Revisiting the City–Capital Symbiosis
Claims to ‘City’zenship in the Contemporary Indian City

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The urban is related to the capital through the very notion of accumulation. What goes into building the urban, both materially and perceptively is the accumulated capital, which in turn gets both (re)produced and consumed within the same set-up. The present circulation and accumulation of global capital has resulted in the creation of First World spaces within Third World cities, heterotopias which complicate claims to urban “city”zenships. The emergence of capital-infected cities and heterotopias is explored along with differential claims to urban “city”zenship using an interface with the Indian city as a context.

The Idea of a ‘City’

The complexity that a city stands for cannot be confined within the understandings of any particular discourse of knowledge; instead, the understanding borrows from a spectrum. Any discipline that has dealt with the city has finally added a bit of its expertise to its analytical understanding. The science of the city, if any, is an amalgamation of theories, practices, contents and concepts. It has been conceptualised as an organism, an oeuvre, an imagination, a commodity, a market, a spatial manifestation for democracy, a society almost at the level of perfection, and most conveniently, an ever incomplete transition. Today, understanding the city is therefore undoubtedly hyper-interdisciplinary.

In an attempt to develop a philosophy of the city or to negate a linear approach in the process, Henri Lefebvre (1996: 86) explained its birth and evolution precisely through the ancient Greek and Roman ways of sophisticated living within particular units of geographic space they called cities. He explained that these cities were born when a community or a tribal group came together to occupy a section of land which was privately owned by the community. Thus, it was private property at a communal level. And, within this community, a small minority exercised control over others, especially women, children,
slaves, and foreigners. This was the state of democracy; democracy, because a community was in charge. The charge, however, was oligopolised. Thus, as Marx believed, it was a democracy of unfreedoms.

Lewis Mumford, Gaston Bardet and others felt that an ideal city must be “free from division of labour, social classes and class struggles;” instead, they should make a “community” and control the “management of this community” (Lefebvre 1996: 97). Lefebvre called them philosophers, and their ideas of a city, a “model.” He felt that their conception of present-day freedom was aligned with the freedom conceptualised in the Greek cities. Thus, they thought of the modern city according to a model of the antique city, which was at the same time identified with the ideal and the rational city. And, this model, Lefebvre felt, was an “ideological extrapolation.”

The identity of a “city” is interestingly intertwined with the entity of “society” through a network of relations, “whether private property relations (Marx), structures of legitimate domination (Weber) or the division of labour (Durkheim)” (Holton 1986: 19).

Marx certainly wavered between treating the city as an autonomous generic structure to be found in all societies characterised by private property and the division of labour, and viewing it as a heterogeneous institution whose form varied according to the property relations of different modes of production. (Holton 1986: 20)

When these relations change, society responds by bringing about changes in the city or in its idea. However, Lefebvre made it clear that the city is not merely an outcome, it has its own evolution.

A city is as much a manifestation of social reality as it is that of art. Though the “city” and the “urban” are conceptualised differently, they are not divorced from one another. The city must pertain to the standards of what is understood by urban, that is, the lifestyle, the progress, and the crisis arising from the urban condition as well. Similarly, the urban cannot sustain only as a feeling or as a philosophy; it requires the realities of a city. A city, therefore, is as metaphorical as it is real. It is observably “‘a prominent feature of social life,’ ‘a major causal factor in the process of social change and ‘the locus … of transition to modern forms of social structure’” (Holton 1986: 19–23).

Lefebvre, however, criticised the continuities, the vision of the city as an organism or a continuously evolving entity through time. This is because he believed that these approaches of continuities remove the specificities of urban realities that are otherwise prominent. The specific is quite complete in itself. Discontinuities, he argued, are thus obvious and they exist not between city formations and social relations, but also within the relations between and among individuals, groups, and entities.

While Durkheim and Marx saw modern society as increasingly obliterating distinctions between city and countryside through the progressive ‘urbanisation’ of society itself, Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth (himself heavily influenced by Simmel’s student, Robert Park) chose to maintain an emphasis on the distinctive character of ‘urban’ social life as such. The focus here is in a sense not urban as such but metropolitan … For Simmel and Wirth it was the distinctive and autonomous cultural features of the metropolis which encouraged them to reassert urban distinctiveness … In the metropolis, direct interaction between persons known to each other gave way to a greater impersonality, producing enlarged individual freedom, a stronger sense of individual self, and a more powerful calculative element in social life. (Holton 1986: 24)

Anthony Giddens conclusively provided “three logical alternatives to defining the city”:

(i) As a generic universalistic and autonomous institution.
(ii) As a non-universal historically contingent but still autonomous institution.
(iii) As a non-autonomous institution subsumed within some more fundamental pattern of social relations (Holton 1986: 25).

Cities, therefore, mirror relations and these relations metamorphose as society modernises irrespective of any particular period through time. The idea of a city is an evidence of change conceptualised as “modernisation” characterised by a more intricate division of labour, new ways of life, and constantly accumulating capital. The perceptions, thus, progress as one meanders through the interconnected and ever-evolving ideas of the city, the urban, the metropolis, and so on. The city–capital interrelationship can be discussed with greater clarity once an understanding of capital is attained.

The Ambiguity Called ‘Capital’

Urban inequalities become inevitable when cities become markets and residents become buyers or sellers or both. The paradox of an existence as such emerges through the twin processes of wealth creation and its variable accumulation. Wealth, simply manifested in commodities, as Marx explains, is desired because it fulfils human needs. Without much delay, its exchange value first and money value next is realised over and above its basic use value. This perception attaches fetish to wealth not by virtue of the want it satisfies, but through the promise of more wealth it is likely to acquire, thus facilitating accumulation. The lure thus shifts from wealth itself to the pleasure of accumulating the same, which, in turn, has the addictive promise of further accumulation embedded in its system. Thus comes about a distinction between “money that is money only, and money that is capital” (Marx 1867: 1). However, not all can be blamed on the structure called the market. For, if the market operated within its set rules and logic, then all that is produced would be consumed and only all that could be consumed would be produced. That is, the perfectly antagonistic curves of demand and supply would finally attain balance on the fulcrum of price. The rules of the game are breached through “surplus,” its production, hoarding, and injection, and finally overflow that generates the secondary and tertiary circuits of capital flow over and above the primary (Harvey 2005: 112).

However, it is important to mention that surplus ceases to be the problem only if it finds justified distribution, which, more often than not, is socially conditioned and follows the capital–labour hierarchies. Therefore, the imbalances of the production process seep into the distribution process as well. Just because the labourer surrenders all claims on the product, the capitalist claims it all, thereby leaving the labourer with the value of labour only (Harvey 1982: 42–43). By virtue of this skewed system of
distribution, the capitalist manages the largest share of the surplus, and is therefore in a position to invest in fixed assets besides investing in the ongoing production–consumption process, thereby generating a subsequent circuit of capital (Har- vey 2005: 118). This is possibly why Marx called capital a “pro- cess—as value ‘in motion’ undergoing a continuous expansion through the production of surplus value” (Harvey 1982: 83).

More precisely, Marx explains “capital” as accumulated wealth and calls it a natural tendency of humans. From this emerges an idea that classical economists, quite incorrectly, tried endorsing. They theorised that capital can be accumulated either by controlling consumption or by extracting it out from circulation, precisely through the processes of hoarding and consumption of the surplus by unproductive labour, respectively. And, hoarding was further mistakenly equated with “capitalist production.” Marx objected to this equation with the argument that accumulation cannot occur through hoarding or extraction out of circulation. This is because either of the two, very naturally, will prevent surplus from becoming capital. It is only through sustenance within circulation that value can be added and capital created.

Circulation of capital is shrouded in its own spatio-temporal ambiguities. The very direction of capital flow has not been assertively concluded. One is yet to decide whether capital moves from capital-rich regions/persons to capital-starved ones or otherwise. If the latter is true, then the possibility of convergence is obliterated as divergence appears most obvious. Piketty, through an extensive chronological and evidenced research, has argued that “some people believe that inequality is always increasing and that the world is by definition always becoming more unjust. Others believe that inequality is naturally decreasing, or that harmony comes about automatically, and that in any case nothing should be done that might risk disturbing this happy equilibrium. Given this dialogue of the deaf, in which each camp justifies its own intellectual laziness by pointing to the laziness of the other” (Piketty 2014: 9), it becomes crucial to contextualise, rather than theorise. He situated himself within the school that believed that a clash of the classes and a doomed fate of ever-increasing population figures are not inevitable. Convergence will come about through diffusion in skill, education, and even technology, and soon, human capital will outdo financial capital. Accumulation and therefore socio-economic divergence will occur, but convergence shall follow. Piketty’s (2014: 14) stand can be summarised in a single sentence: “Growth is a rising tide that lifts all boats.” Also, one needs to realise that capital flows are not unidirectional and irreversible, instead they are circular.

Neil Brenner (1998: 1) conceptualises the inherent spatial contradiction between fixity and motion in the circulation of capital “between capital’s necessary dependence on territory or place and its space-annihilating tendencies.” Although both accumulation and diffusion of accumulated capital are realities at varying space-time locations, yet, the very creation of capital has an embedded addiction for accumulation; also, diffusion or convergence is preconditioned by divergence or accumulation.

Addiction to Accumulation
Production turns capitalist production when the motive turns towards the generation of surplus. “Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation” (Marx 1867: 8) in lure of wealth accumulation.

There are two branches of discussion that take off from here. First concerns the term “reproduction,” and the second is “capitalist relation.” The second needs explanation first because besides capital itself being a problem, the capital–labour relation is another. A market arrangement incorporates three parties, the buyer, the seller, and the commodity. If the commodity is inanimate, then, in the real world, the two former parties are left to interact with each other. But, a capitalist arrangement has room for another kind of buying and selling, where the commodity is not inanimate; it is human labour embodied in living human beings. This is the type wherein the ones who possess labour and are willing to sell it if one can manages to find a buyer in lure of both money (wage) and commodities that one can purchase thereafter. This is pretty much the same incentive for anyone to sell any commodity. What is interestingly different is the understanding that by deciding to take one’s labour to a market and parting with it for wage, one has simultaneously decided to alienate one’s labour (a part of the human self) to its buyer, the capitalist. Therefore, when the commodity using this labour is finally produced, its value added over and above the initial investment does not belong to the labourer, although one’s labour is what is embodied in the surplus or added value of the commodity. Instead, it becomes the sole property of the capitalist, who had not just purchased service from the labourer, but all claims and rights to the same as well. However, the capitalist has no contribution in adding this surplus value, yet enjoys it all alone.

By virtue of the reproductive character of capitalist produc- tion, surplus keeps getting generated and labour keeps getting alienated as the capitalist relation recurs. In fact, as Marx clarifies, because the process is recurrent, alienation occurs through the path from an initial investment to the final twin stages of production and value addition. This is what he calls as simple reproduction. When reproduction in turn becomes recurrent, the labourer gets the chance to sell one’s retained labour power and alienation continues. The capitalist, who is the sole owner of this alienated labour embodied in the surplus value of the commodity produced, consumes only a part of it, and the rest is converted into money. Thus emerge the capitalist’s bourgeoisie tendencies. And, individuals who had met each other in a market as buyers and sellers, now face each other on the other end of the process of transaction as capitalists and workers, bourgeoisie and proletariat, as classes in conflict, as the process continuously continues. Therefore, simple reproduction leads to capitalised surplus value, and extended reproduction leads to an addictive accumu- lation of capital.

The surplus thus created has two parts: one consumed by the capitalist and the other employed as capital, which in turn
accumulates. Thus, if the share of one part increases, the other, most naturally, decreases. But, it is entirely upon the owner of this surplus to determine the shares. The capitalist, in order to become a bigger (more powerful) capitalist, must enrich oneself; thus, they must accumulate as much capital as possible. However, for an individual capitalist, how much capital one can accumulate is directly related to the amount of surplus one earns. It is only after determining the amount of surplus that decisions can be taken. The surplus earned in turn depends upon how productive the labour power was, which in turn is dependent upon the extent of labour exploitation. The lower the wages, the more the earning.

With a given degree of exploitation of labour-power, the mass of the surplus-value produced is determined by the number of workers simultaneously exploited; and this corresponds, although in varying proportions, with the magnitude of the capital. The more, therefore, capital increases by means of successive accumulations, the more does the sum of the value increases that is divided into consumption-fund and accumulation-fund. The capitalist can, therefore, live a more jolly life, and at the same time show more “abstinence.” And, finally, all the springs of production act with greater elasticity, the more its scale extends with the mass of the capital advanced. (Marx 1867: 17)

Therefore, once primitive accumulation occurs, capitalist accumulation follows most organically, keeping the addiction alive.

In fact, the addiction only gets chronic with time, leading to privatisation of some very crucial resources like water and land, as in the case of India. Land acquisitions have been leading to the displacement of the peasant population and creation of an extremely vulnerable “landless proletariat” (Harvey 2003: 145). Ranabir Samaddar (2008: 19) explains how the self-employed, the wage labourers and the homeworkers become “physical sites for primitive capital accumulation.” This is because primitive accumulation does not really come to an end to make way for capitalist accumulation; it continues, using the powers of the state only to accelerate the latter (Harvey 2003: 91).

Capital-infected Cities

For capitalism to survive, the process of surplus production must continue, and all barriers must be overcome. If labour is short, then new labour sources must be found through immigration and so on, or the existing labour force must be disciplined. New markets may be found if the existing one gets exhausted. Innovations must never stop. New credit sources must be found, though Harvey calls the capital involved in credits as fictitious capital that only creates an illusive production. Thus, it is an amazing mix of realisation and speculation. Capitalism, therefore, emerges to be a maze of illusions. The seeds of downfall are thus embedded in its very emergence. The capitalist needs to make sure that the primary circuit naturally terminates into the secondary, and the secondary into the tertiary. Basically, all methods must be employed so as to get the competition going, and its geographical periphery must be continuously expanded. This ceaseless competitive mindset may encroach upon nature’s ability to supply raw material, for example, and ruin societies as well. Also, it can strike a counter blow. In any case, if the surplus fails to get channelised, then either it gets devalued or destroyed.

Here comes in urbanisation. This is a process that has all the potential to generate successful channelisation of the surplus product and ensure continuation of surplus production, keeping capitalism on the go. This is because the process of city growth or expansion absorbs the surplus labour and capital and creates the necessary market as well. As Harvey explains, urbanisation is a class phenomenon, and it occurs through the process of accumulation. Therefore, urbanisation is a fallout of capitalist accumulation, and it is a tool for its continuance as well. Urbanisation is, therefore, that trump card of capitalism which makes it a self-sustaining process.

The urban, therefore, is related to capital through the very notion of accumulation. What goes into the building of the urban, both materially and perceptively, is the accumulated capital, which in turn gets both (re)produced and consumed within the same set-up. However, the urban acquires potential of such strength not in mid-air, but through an extensive history of self-disempowerment, whereby capitalism injects that kind of capacity within the entity called a city to fuel and sustain a gigantic mechanism of the stature of itself. Capitalism as a mechanism moulds particular geographical units called cities through a sustained injection of its venom of capital so as to suit itself, protect it, sustain it, and ensure its survival if the need be so. And, “capitalists as a class—often through the agency of the state—do invest in the production of conditions which they hope will be favourable to accumulation, their own reproduction as a class and their continuing domination over labour” (Harvey 2005: 114). However, “under capitalism there is, (then) a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time” (Harvey 2005: 114). Therefore, capital’s relation with the city needs to be realised through time.

The point from where the city can be problematised is the process of industrialisation. This is the point and the process that has been instrumental in bringing about the major transformations that a city has experienced. The precise problem with industrialisation was that with all the technological progress, only a few could improve their living conditions, while most were still poverty-stricken. Also, because there was overall economic growth, even stagnation appeared like reduction in the standard of living for a certain section of urban citizenry (Piketty 2014). Industrialisation was, thus, seen to be the tool that induced the urban with its given problems and brought about a simultaneous change in the urban reality embodied in a city. This changing nature of society that inhabitants and others began experiencing within the urban confines with the onset of industrialisation could be summarised through the process called urbanisation grossly, if not precisely, which in turn had been initiated and sustained through an addictive production and uncontrolled injection of “capital” conceptualised as accumulated wealth.

It is not that cities did not exist in the pre-industrialised era. Cities existed even then, and in all their grandeur. But, that
world was an entity dominated by culture and not capital, producing oeuvres (having use value) and not products (having exchange value). Industrialisation created this monstrous entity called the “capitalist bourgeoisie” making the city a powerful reality. The industry used the city to its utmost advantage and extracted all that it could bringing it to a state that is almost like a skeleton. The evidences would be in the form of squatters, places which had very little to contribute to these industries in terms of labour or market or otherwise. Thus, a twin process was operative—industrialisation and urbanisation—complementary, yet conflicting. The processes not only have the capacity to alter the urban scenario, it can simultaneously change the equations between entities like the rural and the urban, the natural and the artifice, mostly intensifying the divides. The arrangement changes from being cores and peripheries to networks for industries to benefit from. The cores that are retained, possibly in the form of nodes at the vertices of the mesh become centres of accumulated power. “It survives because of this double role: as place of consumption and consumption of place” (Lefebvre 1996: 73).

Therefore, “the crisis of the city can be perceived through distinct problems and problematical whole” (Lefebvre 1996: 74). The whole in turn is interpreted through a time–space continuum. In fact, “under capitalism ... there exists a tendency to drive beyond all spatial barriers and to annihilate space with time” (Harvey 2005: 117). “Events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe” (Fyfe and Kenny 2005: 59) and processes “do not simply cross borders, but operate as if borders were not there” (Fyfe and Kenny 2005: 59).

The alternative argument designates all cities as world cities because, within the networks of global capital circulation, each is woven into an interconnected metageography. With capital also circulates labour, thereby leading to “peripheralisation at the core” (Hamnett 2005: 78). It is, therefore, important to conceptualise cities both as objects and subjects of enquiry. This is more so because the nations of the world do operate from cores, peripheries, or semi-peripheries; at the most from cores within peripheries and peripheries within cores. Individual cities will have an impact on the phenomena of socio-eco-politico-cultural globalisation, and there will be an impact on the economy, society, politics and culture of an individual city by virtue of globalisation. Therefore, as the world market integrates, cities polarise. Having said that, it is also important to understand that the interconnectedness is a reality superimposed on the reality of segregation. Therefore, for the developing or so-called Third World cities, the position in the global hierarchy does determine the bargains and the capacities to integrate thereafter.

A point in time arrives whereby all powers must be utilised to enhance the reaches of this market so much so that the tendency is towards generating a city that ceases to be a society. Operating on the instincts of freedom and individual liberties, neoliberalism emerged to reassert the tenets of capitalism. It attained such heightened success that it has become equivalent to common sense. It stands for notions like free market, free trade, accelerated power of the market and dwarfed power of the state. It creates a situation whereby the market becomes the internal regulator of the state, but the state ceases to be the external regulator of the market (Leitner et al 2007: 3). Neoliberalism arrived as an attempt to make capital available to a class. In the context of India, it was the economic restructuring that was instrumental in bringing about these transformations. This new economic policy benefited only a small minority of capitalist Indians, and it posed huge miseries to a majority of the country’s population, about 700–1,000 million Indians. This includes “urban proletarians,” “semi-proletarians,” “urban small-scale business owners,” “peasants,” “rural areas,” “informal sector,” and so on (Das 2015: 718).

This process does not lead to economic growth as much as to the channelising of capital away from the other class (Harvey 2007), both contained within the urban. The polarisations and the disposessions in India become so stark that the outcomes become fatal. “Unable to make ends meet, urban workers are committing suicide as in the erstwhile boom town of Tirupur” (Das 2015: 718). Therefore, capitalism, through a control of this neoliberal market structure, tightens its grip over its saviour: urbanisation.

**Economic Expansion**

Not just urbanisation, even suburbanisation (of both industries and residences), and gentrification can save capitalism from the crisis of accumulation. However, cities expand because their economies do, not societies. Economic expansion did traditionally mean geographical expansion as well, in the sense that a city needed to physically expand so as to incorporate the expanded economy, thereby utilising capital. This process is called suburbanisation. However, the idea of geographical expansion ceased to be interpreted as physical expansion alone, and it also started to mean upgradation of city spaces or gentrification, which also requires capital (Smith 1996: 19).

And, if both these close cousins of urbanisation are funded by an individualistic competitive capitalist regime, then it becomes difficult to fuel a collective movement for a right to the same city from an urban set-up, which claims to free the city from the very clasps of capital itself. An attempt to restructure or reorganise a city always takes away from one section and caters to the other. It leads to accumulation through dispossession. These policies sometimes generate a “market of dispossession.” Thus, what appears as “progressive solutions” are actually oppressive mechanisms, or it is what Harvey (2012: 20–25) rightly terms “creative destruction” manifested through segregations in “city”zenships and city spaces.

Migration is one of the major facilitators of these segregations and an important instrument for labour devaluation. Ranabir Samaddar (2008: 13) writes,

In one city, Mumbai, about 80% of workers constituting low income households are migrants. They are mostly illiterate and unskilled. They have very little bargaining power, and many do not enjoy urban services such as, water, electricity, sewerage, and transport. They do not have regulated working hours, they are victims of the “wrath of local elements,” and suffer from harsh working or living conditions,
and as if this is not enough, they are also objects of threats from militants, security forces, toughs, touts, administration, judiciary, and xenophobic rabblerousers against “outsiders.”

This creative destruction, in no way, is to be considered as a random phenomenon. There exists proper organisation (Chatterjee 2008: 58) and sequential regimes (Levien 2015: 146) in the process.

Urban ‘City’zenship

In the words of Park (1967) precisely, the city is an attempt to generate a space designed as per one’s own desires. It is one of the highest forms of imagination. A city generates a commonality and gets identified by the same. The residents are the bearers of this and they, in Harvey’s (2012) words, are the “urban commons.” The problem, he clarifies, is not with the creation of this commons, but with the realisation that each within this common entity is an individual, finally with personal profits to maximise. The problem, he explains, is not the use of common resources within a city that is shared by one and all residing within its domain, but the desire of each sharing party to think of oneself in isolation from the others.

In countries like India, the problem exists at two levels. First, a certain section of the urban common goes completely undocumented and is therefore invisible, and second, there exist pronounced differences among those included. This points at the fact that, even after inclusion, there exist exclusions, thereby confirming the existence of individualistic bargains rather than a common whole in post-liberal Indian cities.

Some prominent examples come from Dharavi in the light of Mega-project Development in Globalising Mumbai, also auto drivers amidst an abrupt vehicular fuel transition phase in Delhi, and in the context of differential imagineering, place marketing and environmental urbanism in the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, to mention a few (Desai and Sanyal 2012).

The hit is thus directly on capitalist tendencies plaguing the inhabitable world. Harvey insists that one should be able to think beyond the clichés that ideology stands divided between a complete state ownership of resources or a complete privatisation on the other hand, or that one form of common identity must therefore be relevant. The complications of the problem are thus revealed.

One understands that there are many shades of grey within the apparent black and white. Also, the entity called the commons is anything but homogeneous. Eventually, one tends to ask: Which commons? Whose interest? “Whose vision of the future is being produced; and what memories of the past are being preserved” (Fyfe and Kenny 2005: 1)? Thus, the solidarity concept becomes baseless to begin with; over and above this if the socio-economically powerful segment of the society garners all the resources, then the defeat gets entrenched. Sometimes, the violation is purposive, but sometimes, it can be eventual as well; for instance, vehicles claiming the roads more than pedestrians or protestors. The solution is sought in utilising private interests in attaining the common good under the supervision of a state within a free and fair market structure.

The problems of this ambitious attempt are multiple. First, private interests most definitely fail to serve common goals. This is because an individual creates value by mixing his own labour with land, and therefore the right to individual property is one’s natural right. However, when this same individual exchanges the value that they have created for something else produced by someone else within a free and fair market, then the effect gets negated. Second, markets are seldom free and fair. And third, the state often fails to set things straight with its right to intervene.

If urbanisation is the required fuel for the survival of capitalism, especially when it is in a state of crisis, then the latter shall use all of its forces to keep the former going. This leads to an inevitable class struggle. This is because, even under the most feasible of circumstances, capitalism will not be able to mobilise the entire population in an urban area to its advantage. Therefore, a struggle is obvious. The urban being the required site for political expression, and revolution in cities has a long and connected history. A splinter somewhere has often proved to be a flame elsewhere. The question to be asked is: Is there anything particularly special about urban spaces and life that triggers these movements, or is it only a part of a larger process? How significant is the geography of the “urban” in initiating and sustaining struggles? However, there are localised labour struggles, and there are larger global anti-capitalist struggles. Struggles at different levels and scales must be consolidated. The comrade and the citizen should be able to move hand in hand. Different pathways to the same goal must converge at some point, and the city can prove to be an apt site for the same.

The problem in question is extremely grave because a feral (untamed and wild) capitalism is rampant. It is “a political economy of mass dispossession,” “of predatory practices,” “of daylight robbery,” “of defraud and steal,” etc. Thus, what a street rioter does on the streets, a smart chief executive officer (CEO) does it under the covers. The “animal spirits” are the “new normal” (Harvey 2012: 156).

The capitalist form of urbanisation thus tends to destroy anything that is social and for all. At the other end of the process, what it creates are the uncommons whose interests ensure its survival. This is precisely about the commodification of cultures, history and basically human lives and experiences. It is an attempt by capitalism to extract a value from these as well, by selling them in a so-called market like any other commodity at a price. It must be understood here that capitalism plays a dual role in this case. On the one hand, it takes away from the uniqueness of the concerned items of localised nature by making them saleable commodities at the world market. It also adds value, appreciation and recognition to the same.

However, it should not be confused with the understanding that capitalism is like an instrument that helps in maintaining the uniqueness of these experiences because capital cashes
from cultural differences adding value to it in the process. A shameless injection of capital thus infects cities through alienation, commodification of cultures, exploitation, monetisation of local cultural differences and so on in the name of “authenticity, originality and tradition” (Harvey 2012: 112). The impact of the injection of capital stands exposed and explicit on the city spaces, thereby colouring and imaging the same. This generates heterotopia and bursts the bubbles of utopia.

**Utopias and Heterotopias**

An unexplained variety of utopia is attached to the city and the life it entails. Certain ways of life are identified with a particular city, possibly at a given point in time across city spaces or through time in one place, thereby generating images. Strangely though, more often than not, these imaginations find truth in an unrealistic space of existence alone. Fundamentally, unreal city spaces form the most obvious realities. Urban utopias manifest in urban societies in the most perfected forms so as to help generate nostalgia, which is the memory of an existence that never was, but was, and probably still is the most desired (Foucault 1984). That is the kind of desirability and expectation that a city weaves, leaving it no choice but to be tailor-made for the “urban commons,” who harbour such imaginations and memories.

Foucault explains heterotopias as antithetical to utopias. These are places which exist for sure in reality. They are the “other” spaces of exclusion as opposed to those of everyday use and participation (Foucault 1984). With the splurge of capital into cities, there emerges these spaces of otherness within the urban whole, for example, an entertainment complex or a gated community. The privatisation of city space introduces these processes of otherness. Urban land starts getting treated as the crucial tool for economic opportunities. This disables perceiving urban land different from the property market. Once that happens, yield from such pieces of land has to be maximised. And, the moment this becomes the popular notion, the economically less privileged class has to be shown the way out of the so-called productive lands (Harvey 2012: 2). The market of this gigantic stature has its roots spread into fields like health, education and so on, conveniently replacing the state from these spheres in the fear of preventing any kind of equalisation that the state might just indulge upon. Even resources like urban open spaces, parks and so on, which are made for all, also become relatively privatised in the sense that their absolute availability declines, which leads to the relative eviction of the un-affording classes. The city therefore turns into a site of the inevitable class struggle.

The othering process has been so rampant, given the understanding that neoliberalism is almost common sense that it is gradually becoming synonymous to mere differences. The entire city is becoming heterotopic, and exclusion is the new normal. The private spaces replace the public spaces and produce privatised spaces of public use, thereby leading to both apparent and/or absolute disappearance of the latter (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008). What disappears in the process is the common entity of the city and its single standing image which draws from and generates heterogeneities to the urban commons.

If peripheralisation of cores is an evidence of reorganised global spaces, then stretching cores to the extent of peripheries is an evidence of reorganised city spaces due to globalisation. The realtors and investors, in order to draw out profit from the peripheries, pull the city outwards. This makes the suburbs appear relatively attractive. This urban geographical industrialisation and urban capital accumulation create places that include “territorial concentrations of related activities,” “new industrial locales,” “new constellations of employment, transport and residence,” basically exciting new “suburban spaces.” “These extrusions of the growing city are not altogether random … the complexity of metropolitan expansion requires … non-determinate, non-uniformitarian theory.” “There are no ‘normal’ cities and suburbs, no uniform growth paths” (Walker and Lewis 2005: 121–27).

“The distinctive features of postmodern urbanism mark a radical break from the modernist city” and generates brand new urban landscapes like “decentralised urban sprawl, gated communities and edge cities,” which are new cities on the edge of old cities. These new cities are also “privotopias,” and “fortified enclaves,” that is, spaces that emerge with the co-emergence of private interest interpreted as common interest and which generate a network of surveillance. It simultaneously gives birth to new entities like “commodities” (commodified communities), “cybergoisie” (an elite group of chief executives and entrepreneurs), “protosurfs” (marginalised surplus labour), and results in the consequent emergence of “containment centres,” “interdictory spaces” and “street warfare” with a tendency towards the rise of “cultures of heteropolis” (Dear and Flusty 2005: 138–41).

Cities under postmodern urbanisms are heteropolises by virtue of an untamed cosmopolitisation, so much so that the differences and the segregations become the new sameness, which is both unimagined and manipulated. The visible evidence appears and reappears in the form of “hetero-architecture,” which is a manifestation of Raban’s “hard city.” The soft, though invisible, spreads roots through a customised and “an individualised interpretation of the city, a perceptual orientation created in the mind of every urbanite.” The hard and the soft are not however dichotomous, this is because “dreamscapes are easily convertible into marketable commodities, that is, saleable pre-packaged landscapes engineered to satisfy fantasies.” However, the deal is not available to all city residents, in fact very few can even afford such expensive fantasies. “In the consequent ‘carceral city,’ the working poor and destitute are spatially sequestered on the ‘mean streets,’ and excluded from the affluent ‘forbidden cities’ through ‘security by design’” (Dear and Flusty 2005: 141–43). The obsession to protect the elite and their right to fantasies is so assertive that criminalisation of the poor appears most obvious.

The two English words that continuously echoed through the body of the discussion above are “new” and “hetero,” one complementing the other. What is important is the realisation of the fact that it is the new that is hetero and the hetero that is
new. This is precisely the point where the problem resides. As Marx explains, once a capitalist has succeeded in realising the entire capital invested, the labour employed in the production process must have the sole right to the product and its value. Using this analogy in the concerned problem, one relates to the fact that similarly, the “city”-zens are entitled to the right to that city whose value and character they have created over and above the ruthless powers of capital, which in turn has generated a chain of new normals.

David Harvey (2012) opined that the right to the city does not only mean a right on all that already currently exists in a city, its resources and services, but over and above this, it must also mean the right to transform the city, shape it according to one’s desires, to be able to create and recreate it and to be able to give it a character. And, doing all of this should not be treated as a separate right in itself, but as an appraisal of all of the existing human rights. The right to the city is therefore an antibody to be created against a host of odds like capitalism, privatisation, globalisation, commodification, poverty, environmental degradation, etc. Therefore, the city must work for its inhabitants and not vice versa. The working class in this case is the foremost “beneficiary of the conquest of the city against capital” (Jouffe 2010: 43).

One surely understands that it is not humanly possible to create a city that caters to the needs of all its inhabitants; needs, which vary as per an individual’s standing in society, according to one’s desires, imaginations and identities, etc. Thus, each segment of the city space can generate an independent string of imaginations depending upon the extent of accessibility and appropriation and the needs for the same. “City”-zenship emerges to be an assemblage of narratives and nostalgia inflicted existence coupled with the extent of the current usage and access to city spaces (Yusuf 2011: 300). “City”-zenship is a differentiated existence and urban space is heterotopic. Thus, the social identities get spatially entrenched, and spatial identities, socially. The exclusions eventually tend to overlap. Therefore, there appears to be something intrinsic about the geography of the urban, which makes conflict inevitable. The claim of the right to the city is a manifestation of the existence of this conflict whose resolution lies in attaining the desired democratic urban society as antithetical to the currently existing capital-infected cities.

Addressing the Indian Context

In India, we have followed a tradition of living separately, possibly because clusters within cities were occupation-based since habitations were based on one’s work.

In case of India’s cities, studies from the early colonial period suggest caste-based settlement, reflecting occupational distinctions within city neighbourhoods and sections, with a tendency towards higher castes living in the centre of the city and lower castes on the periphery. (Mehra 2011: 40)

This kind of segregation in cities is said to be a contribution from rural in-migrants and is believed to fade with urban development. Again, “a combination of factors leads to the increasing marginalisation and ‘ghettoisation’ of religious minorities, especially Muslims, in the city” (Ghose 2011: 47). This kind of segregation is said to be in a cause and effect relationship with access to public goods and services. Yet again, “it is not only exclusionary in the regional sense but also as a social and spatial process within the city, it would be perilous to ignore the conditions of migrants in urban areas” (Ghose 2011: 49).

However, the migrant colonies, cultural enclaves and the likes need not always be clusters of deprivation or poverty. In more recent times,

land contestations over locations in central city areas and rapidly developing urban peripheries adversely shape the claims of poor groups to physical territory, political and institutional space and economy, especially when all poor groups mobilise forms of occupancy that are based on de facto tenure. (Benjamin and Raman 2011: 63)

In fact new forms of segregation and exclusion between informal-formal, poorer-richer cities are also visible in the privatisation of new urban spaces built for middle-class residents. Such privatisation includes the ubiquitous installation of security and monitoring infrastructure such as security gates on neighbourhood, mall and office entrances, which restrict and monitor entry and exit, especially of the urban poor. (Mehra 2011: 61)

What is also emergent in Indian cities is cohabitation of different classes rather than strict regional segregation. Therefore, instead of being able to identify broad cores and peripheries within cities, one is more likely to identify areas with both cores and peripheries. This kind of existence finds justification in the symbiotic relationships that the urban rich and the urban poor share. The latter provides all kinds of cheap services to the former, thereby enabling the rich to tolerate the presence of the poor in their vicinities. Therefore, living separately and claiming different segments of the city space is, and has been, very typical of Indian cities finding even profound expressions since globalisation.

The whole act of legitimising one’s stay in the city by fellow “city”-zens through an act of tolerance of coexistence or the lack of it brings the right to inhabitancy within a multifaceted critical frame of analysis. In this framework, class as a cause is most indispensable, more so because the global and national processes of capital flow are as much cultural as they are classed. In fact, capital itself is, most undoubtedly, both economic and sociocultural.

Moving away from the Nehruvian ideology of development into the liberalisation period and beyond has made this stronger, whereby the city has become the talking ground for citizenship, retaining the imagination of the nation state as a larger entity. At least, the perception is such that

Cities across India have become spaces marked by urban inequality and growing “ghettoisation” and segregation. Where new projects (gated communities, malls, entertainment complexes) have created a clear demarcation between “rich” and “poor” areas, slums are sprawling, with little access to essential civic services, especially water, electricity and sanitation. The poor continue to be forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for neighbourhoods of cities that have become playgrounds for the rich. The existing reality in Indian cities thus argues for the need for a broad-based holistic and encompassing right to the city as a human rights response. (Kothari 2011: 143)
Interestingly, in India, both the rich and the poor have enough to take from the right to the city movement. If the poor want shelter, food, sanitation, work and so on, the rich also want a clean environment, a slum-free neighbourhood, non-stinking streets, pollution-free air to breathe, land for real estate expansion, etc. Thus, in a way, they refute the idea that the rich already have the right to the city to themselves, and therefore they want nothing, and it is only a cry from the peripheries; the rich also have enough stakes. Each one is trying to appropriate their belonging and participation within the city space. Not only in terms of people, movement is broad-based here in India in terms of practices as well. It includes “mundane aspects of residential life” like “plumbing,” to “dramatic” events like “eviction” (Holston 2012: xi).

The underlying assumption to this understanding is that an Indian “city” is for the rich, the poor eventually become a part of it, and the obvious termination is in a struggle, a revolt; a struggle within the city space, for them and among them. The squatter sites, the refugee colonies, the working-class mohallas, and the slums therefore have their own claims as opposed to the shopping malls, the gated communities, the elite urban neighbourhoods, etc. The city streets as stages of protests, with their own stories of inclusion and exclusion, the cultural neighbourhoods, and the ghettos with their histories add up to frame the image of the city and build its character. The 21st century is therefore an urban century for India (Roy 2008: xvi).

Indian cities therefore deserve to be the talking points, especially at a stage when it is all set to create a new brand of cities, which are neither an extension of existing cities nor their upgraded selves. New Indian cities have been campaigned as a solution to the existing problems in older Indian cities. To achieve the target of building such cities, the Indian government had allocated $1.2 billion for smart cities in the 2014–15 Union Budget. The debate around the selection of these cities is an important one, as building new high-tech cities remains a vital way of channelising capital. Smart cities in India promise to support the Digital India initiative, make use of renewable sources of energy, ensure electronic service delivery, smart mobility, robust information technology connectivity, digitalisations and e-governance, and have energy-efficient green buildings besides ensuring core infrastructure (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs nd). Basically, smart cities, through each of its manifestations and in totality, involve bulk investments for and within urban areas. Therefore, at this juncture, it is most appropriate to ask, “Smart for whom?” A 2017 report by the Housing and Land Rights Network (HRLN) on the Smart Cities Mission poses this very valid question. The report documents “forced evictions and demolitions of homes … in 32 of the cities participating in the Smart Cities Mission.” It has been further stated that “while many of those evictions were related to the mission, demolishing slums so that cities conform to the aesthetic norms of a ‘world-class’ city, without taking into
account the paucity of formal housing that cities offer, has been a long-standing practice. At least six homes are being destroyed every hour in India as authorities declare areas that are already densely populated as “unsuitable for habitation.” The paucity of formal housing that cities offer, has been a long-standing practice. At least six homes are destroyed every hour in India as authorities declare areas that are already densely populated as “unsuitable for habitation.”

The urge to market and celebrate this very exclusiveness and convert it into an urban way of life is the more disturbing part. The shift from developing the city as a whole to concentrating on only some parts of it, thereby the magnifying and selling the joy of inhabiting the cores—“the first world looking part” and enjoying the cheap services most conveniently coming in from the periphery “shabby- dingy looking part”—is a serious blow to the idea of social justice and a democratic society that a city was expected to represent at a certain point in the history of its evolution. It is, therefore, time to address the city–capital interrelationship and its associated issues in the Indian context today. It is time we realised the directions to work upon so as to avoid building up extreme urban polarisations, resultant resentments, a concretised consciousness and massive urban movements, the splinters of which are more than just visible.

This article has been an attempt to raise a few valid questions, rather than answering the same. And, these questions are being claimed as valid not only because they emerge most organically, but because they have been raised after a detailed conceptual discussion on cities, capital, accumulation and rights and the linkages between all of them. As citizens, it is our responsibility to raise these questions at this point because we all realise that our cities must become more inclusive and more accommodative to begin with, rather than celebrating the polarisations and the exclusions.

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