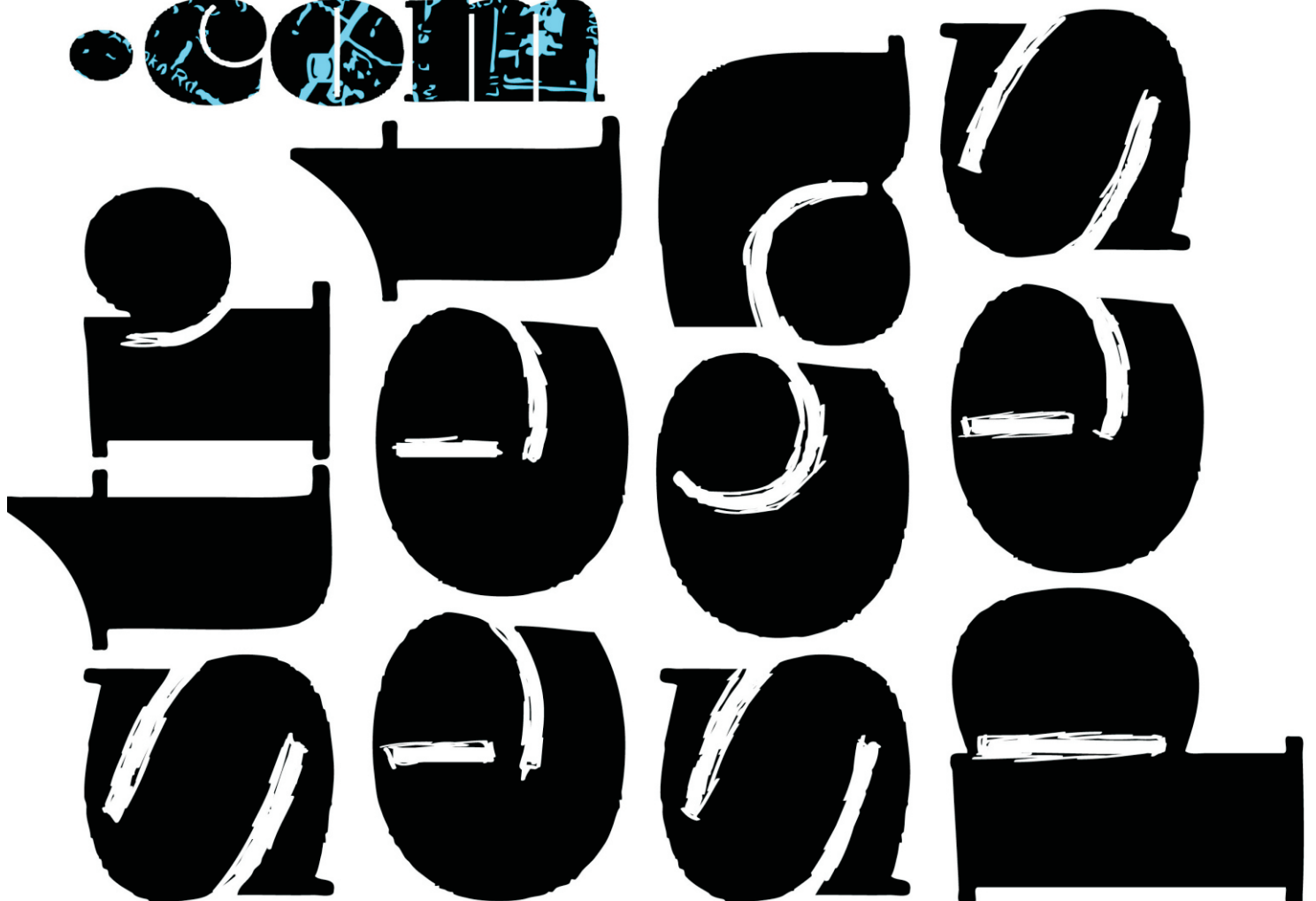


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the future of

the street

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The problem

WHAT is the future of the street? In both the popular and critical imagination, the question is coloured by a sense of impending obsolescence, as though the importance of the street as a conduit of social life may well be a thing of the past. Recent experience seems only to confirm this. Infrastructure bends to accept an exploding population of single occupancy vehicles: flyovers and thoroughfares provide ground for unceasing circulation, insulating the movement of vehicles from the discontinuous ebb and flow of street congestion. Retail and leisure are drawn in from the street and subject to new forms of ownership, locating the social life of economic transaction inside closed interior shops and malls, while street hawkers are organized into highly regulated vending zones. Other transformations are less visible, but increasingly ubiquitous. GIS, CCTV and other technologies of mapping and surveillance significantly reshape how the space of the street is inhabited, regulated and contested.

Notwithstanding these and other transformations, street life is anything but a vestige of the past. Certainly, it has been transformed, or even displaced, but to mourn its loss is to ignore its contested and uneven nature. Rather than write an obituary for the life of the street, we propose a debate about how the physical and social landscape of the street has been transformed in response to new forms of urban management and control. In this respect, the street is a window into larger urban contestations, allowing us to speculate on the present and future of public space in urban India.

Across India, the street has been centre stage in discussions of disputed urban issues such as transport, eviction drives, new economic settings and emerging

forms of public life. Moreover, streets in Indian cities have historically hosted a range of socio-political and cultural uses that are integral to urban democracy. The street is an everyday urban space not only in the empirical sense of the term, but also in the sense that the French thinker Henri Lefebvre assigns to it: it is an uneven terrain of the familiar and the unperceived where unspectacular negotiations about questions of meaning and power can unfold. Whatever its function as an infrastructure of circulation, the street remains open to multiple uses and forms of life. Commerce can turn quickly into celebration, leisure into warfare or protest.

Frequently, and especially in spatial practices such as urban design and planning, the street is imagined as a stage on which public life will be performed, a backdrop to activities that are programmed within its boundaries. Regulations ranging from land use, restrictions on vending and traffic lights circumscribe its trajectories of use and movement. Nonetheless, the excesses of urban life unsettle the social, economic or vehicular functions that are assigned to the street. Noise, odours, pedestrians, hawkers, vehicular traffic, hoardings and encroachments of buildings and construction crowd the experience of the street with images, transactions and physical objects. The street is also a home to itinerant populations, and is appropriated as an extension of activity from houses, shops and other spaces. One never knows precisely where the street ends and private space begins. Historian Nikhil Rao recounts the particular quality of this blurring between the domestic and the common in early 20th century Mumbai, describing buildings as 'sweating' with life, an image that captures well the way in which interior realms spill out into the street.¹

Unsurprisingly, then, the street has long been the object of anxieties about social miscegenation and mixtures of commerce, residence and community – forms of collective belonging and exchange that are unpredictable but vital forces in the life of a city. Though managed through techniques of segregation between black and white towns in colonial India, the messy relations of the street were increasingly scrutinized in the

* The discussion in the issue draws from and expands on questions raised in a number of public forums over the past few years. Several of the contributions began as presentations in a workshop on 'Streets' organized in January 2010 by the Urban Research and Policy Programme of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), and Arts, Resources and Teaching (A.R.T.), Bangalore. The co-editors would like to acknowledge Solomon Benjamin, Carol Upadhy and Annapurna Garimella for organizing the workshop and for their contributions to this publication, and the former and current directors of NIAS, K. Kasturirangan and V.S. Ramamurthy, for their encouragement and support. The issue also draws on discussions that have taken place on the Urban Study Group list on sarai.net. We would also like to thank Jonathan Anjaria, Zainab Bawa, Jyoti Hosagrahar, Lalitha Kamath, and Anant Maringanti for their insights along the way.

1. Nikhil Rao, 'Street Scheming: The Street and Planning in Late Colonial Bombay.' Paper presented at Streets: A Workshop, NIAS, Bangalore, 2010.

19th century by discourses of sanitation and colonial era improvement schemes. The street was evaluated through what Anthony Vidler calls a 'pathology of urban form', where urban physical and social processes were understood as living organisms that were dependent on each other, and whose so-called ills could be 'diagnosed'.² Unfolding in the long shadow of the Enlightenment, industrialization in Europe and colonization, reformers gauged the health of the city through the perceived health of the street, energizing socialist critiques of industrial capitalism by thinkers such as Engels, as well as providing grist for the demolition drives of Haussman in Paris. Either way, colonial urbanism inflected this moral imperative: to improve the street was to improve the city at large, assuring a healthy and productive social body.

By independence, urban development projects such as the drafting of master plans redirected the moral imperative of social reform to one of redressing the inequities of the colonial city through planning.³ The street functioned as a diagram of urban organization, reinforcing the separation of different forms of life through zoning and managerial techniques of distributing development in step with technical calculations of density or work-distance ratios.⁴ Though master planning remains as a troubled artifact of this moment, much of its social agenda has been eviscerated. As Ravi Sundaram argues, information gathering and mapping techniques, long associated with planning, were significantly altered in their orientation by the 1990s. Efforts to make otherwise entangled urban processes clear and transparent to a managerial eye were no longer associated with programmes of social justice, but were instead utilized in the service of a politics of fear, where potential urban risks such as pollution, encroachment and traffic mobilized the courts, the media and citizens groups to demand the demolition and displacement of populations and ways of life deemed 'non-conforming'

2. Anthony Vidler, *The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays*. The Monacelli Press, New York, 2011.

3. Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism*. Routledge, New Delhi, 2010.

4. Ravi Sundaram, 'The Street as Image: From Planning to the Digital Surface.' Paper presented at Streets: A Workshop, NIAS, Bangalore, 2010.

with the plan and other normative benchmarks of urban control.

At present, urban infrastructure development is the lens through which the future of the street is imagined. Events such as the Commonwealth Games (CWG) bring into sharp focus how infrastructure is instrumentalized by programmes of 'reform' and 'improvement'. Reform and urban improvement operate rhetorically by identifying supposedly anachronistic forms of life and civic expression as targets for intervention. Witnessed over a longer duration, the CWG is but one example of such intervention. The instrument of planning, for example, was designed to leave behind many of the existing forms of civic discourse in cities such as Delhi as traditional and backward.⁵ More recently, urban activism in the '90s laboured to subvert and relinquish the supposed encroachment of the 'informal' city, likening it to a cancer. Similarly, infrastructure development seeks to render anachronistic ways of life that hinder the circulation of vehicles, water, information and electricity. An autorickshaw placed squarely in the heart of the Games Village seemed to suggest, for instance, that this form of transport be confined to the dustbin of history, whatever its significant presence in the life of contemporary cities.⁶

The language of urban reform rings a familiar tune, echoing in the discourse of urbanism in India from at least the late 19th century onward. Cleansing, congestion, pollution, beautification and other concepts about the so-called ills of street life recall, deliberately or not, earlier moments of urban transformation in the subcontinent. Projects such as Metrorail construction and the CWG are promulgated as emblems of progress and affiliated with appeals to urban, national or regional belonging, recalling efforts in the mid 20th century to ally infrastructure development with the related social imagination of the nation and its expression in the national economy. Rather than take at face value the historical consistency of well-worn ideas attached to these projects such as circulation or beautification, their

5. Ibid.

6. Note the introductory photograph to Nivedita Menon's post on Kafila and the sad irony of the artifacts or detritus of development projects being showcased as emblems of culture. <http://kafila.org/2010/09/24/the-banality-of-shame/>

currency in the present demands a critical examination of how these ideas are redefined in the service of emerging claims to power.

After all, beautification and circulation of streets are always linked to larger efforts at reshaping the landscape of power in cities. Tantamount to these efforts is an agenda about remaking spaces and forms of economic life. Ishita Pande, for instance, illustrates with considerable depth how sanitary reforms in colonial Calcutta were as much about the consolidation of the colonial economy as they were about health and disease. The spread of diseases such as cholera was attributed to fetid air and water, demanding increased ventilation, drainage and sewer systems, setbacks between buildings and other hallmarks of urbanism from the late 19th century onward. But this was not all. The circulation of air and water in open spaces such as the street was closely allied with the efficient circulation of goods and labour, linking the cultivation of health and citizenship with that of free trade.⁷ Though issuing from a very different moment, the contemporary construction of flyovers, expressways, signal-free corridors and other forms of transport infrastructure is equally vigilant in its demands for circulation, often privileging the demands of an elite urban economy.

Among the concepts that underpin urban reform and street redevelopment, public space is arguably the most contested. The notion of public space or public resources, much like other concepts about urban reform, is one that is persistently haunted by its history. While histories of street life in Europe and the United States depict the inscription of a binary relationship between public and private space onto streets through a series of reforms in the 19th and early 20th centuries, histories of street life in India are largely concerned with the failed hegemony of such inscription in colonial and postcolonial settings. Public space has always been a fraught concept in urban South Asia. Cries to defend its status in contemporary urban India often forget its troubled history in the subcontinent, ignoring its associations with colonial control of urban space and the ascendancy of bourgeois images of urban life, not to mention the slippery and often shameful misuse of 'public purpose'.

7. Ishita Pande, *Medicine, Race and Liberalism in British Bengal: Symptoms of Empire*. Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 120.

8. Brian Lonsway, *Making Leisure Work: Architecture and the Experience Economy*. Routledge, New York, 2009. Lonsway's book provides a roadmap for understanding the way in which

Indeed, common space in major Indian cities is increasingly cordoned off and narrativized into highly orchestrated theatres of consumption and leisure.⁸ The feeling that the 'public space' of the street is being encroached upon or regulated beyond recognition is visceral, though its conclusions frequently ignore how public space is itself utilized as a concept for bourgeois appropriations of urban space. This anxiety over public space obscures a rigorous inspection of processes that bear no direct relationship to the space of the street, but which have profound consequences for it, such as the spatial consequences of new models of retail. In many respects, the narrative of the disappearance of street life and public space belies the questions of power that emerge from a closer examination of these transformations.

Sounding the death knell for the public space of the street also ignores the significant ways in which public life at large continues to proliferate and transform the meanings and uses that are associated with public space. In his seminal critique of public space, Sudipta Kaviraj recounts how migrants to Calcutta appropriated the formerly public space of Deshapriya Park as *publik* (capturing how the original English word is pronounced in Kolkata) space, indicating, as Ananya Roy tells us, the 'quasi-claims' articulated in everyday informal practices⁹ and suggesting that cities in India are populated with contested meanings about what public space is, and who it serves.¹⁰

Residents of the newly constructed community turned filth on its head, using their perceived uncleanness as fortification against bourgeois appropriations of the park and assuring their claim to an urban environment in which they had no viable place. The persistent ambiguity of concepts of public space (a positive space invested with notions of civic responsibility and attendant uses and behaviours) and open space (a space which is the negative of public space and thus not regulated by its norms of property or propriety) is exploited productively in many ways. Flourishing economies of scavenging and recycling, for instance, inhabit and draw from open spaces throughout Indian cities, comprising

experience itself is calculated and strategized in the construction of space and architecture, especially in spaces such as malls, theme parks and other such spaces. The metrics of experience or 'experiences' is a phenomenon of architecture, real estate and marketing that deserves critical attention in India.

9. Ananya Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003.

10. Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices About Space in Calcutta', *Public Culture* 10(1), 1997, pp. 83-113.

a significant urban economy for the urban poor. The presence of these economies challenges efforts to 'beautify' public space and separate spaces of work and residence, relying on the conceptual ambiguity of public and open space to continue operating in an urban economy.

Together with struggles over its meaning and uses, contestation about the technical construction of the street is equally important to its openness to different forms of occupation and sociality. Small shifts in the flow of traffic or the material composition of the street can have tremendous consequences for the life and livelihoods of those who inhabit it. As Arjun Appadurai has noted, the Indian street is an economy of small differences.¹¹ Different speeds of traffic and the design of intersections bear direct relationship to the placement of roadside markets and vendors, for instance. Concrete paving is difficult to penetrate, whereas asphalt is soft and easy to puncture, allowing tents to be constructed for weddings and festivals.

Though largely enclosed in the domain of engineering and planning, the physical infrastructure of the street is deeply politicized, much like other urban infrastructures in India such as water.¹² Widening of roads to accommodate more vehicular traffic, for instance, is deeply contested, forcing demolition and displacement of formidable local economies—economies which, as researchers in Bangalore recently discovered, were themselves agitating for the streets to be improved and paved in the first place.¹³ Who is responsible for the maintenance and design of the street, in this instance? Though commonly associated with government agencies, responsibility and expertise about technical issues such as paving, drainage systems, road width and signal placement is typically distributed across different actors, ranging from shopkeepers to engineers and local politicians. Rather than diffuse decision-making, the politicization of street engineering and design opens up the imagination and maintenance of the street to a considerable degree of contestation over how it will be used and laid claim to. In this respect, street life is constantly under construction and open to competing

interests. It cannot be easily fixed as an image, as nostalgia over its loss is wont to do.

Despite the spectre of displacement and relocation, street culture is deeply resilient, playing on the speed and space that new infrastructures comprise. Though programmes such as Metrorail or flyover construction are professedly about an urban scale of circulation, they also operate at a finer grain of urban life, intervening with blunt force in existing neighbourhoods much like a meat cutter's axe, as Robert Moses once famously referred to urban redevelopment of congested neighborhoods in mid century New York City.¹⁴ Despite this, the Metro has become an important new public environment for Delhi, extending and departing from the culture of the street in critical ways. Likewise, the space beneath flyovers comprises space for markets and other uses, however tenuous. New forms of infrastructure and urban space are always open to unintended uses and consequences, a fact of which leaves them open to considerable contestation and transformation.

Though streets feature prominently in discussions of urban redevelopment in India, there is a paucity of speculation regarding the future of such projects and policies from the standpoint of the street itself. Critical writing on the street in India remains specialized and policy oriented, marginalizing the experience of everyday life. In step with the current focus of development discourse in India on urban infrastructure, the street is widely represented as a site of potential urban redevelopment. Planners, developers and the popular media foreground the role of the street as the centrepiece of a new set of images about what urban life in India will look like, placing significant pressure on its capacity to represent the future of the city.

In response, we propose a critical examination of street culture today. We propose a particular attention to everyday enactments and translations of policies and governance within the space of the street, as well as an appraisal of different ways in which the social and cultural life of the street is transforming. After all, the street remains unique as a space of interaction, a space where strangers meet and different social groups intersect. What does this particular interaction look like today, given that public life occupies an increasingly wide array of built environments ranging from malls to gated communities and SEZs? In taking account of these experiences, what futures might they portend for the street?

11. Arjun Appadurai, 'Street Culture', *The India Magazine* 8(1), December 1987, pp. 14-23.

12. Nikhil Anand, 'Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai', *Cultural Anthropology* 26(4), 2011, pp. 542-563.

13. Lalitha Kamath and P. Rajan, 'Co-producing the Street: A Brief History of the Life of and Tussle Over Bangalore's CMH Road.' Paper presented at Streets: A Workshop, NIAS, Bangalore, 2010.

14. Marshall Berman, 'In the Forest of Symbols: Some Notes on Modernism in New York', in *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Penguin, New York, 1988, pp. 293-294.

Zoning crossroads: a critique

RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY,
T.V. PRATHAMESH and PUJA GUHA

FROM the early colonial period onward, the Indian state has on various occasions responded to the practice of street vending prevalent primarily around the official commercial areas of major cities through loose and heterogeneous strategies. It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a general pattern from the state's attitude towards street vendors. The moves have often been selective, arbitrary and specific to the context of a particular area of a particular city. Decades of localized interventions by the state – a combination of tolerance, eviction and selective rehabilitation – and collective actions by street vendors, set the stage for the emergence of a uniform understanding of the categories of 'urban' and 'street vendor' at a national scale. These categories were consolidated with the publication of the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2009 (henceforth National Policy), supported by a bill to be converted into acts through the state legislatures. Moreover, the concerned ministry in the central government has conducted national-level consultations in the recent past to devise a central law on street vending.

In 2004, the first draft of the policy was made public for wider con-

sultation. Several street vendors' associations, activists and academicians across the country participated in the nationwide debate. Incorporating recommendations made on the 2004 policy draft, the 2009 draft of the National Policy was published. Although many states were initially hesitant to accept and implement the policy, wider public opinion has so far been in favour of settling the street vendors' issue through the enactment and implementation of the National Policy.

Drawing lessons from ethnographic research conducted at 28 important crossroads in Kolkata in 2011, we argue that the zoning norms suggested in the National Policy and various state-level documents are based on an erroneous connection made between street vending and disorderly traffic that is characteristic of Indian cities. The experience of Gariahaat crossing in Kolkata illustrates how the zoning norms in the National Policy are in dire contradiction with the everyday economic and social practices that occur at the area, practices that are emblematic of the larger context of street vending in urban India.

Gariahaat is an important transit point in South Kolkata where one finds

* We are thankful to Jananie Kalyanaraman for her intellectual and editorial support.

a coexistence of both high and low end retail. Before the emergence of a few upper middle class residential constructions along the Southern Avenue in the late 1920s, Gariahaat marked the southern physical boundary of the city.

The imagination that Gariahaat marked the 'end' of the city persisted for long among the *bhadralok* (gentlemanly classes). Coming from the north and west of Gariahaat, for the *bhadralok*, was coterminous with claiming a certain rootedness with the city. After the partition of India, the fringes of Gariahaat witnessed widespread transformation. The city moved further south as a result of unprecedented demographic pressure following the partition. A number of refugee settlements sprang up in areas surrounding Gariahaat and Tollygunj, often leading to a series of displacements of Muslim communities settled in those areas. Gariahaat gradually became a vibrant centre for the articulation of radical citizenship claims through organised *jabardakhal* (squatting movements). Over time, the Gariahaat crossing became an important public ground for spectacles of popular politics – protests, blockades, rallies, strikes and ceremonial destruction of public property. In the narratives of refugee struggle in Kolkata, Gariahaat emerged as a symbol of solidarity, collective action, refugee entrepreneurialism and nostalgia.

The growth of refugee populations in this area in the first two decades following independence also coincided with the ongoing rural-urban migration, mainly from the southern districts of the state of West Bengal. The migrants from the rural hinterland of the city occupied lands along the railway track between Tollygunj and Ballygunj. With the growth of a substantial lower class and lower middle class population in the vicinity of the Gariahaat crossing, a parallel economy of low end

products started developing on the streets and footpaths.

During the 1960s, street vendors began clustering on the footpaths of Gariahaat Road and Rashbehari Avenue near a municipal retail market known as Gariahaat market. Even before that, fruit and vegetable sellers were visible on Gariahaat Road. They were usually migrants from the neighbouring districts of Kolkata, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. The refugees who migrated from East Pakistan were already part of the existing networks of textile and garment trading activities in Bengal and beyond. Hence, they started footpath stalls at Gariahaat, selling textile products, specializing mainly in traditional handloom saris.

The refugee street vendors were also familiar with textile products and artisanal communities in the districts of West Bengal bordering East Pakistan. This was due to the existence of several inter-district trading channels. These networks were reshuffled and reinvented as 'illegal' with the emergence of two nation states in the sub-continent. Further, the partition led to a violent geographic dislocation of peasant and artisanal communities. Many of the skilled artisanal communities found settlement in different refugee camps in West Bengal and in bordering districts. We often found that refugee traders in Kolkata had kinship, village and other social ties with these artisanal groups. In addition, the context of rehabilitation and struggle for citizenship created a new sense of bonding between various groups, which manifested through diverse economic activities. Such networks allowed for a more enduring relationship between street vendors and refugee weavers from whom the street vendors used to purchase goods. Through artisanal connections forged across dispersed refugee settlements,

Gariahaat in the 1960s emerged as a veritable destination for a number of inter-district retail networks. By the late 1960s, the street vendors successfully erected semi-permanent structures on footpaths and also on the famous Gariahaat Boulevard. They also entered into the local economies of power through several neighbourhood clubs, and social and cultural events.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the number of street vendors had grown to a few thousands within a hundred metre radius of Gariahaat crossing, as had the diversity of commodities. Now, on the footpaths along all four directions from Gariahaat crossing, stand innumerable vendors peddling the most disparate array of goods one can think of – from glass and ceramic items to mill and handloom textile products, food to pens, and envelopes to lottery tickets. The flow of a diverse range of goods in Gariahaat makes it a part of several larger and complex commodity cycles ranging from the green field of a small farmer in a distant rural district to the workshop of a weaver in Nadia. To the primary producers, street vendors often act as an alternative to the organized chains of powerful intermediaries that mediate between the multitude of primary producers and the vast and variegated army of consumers.

The prices in organized and legalized markets are determined at every stage by *aratdars*, cold storage owners, rice mill owners, transport intermediaries, usurers, and city-based powerful wholesalers. By comparison, fruit and vegetable vendors at Gariahaat maintain direct relations with primary producers and thus minimize the costs associated with a lengthy commodity chain. Romesh, a key informant among the Gariahaat vegetable vendors, told us that the usual practice for the vendors is to set the

price at a higher rate, often at par with the price of the established retail market. Customers know that they can get fresh vegetables from the vendors at a considerably lower price by bargaining with them. Operating in an economy of small differences, customers make a choice based on a range of subtle issues such as their pre-existing connection of trust with vendors, price differences, display, location, age and gender of the vendor, and so on.

Romesh explained the spatial dynamics of economic life in Gariahaat crossing. Vendors compete with each other for plots that are close to the crossing because transactions depend on proximity to traffic signals. Here, automobile circulation stops for a while to obey traffic rules. This routine suspension of auto-mobility gives the vendors an opportunity to target customers in buses. Some people get into buses, while some come down. Yet, some others wait for another bus. They buy essential things from vendors while making such transitions. Romesh pointed out that vendors will not open a stall between two intersections where buses and cars do not stop. This is the reason why, Romesh speculated, that one hardly comes across a street vendor on flyovers. Vendors always gravitate towards congested spaces like intersections of streets, hospitals, schools and office areas.

The vendors are also central to the life of the neighbourhood. They can tell you exactly how to navigate a complex geography of serpentine lanes crisscrossing each other. They provide security to the neighbourhood. Political parties and neighbourhood clubs depend on them to organise a procession or to raise money for the neighbourhood Durga Puja. In these and other ways, as we have already mentioned, the vendors remain connected to the social life of the community,

drawing a close relationship between economic transactions and the social landscape of the neighbourhood. A typical neighbourhood tea stall can have multiple social and economic functions. The neighbourhood elders (male) may assemble at a particular time of the day to socialize with others. Once this crowd disperses, the younger members of the community may gather there to perform the same kind of socialization. The crowd might have an established relationship with the vendor to the extent that the vendor even agrees to accept the payment in installments. The same tea stall can become an information centre for the police and political parties for larger and more effective social surveillance in the community. A tea stall owner might also act as a real estate broker or at least an agent of a big property broker, thanks to his/her superior knowledge of who is coming in and going out within the social territory of the neighbourhood. Thus, street vendors in Kolkata support a complex social and economic world, acting as a vital link between small-scale rural and urban economies.

The National Policy appears to be a part of a larger strategy to discipline and document the Indian retail structure to make it worthy of corporate and Foreign Direct Investment. This is why one can find very easy temporal conjunctions between the coming of shopping malls in Indian cities and the disciplining of street vendors through zoning norms. For an orderly retail space to flourish, one needs to alter the spatial aesthetics of the immediate 'outside' – the street. The large-scale advent of corporate retail presupposes the disciplining of the existing practices through the extension of law and governance and the production of legibility through documentation. The National Policy seeks

not only to discipline street vending through maps and grids, it also attempts to create a database for all sorts of street trade. The National Policy, then, is a subset of the current regime of development that seeks to restructure the entire mechanism of rural-urban surplus extraction through credit formalization, financial inclusion, and procurement practices.

The National Policy represents the first concerted effort from the Indian state to govern the informal economy in general and to integrate the street vendors' question with concerns regarding urban planning. Subsequently, several state governments drafted state-level policies on street vendors that replicated the National Policy. In the context of the recent global neo-liberal currents, the state is seeking to address the informal economy in terms of social security, inclusion in the national accounting, and so on, with a view towards increasing government presence through institutionalization. Clearly, the National Policy is part of a much wider project on organizing the informal economy and urban space along with a greater corporatization of the economy.

We argue that the spatial measures suggested in the National Policy seek to preserve the vulnerabilities of the informal economy and leave space for arbitrary action from above. For instance, it makes provisions for each street vendor to be registered under the supervision of a Town Vending Committee (TVC), headed by the respective municipal commissioner, and given an identity card with a code number and category. The street vendors are supposed to be governed by the zoning norms. What makes street vending simultaneously legitimate and illegitimate? It is predominantly the spatial laws. A certain obedience to them makes street vending a constitu-

tionally guaranteed right of the poor to eke out a living, while a violation of the same could lead to fines, confiscation, and even eviction.

The National Policy, 2009 introduces three zonal categories, namely, Restriction-free Vending Zones, Restricted Vending Zones and No-Vending Zones. These are central to many other key elements of the policy such as the pivotal function of the TVCs, the process of registration and record-making, and the modalities of eviction. The National Policy declares that one of the pivotal functions of the TVCs is to come up with city-specific zoning laws on the basis of consensus among stakeholders. In demarcating vending zones, the TVCs must maintain a proper balance between the usable space and the number of vendors without compromising issues of traffic, public health and environment.

In order to address this requirement, a digitized demographic database (archive) will be created in each city by trained professionals who are familiar with street vendors. This will also help the TVCs to issue registration certificates, identify the trespassers, curb spatial and other aberrations, collect taxes, provide civic facilities and introduce welfare schemes. This means that at least in the context of the National Policy, legalization involves the privileging of some activities as legitimate and the branding of some others as illegitimate, and thus deserving punishment and eviction.

In 2010, the state of West Bengal came up with the West Bengal Street Vendor Policy that proposes to declare areas falling within a 100 metre radius of all busy street crossings in the city of Kolkata, as non-vending zones, along with the immediate vicinities of hospitals, schools, colleges, offices and heritage buildings. We argue that such a proposal in the policy

document deserves closer scrutiny and vigorous public debate.

The idea of a non-vending zone is premised *only* on the perceived connection between street vendors and traffic congestion at street crossings. The argument is that since street vendors concentrate at the crossings, the obstruction caused forces pedestrians to leave safe and secure pavements and walk on the streets. As a result, they become vulnerable to accidents and their movement impedes vehicular traffic. Pedestrians walking on the streets also show greater propensity to cross roads in violation of traffic rules. The prescribed panacea to this impasse in urban life is to declare pavement hawking as illegal near densely populated crossings and transit centres. The National Policy seems to lack the common sense that it is congestion and density of human activity that is responsible for street vendors to be present in the proximity of crossroads and not the other way round.

In fact, during a field survey conducted at 28 crossings in Kolkata which had been earmarked for non-vending zones, it was observed that pavement vendors played only a marginal role in causing congestion. Compared to the extent of traffic, existing retail shops encroaching pavement spaces and instinctive violation of traffic rules by pedestrians and automobiles, several other factors unrelated to street vending caused congestion and chaos surrounding road crossings. These included car parking areas in the vicinity of the crossing, autorickshaw stands, road repair works, narrow roads and pavement spaces. Thus, the zoning norm for street vendors will not solve the problem of traffic congestion at street crossings since, according to our study in Kolkata, street vendors are not the principal cause for congestion in the first place. It is likely that zoning

restrictions will achieve little else apart from displacing established street vendors and affecting their livelihoods.

Thus, it appears that the current draft of the National Policy is more spatial than social. It does not, for example, pay attention to the internal hierarchies within the street vending sector. It ensures that more than 40 per cent of the members of TVCs are from the street vendors' associations, but it remains silent on the fact that only a meagre proportion of street vendors in India fall under the fold of unions. Who will represent such a large number of non-unionised street vendors in the TVCs? The National Policy, then, seeks to institutionalize a certain form of participatory exclusion.

Since the Gariahaat crossing is one of the most important transit centres in the city, it is no surprise to see large numbers of people waiting in queues for autorickshaws and buses. As a result, buses and autorickshaws move very slowly to pick up more passengers. The hawkers serve the people in perpetual waiting, in several ways. One may find an office-going person having a quick sip of tea from an earthen cup. When a bus or a shuttle approaches, the person is often seen throwing the half-finished tea in the bin and rushing to board the vehicle. Many people alight from the bus and collect fruits and vegetables on their return home from office. In such contexts, the relocation of street vendors from the vicinity of the crossing to less populated spaces between crossings will likely not be a sustainable policy decision. Moreover, the NIAS-URPP study of crossings shows no connection between congestion, unruly traffic and the presence of street vending.

During the pilot survey of 28 major crossings in Kolkata, we observed that the pavements were often broken and manholes adjacent

to the pavements were left open, threatening commuters with serious accidents. We also found roads being repaired near several of the city's major crossings, affecting the normal flow of traffic. A lack of coordination between different state departments was evident. Needless to say, much of the city's traffic congestion is caused by the fact that pedestrians are forced to walk on the streets due to the closures caused by repair works. Congestion on the streets is also caused by the growing number of single occupancy and privately owned vehicles in the city, the escalating demand for spacious car parking lots, and the gradual shrinking of the public transport system (not so much in Kolkata but in many other cities of India).

It will be relevant here to highlight some of the findings of a study conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on Kolkata's existing transport system and air pollution levels.¹ This study reveals that the growth rate of private cars has already superseded that of two-wheelers. Further, car ownership has jumped from 1.73 per cent households in 1998 to 11.1 per cent in 2008, while ownership of two-wheelers has risen from 5.67 per cent households in 1998 to 16.5 per cent in 2008. Consequently, the percentage of households without a vehicle has decreased by nearly 12 per cent. Kolkata already has 0.4 million cars, as against 1.1 million in Delhi. Both cars and two-wheelers, the CSE survey estimates, constitute 50 per cent of the traffic, but caters only to 12 per cent of the net travel demand of the city.

Under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) scheme, roads and fly-

overs constitute 73 per cent of the total spending in the Kolkata metropolitan area. It is worth remembering that flyovers serve neither the walking citizenry nor are they meant for public transportation. Public vehicles are meant to provide frequent stops for passengers over short distances, but flyovers do not cater to this purpose. It is frequently observed that crossings beneath the flyovers are populated by people in transit waiting for buses and autorickshaws. The CSE survey warns that Kolkata is likely to follow the example of Delhi, where huge road and flyover infrastructure has failed to effectively manage the problems of air pollution and congestion.

Street improvements are often designed by planners with minimum consideration for pedestrians and people who work and live on streets, favouring the faster circulation of automobiles at the cost of the walking citizenry. We argue that the violation of traffic norms by pedestrians comes from a bias towards automobiles rather than obstruction caused by hawkers on the pavements. In fact, rather than push pedestrians onto the street, hawkers encourage pedestrians to walk on pavements as a sales strategy. A policy on street vendors should encompass these and other everyday realities of the crossroads to avoid its inevitable rejection. The zoning norms in the National Policy will be exclusionary to street vendors if it continues to conflate a policy on street vendors with a policy for traffic regulation.

Our Gariahaat story is linked to several important developments in the subcontinent in the postcolonial period. It tells us how street vending has flourished in the interstitial space between 'law' and 'governance'. A policy to manage street vending should take into account the life world of interconnected informalities.

1. <http://www.cseindia.org/content/kolkata-city-dialogue-air-quality-and-transportation-challenge-agenda-action-0>