xlii} Noida, near Delhi, was a barren landscape, which has been turned into a large housing colony. At present Noida is an upcoming zone with colleges, resident training institutes, offices, hi-profile pubs etc. Indeed, it seems like an unreal, eerie, movie set; where people from diverse background have gathered to produce an imaginary city without a past. Note, in the last few years the number of crimes (gruesome murders actually) have been very high in Noida. Also Noida is a thorough fare between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

Also visit <http://www.cscsarchive.org:8081/Bangalore/Home.nsf> to view a collection of photographs along with commentary from the project “Worlding the City: The Futures of Bangalore” by Janaki Nair.

^{xliii} Globalization as a notion therefore, recasts our opinions of culture, identity, community, society, nation, space, and history through mediation. It tries to displace us from our local territory, and re-locate us in a ‘space-less, community-less, homogeneous culture’, despite the various forms of local/ global negotiations. It is not that the ‘local’ is can be altogether denied, but the local is gradually assimilated within the global, thereby, de-

contextualising 'original' contours. As a concept, globalization means a certain kind of 'time-space' compression, where media images play a crucial role, as screen becomes a powerful metaphor of our times. Simply, media plays a significant role in forming global identities.

^{xliv} The eastern part of Kolkata now referred to as the 'New Town' can truly be studied as the emergent 'Global' Kolkata, where housing estates, flyovers are cropping up, and wide meandering roads (for new branded cars) crisscross the area which were earlier agricultural low land.

^{xlv} See Harvey, David, 2005, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, OUP, USA.

^{xlvi} See 'Changing Scenes', Biswas, Moinak, 2010, *Sarai Reader 08: Fear*, CSDS, New Delhi. Visit: <http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/08-fear>

^{xlvii} In 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' republished in Featherstone, Mike (Ed.), 1999, *Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity*, Sage Publications, London.

^{xlviii} As described in the advertisements.

^{xlix} From the South City website, also see <http://www.southcityprojects.com/index.html>

ⁱ Excerpts from the report (from Ranu Ghosh's 5th Posting, on www.sarai.net):

"After detailed scrutiny of the different information made available before the Ccommittee, it is observed that before issue of Consent to Establish to Ms. South City project, no inspection was conducted by the State Board.... The committee surprisingly observed that before issuing permission for relocation of the water body in M/s South City project, no proper area was identified by the State Board officials, nor has taken any precautionary measure.... Even the Deptt. Of Environment issued a direction upon the State Board on 18.7.2005 under memo No: EN/10393/T-II-2/010/2004 to allow the project proponent to fill up the water body."

Having made these observations, the Committee has recommended:

"The entire work of the M/S South City Project should be closed for the following reasons:

i) Construction work of Tower III & IV have encroached the water body and also have developed by filling up the water body.

ii) Presently, M/S South City Project has failed to show any water body area of 1.31 acres for which M/s SCP obtained permission from the State Board to fill up.

iii) M/S SCP failed to show any area where 1.41 acres of land will be developed as water body as per their commitment against the filling up of the water body of 1.31 acres.

2. Tower III & IV should be demolished and the water body of Bikramgarh Jheel should be restored and Kolkata Municipal Corporation should demarcate the area – not only the side of M/S SCP, but also other parts should be restored," as has been done in the case of other water bodies in Kolkata?

ⁱⁱ See Dicks, Bella, 2003, *Culture on Display, The Production of Contemporary Visibility*, Open University Press, England.

- ^{lii} See Anjan Ghosh's essay 'Contested Spaces: Puja and its Publics in Calcutta' (under the 'Publics and Collectives in the City' section), in Ghosh et al edited, 2011, *Theorizing The Present, Essays For Partha Chatterjee*, OUP, New Delhi.
- ^{liii} In a recent conference on 'Media Morphologies, Infrastructures and technologies in Art, Cinema and Popular Culture', organized by Nieuwe Oogst foundation, held at Rotterdam, Netherlands, in September, 2011, Ajay Gandhi talking about Delhi's CCTV cultures and problems, described the idea of seeing/being seen (or voyeurism/exhibitionism) as '*Dekhna* and *Dikhava*'.
- ^{liv} For instance, the film *Ekti Tarar Khonje* (Avik Mukhopadhyay, 2010) depicting the journey of a small town boy (based in Chandannagore, which was a French Colony) to Kolkata in pursuit of stardom, was one of the first Bengali films to be released in multiplexes and simultaneously in international circuits. Illustrating the darkness of the city and its underbelly through images, dialogues as well as complicated ending, this narrative of a young dreamer turned gangster failed to impress middle-class audiences, though the film produced fervent discussions in the media and on social networking sites.
- ^{lv} See Lefebvre, Henri, 1974, *The Production of Space* (Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), Blackwell, UK/USA.
- ^{lvi} See Harvey, David, 1979, *Social Justice and the City*, Edward Arnold, London.
- ^{lvii} Furthermore, there appears to be a trickle down effect as shops in poorer sections of the city or in the lower middle class areas, along with lines of shops near the railway stations often sell cheap imitations of expensive gowns, casual wear (Jeans and T-shirt) etc.
- ^{lviii} See Fernandes, Leela (2004) 'The Politics of Forgetting: Class Politics, State Power and the Restructuring of Urban Space in India', in *Urban Studies, Vol. 41, No. 12*, pp. 2415-2430.
- ^{lix} I must thank Ardrian M. Athique for letting read his draft paper on multiplex cinemas. I have borrowed the information on multiplexes from his paper. Also see my paper 'Photoshop Landscapes: Digital Mediations and Bollywood Cities' on this topic, published in 2009, in *Journal of the Moving Image* 8, pp. 50-72.
- ^{lx} See Kaur R. and Sinha A. (Ed.), 2005, *Bollyworld, Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, Sage, New Delhi/ Thousand Oaks/ London.
- ^{lxi} See Prasad, M. Madhava, 1998, *Ideology of the Hindi Film, A Historical Reconstruction*. OUP, Delhi.
- ^{lxii} See Abhijit Roy, 2006, 'Live(li)ness and Network Publics in Post-Liberalisation Indian Popular Films', *Journal of the Moving Image*, No.5, for a discussion on televisual aesthetics in cinema.
- ^{lxiii} Similarly, the owner of Priya Cinema, one of the most popular middle-class theatres in South Kolkata, also have in their possession multiplexes located in New Town (Bioscope) and North Kolkata (Star).
- ^{lxiv} See Chatterjee, Partha, 2004, *The Politics of the Governed, Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Permanent Black, New Delhi.
- ^{lxv} In Kaarsholm, Preben and Hofmeyr, Isabel (Ed.), 2009, *The Popular and the Public, Cultural debates and struggles over public space in Modern India, Africa and Europe*, Seagull Books, London/NY/Calcutta.
- ^{lxvi} See <http://www.foucault.info./documents/heteroTopia/>
- ^{lxvii} An adaptation of a contemporary classic written by Nabarun Bhattacharya.
- ^{lxviii} See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 2006, Duke University, Durham (first published in 1984 as "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in *New Left Review*, Vol.146, pp. 53-92).
- ^{lxix} On of the glaring examples of this would be the vandalization of the luxury resort named Vedic Village, located in the New Town, in August, 2009. Apparently, two rival football teams were enraged and unhappy about the results. Thereafter, a more or less benign fight quickly turned enormously violent, as one group chased by another, sought refuge in the Vedic village. The place was eventually burnt down by the huge mob of about seven hundred people. Indeed, the situation immediately opened up a series of contradictions imbedded in the processes of post-colonial developments, followed by rapid post-liberalization growth.
- ^{lxx} See De Certeau, M., 1984, 'Walking in the city' in *The practise of everyday life*, University of California Press, Berkeley.