

THE 21ST-CENTURY CITY AND ITS VALUES: URBANISM, TOLERATION, AND EQUALITY

October 1, 2004

SESSION 3: EQUALITY

Lisa Anderson: Good afternoon. I'm Lisa Anderson, and I will be moderating the final panel of the final symposium of Columbia's yearlong celebration of its 250th anniversary.

It's fitting to be talking about cities in this last symposium, housed as we are in one of the greatest urban agglomerations of all times, and fitting to be talking from a perspective that takes time seriously. Columbia was founded in a city both the same and unimaginably different from the one we live in now, and the prospects that our successors might convene again some two and a half centuries from now to reflect on urban life has the nice quality of making this symposium both historically significant—we will be in their archives—and appropriately modest in the scheme of things.

This afternoon we consider the consequences of urban life, and how we define urban life, for equality, and how we define equality. Partha Chatterjee will address some of these questions, in part, by telling us something about how soccer shaped conceptions of political agency and competence in Calcutta nearly a hundred years ago. Before I introduce him and our discussant, Richard Sennett, I'm compelled to remind you that sports are still driving much of the discussion of development, particularly in New York City today. Stadiums are imagined in Manhattan in Brooklyn, and teams are being lured in and out of the city. And I want to tell you a little story about this; take a minute for this. There is, of course, a major bid for the 2012 Olympics being mounted by New York City. Far be it for me to know exactly why we're doing this, but the deputy mayor's story of how he came to be convinced that New York should mount the bid, I think, is revealing for our theme this afternoon. He's an investment banker by background, and he was once persuaded by a client, much against his will, to attend a World Cup soccer game in New Jersey. He was stunned—and the way he tells it suggest he really was stunned—by the size and enthusiasm of the crowds of people supporting home teams from countries he had never heard of. His vision of New York was transformed that afternoon as he realized the extent to which New York is constructed of people from home countries he has

not heard of. He concluded that this was something on which the city should capitalize, in all the possible meanings of that word. And there, the idea that sports could drive economic development—and that New York might be reflected in the international gathering of athletes that is the Olympics—was born. With that simple illustration of the complexity and immediacy of relationships between urban geography, economic aspiration, and social identities, let me introduce to you our speaker.

Partha Chatterjee is professor of political science at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta, India, and simultaneously professor of anthropology here at Columbia. He was a founding member of the enormously influential subaltern-studies group of historians. The subaltern-studies collective began as a group of historians in India who felt in the early 1980s that Indian history was limited because it adopted a nationalist perspective that neglected the perspectives and voices of those outside centers of power: peasants, workers, tribal people, women, and, I presume, soccer fans. In his lecture today, his research is almost entirely on India—more specifically on Bengal—but he makes points of acute importance to us all.

When he's finished speaking, Richard Sennett will comment. He, Richard Sennett, is professor of sociology at the London School of Economics, where he chairs the Cities Program, an interdisciplinary teaching and research program joining visual urban design to the social sciences. Before going to LSE about five years ago, he spent 25 years at NYU and he is widely known and equally widely respected for his work on the interconnections between authority, modernism, and public life. From Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Texts of Power and Wages of Freedom* to Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man, The Corrosion of Character and Respect, The Welfare State: Inequality and the City*, you have before you the authors of some of the most influential social science of our day, and I'm delighted to be able to introduce them.

Professor Chatterjee, the floor is yours.

Partha Chatterjee: Thank you very much, Lisa, for that wonderfully generous introduction. It is, in fact, a great honor to have been invited to participate in this symposium, especially to participate as a Columbia representative because I am, as Lisa explained, only partially affiliated here. I also wear several disciplinary hats, and for various reasons today I have decided to wear my historian's hat. And as a result I will not be able to give you a historical description of the twenty-first-century city. What I have decided to do is actually talk about the evolution of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, from that perspective, ask if that might have something to tell us about the prospects of equality in the twenty-first-century city.

Now in his well-known work *The Right to the City*, the sociologist-philosopher Henri Lefebvre has spoken of the way in which the ancient Greek and Roman city, providing an ideological model of the urban as a space of free citizenship, created in the new industrial cities of Western Europe in the nineteenth century the possibility of a democratic urbanity. "Urban life," he said, somewhat wistfully, "suggests meetings, the confrontation of differences, reciprocal knowledge and acknowledgement, ways of living, patterns, which coexist in the city." But urban democracy raised the specter of an equal right to the city that threatened the privileges of the ruling class. The latter responded by expelling the poor from the

urban center and destroying urbanity. Lefebvre saw in this a class strategy that continued to operate in the twentieth century through urban planning, the governmental responses to the housing question, and the creation of new transportation links between the suburbs and the city. But he also qualified his historical theoretical argument by emphasizing its limits. "Let us leave aside," he said, "questions posed by the Oriental city, the Asiatic mode of production, 'town and country' relations in this mode of production, and lastly the formations of ideologies on this base. Only the Greek and Roman antique city from which are derived societies and civilizations known as 'Western' will be considered."

Now this raises an obvious question about the generality of the framework suggested by urban sociologists such as Lefebvre, or indeed of the frameworks proposed by his many critics. The lack of generality seems even more telling when we remember that most of the largest cities in the world today, especially those that grew most rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century, are not Western cities. Even though there have been attempts in recent years to think of the rise of these megacities within a general framework of the new forms of global capitalism (I'm thinking of Manuel Castells or David Harvey or Saskia Sassen, for example), they have achieved this generality at the cost of sacrificing the richness of the specific historical genealogies that sociologists of the city, from Max Weber to Henri Lefebvre, would have insisted upon. So either we have historical theories that are, at best, provincial in their restriction to Western Europe and North America, or else we have general theories that have little historical depth. That would seem to be the choice we are being offered.

This, I admit, is a somewhat obvious criticism that a postcolonial theorist might advance. But in today's talk, I would like to consider the argument that historical trajectories are becoming less and less important in the changing urban forms that we are seeing in most of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. And I was particularly struck by the discussions this morning on the Chinese cities—and we'll come to back to a discussion of this.

This is not so much a statement about determinate social forms emerging out of a common set of globally prevalent structural conditions, but rather as the description of a strategy. I take from Lefebvre the idea that the modern Western city is the site of a struggle over free and equal citizenship, but free citizenship is not what has been realized. Rather, different groups and classes employ different strategies by using different economic, ethical, and aesthetic arguments to press their often-conflicting claims to a right to the city. These strategies build on the different historical genealogies of the city in different parts of the world. Postcolonial historiography has—I believe—have enough to demolish the notion that the evolution of modern Cairo, Delhi, and Shanghai can be understood within some common framework of the Oriental city. Specific historical genealogies are important in understanding the strategies that may be adopted by colonial or postcolonial elites, or by the urban poor in these cities. But specific histories may also explain why at a certain juncture, the irrelevance of history might become part of the economic or aesthetic arguments deployed by particular classes to press their claims over the future of the city.

It is one such historical genealogy of a contemporary twenty-first-century urban strategy that I will talk about today. The genealogy involves the transition from

embryonic forms of early modernity, quickly aborted, to a specifically colonial form of modernity, moving further into a postcolonial nation-state formation that is now struggling to emerge out of the crisis precipitated by the latest waves of globalized production and exchange. The city is Calcutta, where I was born and where I continue to live and work when I am not at Columbia.

There was, I believe, the emergence in Calcutta in the early nineteenth century of certain distinctly urban forms of sociality that I prefer to call early modern. These were different from the traditional social structures prevalent in rural Bengal or the urban institutions and practices prevalent in the precolonial cities of northern India. But more significantly, they were also different from the characteristically colonial forms of urban modernity that have become more familiar to us from the second half of the nineteenth century. The distinction I am making between the early modern and the colonial modern has not been much noticed in modern Indian historiography, so that it is difficult for me to establish it persuasively in the space of this talk. But let me sketch an outline.

Of historians of Calcutta, only S. M. Mukherjee has seen the distinctive features of the new urbanity that struggled to emerge in the city in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, even though he did not draw the conceptual distinction that I am now making. Mukherjee pointed out first the new institutional form of the association, called societies or associations in English, or in the Bengali equivalents of *shabha* or *samiti*. These were, of course, associations of wealthy or propertied elite groups, but they were now of mixed caste and even religious composition, based on free membership and acting as debating societies, organizations of social reform, and promoters of causes and even political agitation.

Second, while some of these societies were floated by reformers who held unorthodox religious views or espoused the breaking of taboos and social conventions, many were also run by highly orthodox people who nevertheless used the new associational form to launch campaigns and create new institutions in the city. It was a group of such orthodox leaders who teamed up with European businessmen and professionals to start in 1817 the Hindu College that was to have such a profound role in the spread of modern Western education and culture in eastern India. Indian elites and nonofficial Europeans also combined to create the societies that spread the new schools and produced the new textbooks in the 1820s and 1830s.

Third, it was in these decades that the new Indian press, in English as well as in the Indian languages, established itself as a political weapon, campaigning for social, religious, and political causes; criticizing the government; and frequently bringing upon itself the wrath of the colonial authorities. Here, too, it is significant that Indian elites and European businessmen and professionals often combined to criticize the colonial government. The protest meeting at the town hall in 1823 in Calcutta against measures to restrain the press from criticizing officials was said to have been attended by almost 1,000 people, including both European and Indian notables. European free traders joined with Indian reformers, as well as conservatives, to demand the end of the East India Company's trade monopoly, the protection of land and property, and, interestingly, the settlement of Europeans in India. There is no doubt that Calcutta in the early nineteenth century, then inhabited by about 200,000 people, developed a new social space for the activities of an urban public mixed in its

racial, religious, and caste composition, and led mainly by the wealthy businessmen of the city that sought to claim and protect the rights of the public against the ruling authorities headed by the governor-general and his council.

The second new institutional feature in this period was the emergence of parties, each led by a wealthy Bengali magnate. The parties were called *dal*, which is exactly what political parties are called today, although in the early nineteenth century there was obviously nothing resembling the political parties we are familiar with today. Once again, Mukherjee has studied the phenomenon closely. He notes that there were five major parties and several minor ones in Calcutta at this time. Most were led by men from the upper castes, even though in some cases their entry into the ranks of the ritually elevated castes was recent and clearly influenced by the exercise of power and financial inducements. Some parties were led by men belonging to ritually low trading castes, but the membership of the parties was quite mixed in their caste composition and it was common for ritually superior Brahmans to accept the leadership of a ritually inferior *Kayastha* or *Tili* or *Subarnabanik* party leader. In all cases, the chief qualification for becoming the leader of a party was wealth and political access to the ruling British authorities. Membership of these parties was voluntary and people were known to leave a party to join a rival one. Mukherjee notes that the function of the party leader, *dolopati*, carried traces of the traditional functions of kingship. Thus, he was supposed to enforce the rules of religion and caste among the members of his party; punish offenders and reward the meritorious; and settle disputes over property, inheritance, and marriage. He had the power to ostracize those who seriously violated religious or caste injunctions, and members were prohibited from maintaining any social relations with the ostracized family. The party leader also took over another erstwhile royal function, that of patronizing scholarship and the arts. Many significant publishing ventures of the period—including journals, dictionaries, and translations of Sanskrit classics, and new genres of popular music and theater—were organized and promoted by the leading magnates in the city, often in a spirit of mutual competition.

There was also a hint of sovereign power in the regular use of armed retainers to keep the urban poor under control. Artisans and other service groups in the city were under the patronage of wealthy magnates who frequently used force to collect rents, evict recalcitrant tenants, and prevent disorder during public festivals.

Now it's easy to read in the activities of these early-nineteenth-century parties and leaders a carryover of older social forms associated with landlords in rural Bengal. But the elements of novelty should not be missed. None of the urban magnates could claim even a figment of traditional political legitimacy, either by lineage or by military power. Even as they adopted and flaunted many of the Persianate styles of the northern Indian aristocratic culture, the forms of power that these magnates exercised and the institutions they built in the city were quite novel. Even for ordinary inhabitants of Calcutta, it was widely observed that life in the new city was different from anything that had been previously experienced.

Kalikata kamalalay [Calcutta, Abode of the Goddess of Wealth], this is a book written in 1823, and it's possibly the first text of urban sociology in India. It divided the urban classes into wealthy aristocrats, middling householders, poor but respectable persons, and the laboring poor. The author Bhabanicharan, a scholarly Brahman, had made a career for himself as a professional writer and journal editor, perhaps the

first one in India. He was a leading figure in the new urban public life of debate and social campaign. His book, he says in his preface, was addressed to visitors to Calcutta from rural areas and small towns who found the ways of the new city utterly incomprehensible. His burden was to show that there was indeed an ethical way of living in the city, even though it was in many ways different from the traditional practices of the countryside. He provided the first elaborate description of the new politics of the *dal*, of parties.

Yes, wealth and power, he admitted, had much greater importance in Calcutta than at other places, but no one confused this new secular order of social status with the traditionally prescribed ritual order to precedence that was still respected but kept separate. The novelty of life in Calcutta lay in the unprecedented opportunities of social mobility that it offered. Lowly peddlers and shopkeepers could become wealthy aristocrats in the course of a single generation. Similarly, respectable people fallen into bad times could afford to take up menial or disreputable occupations because of the anonymity that the city offered. In short, greater freedom and greater equality than in the traditional order, a place of social churning, perhaps a place also of the emergence of new moral norms. Scholar that he was, Bhabanicharan noted the plethora of new Persian and English words that had entered the everyday Bengali language spoken in Calcutta. He defended the new practice, saying that there was nothing wrong in it as long as the language of religious ritual was kept uncontaminated.

I have spoken before of the rise of a new public domain in the early nineteenth-century Calcutta, where Indian and European notables could come together to criticize the government authorities and claim their rights as free subjects of the British monarch. It is tempting to speculate if this was the same tendency that had produced in the same historical era the political movements that led to the overthrow of empire in North and South America. Certainly, leading Indian intellectual figures such as Rammohun Roy believed in the existence of the public, and intrinsically urban, domain of freedom and equality, restricted by the economic and educational qualifications of responsible citizenship, but undivided by distinctions of race or color. So did the Eurasian poet and journalist Henry Derozio, the charismatic leader of the free-thinking young Bengal movement.

However, the authorities of the colonial government clearly wanted none of this. Driven by the specters of America and France, they were deeply suspicious of revolutionism. They imposed censorship on the press, deported troublesome European journalists, and actively discouraged the coming together of Europeans and Indians in associations that could make political demands in the public sphere.

The main features of the colonial modern, of course, have been widely discussed in the literature on colonialism and nationalism and are well known. I will date this period from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. It was at this time that the Indian economy became a characteristically colonial economy. The flow of colonial trade had been reversed from the export from India of textiles and luxuries, which was the earlier pattern, to the import of industrial manufactures and the export of primary agricultural products. The structures of colonial agrarian property, revenue, credit, and commodity exchange were also fully in place. Politically, the British bar had been established as paramount all over the subcontinent. Intellectually, the institutions of colonial education spread as the breeding ground of

new cultural styles and movements that created the Indian middle classes and shaped an entire range of nationalist responses to colonial rule. The colonial modern has a recognized shape as a formation and a period in South Asian history. It also exerts the full weight of its dominance over all discussions of south Asian modernity after the middle of the nineteenth century.

The city is, of course, the place of the colonial modern. That was where the new Indian middle classes, through their encounter with colonial rule, created the institutions and modes of thought and practice that would characterize nationalist modernity. However, the emergence of the colonial modern was also accompanied by a split in the urban public sphere. Unlike the earlier period—when there were many institutions and initiatives in which European and Indian residents of cities were partners—the second half of the nineteenth century saw the marking of a strong socially enforced dividing line between the British rulers and their Indian subjects. Correspondingly, the new institutions of nationalist modernity were founded on what was defined as a separate domain of national culture from which the alien rulers were excluded.

But it is important to emphasize that these racial dividing lines between rulers and ruled were kept in place not by publicly declared rules of segregation. There was no apartheid system in the cities of colonial India. On the contrary, the civic regulations and urban institutional structures were based on what the historian Patrick Joyce has called "the rule of freedom," with the qualification that it was subject to another rule, the one that I have elsewhere described as the rule of colonial difference. The rule of freedom justified the deployment of the new, more liberal techniques put in place in British cities in order to govern urban populations and make them more healthy, peaceful, and productive. This is the liberal project that produced the detailed urban censuses and maps; the new systems of piped water supply, underground sewers, garbage removal, and disposal of the dead; the public libraries and publicly supervised school systems, the avenues and parks, street lighting and public transport, and elected municipal government, all of this in the nineteenth century, of course.

All of these techniques were applied in the city of Calcutta in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet the rule of colonial difference ensured that the difference between white town and native town was known and observed by all residents. That official maps and directories specified the individual details of every house and its residents in the European wards—and only large classes of population in the native wards—that schools for European or Eurasian students and those for native students were supervised by different boards.

Let me show you a couple of maps. This is broadly a conceptual map around the middle of the nineteenth century, where you see the river on the left and the city is mostly a north-south settlement. The one on the south is white town or European town, the one on the north is native town, Indian town, and there's a section in the middle which is called intermediate here, which is largely business, commercial districts, less residential than the other two areas.

But this is an official map from 1825. This shows a section of a European ward, and each dark space is actually a house, a single house, with its compound or lawns, gardens, etcetera. And there's an accompanying directory which lists the resident of

each single house here. This is the European ward and this is what it looks on the map. Now to the same scale, an Indian ward. This is what it looks like, and the dark spaces are not single houses at all. They are settlements of huts all together, usually huts, and there is no directory except for the houses of particular rich, wealthy people. The entire . . . in fact, you will see there is no demarcation of single plots at all in this map.

The criteria by which the colonial could be declared as the exception to the universal rule were diverse. Sometimes it would be the difference between public and private, so that clubs or swimming pools could be reserved for whites only because they were regulated by rules made by private associations. In other cases, dress, demeanor, or even suspicious behavior could allow the police to prevent most classes of the native population from walking down particular streets or public places frequented by Europeans. An 1821 order from the governor, for instance, states: "Considerable inconvenience is experienced by the European part of the community who resort to the what is now called Strand Road from the crowds of native workmen and coolies who make a thoroughfare of the walk. His Lordship is pleased to direct that natives shall not in future be allowed to pass the Sluice Bridge between the hours of five and eight in the morning and five and eight in the evening." Now no blanket segregation this, only a rule of exception purporting to apply to particular population groups for specific time periods.

Or take this as another example. When work began in 1859 on an underground sewage system for Calcutta, the white town in the south of the city was the first to get it, and I'm quoting from an official report: "It has been hinted that the Europeans acted somewhat selfishly in commencing these works in their own quarter of the town. Where it was pointed out that the prevailing winds being from the south every improvement in the European quarter benefits the whole town, whereas the same can not be said of improvements in the northern division."

One of the most significant developments in the urban history of Calcutta in the late nineteenth century was the extension of the rule of freedom into the so-called black town in the north. This was a classically colonial process in which the moral project of modernity was wrested from the hands of the alien rulers by new nationalist elite. Sumanta Banerjee has described the process by which a vibrant popular culture of the streets was suppressed and tamed in the Calcutta of this period to produce the genteel urban high culture of the new Bengali middle class. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the streets served as an open marketplace. Peddlers and beggars jostle with gamblers and prostitutes. All roads and open spaces were potential sites of public entertainment. Religious festivals were observed by processions, music, ritual performances, and public revelry on the streets. Rijaluddin a Malay traveler from Penang, described the streets of Calcutta in 1810 as being full of entertainers such as snake charmers, puppeteers, gymnasts, trapeze artists, and fakirs showing tricks with monkeys, goats and bears. He also observed that the brothels and drinking houses were frequented by men of all races—English, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Chinese, Bengalis, Burmese, Tamils, and Malays. A famous satirical sketch from the middle of the century describes the brothel districts as places where it was impossible to tell the respectable man from the lowborn, because everyone wore the same fashionable clothes.

By the 1860s, however, the campaign was on to cleanse the streets of these noisy, obscene, and allegedly barbaric forms of entertainment. A guidebook published in

1886 warned rural visitors to the city that although the streets of Calcutta were open equally to all members of the public, those straying onto the carriageway were liable to be struck by a whip from a passing coach. Or unsuspecting men urinating on the roadside—a perfectly natural thing to do—might have had to spend the night in a police lockup. Popular festivals with performances such as body piercing and swinging from hooks were sought to be banned. Pantomime floats with ribald and satirical singing were removed from the streets, and brothels and liquor shops were put under strong surveillance. This was not merely the work of a colonial government driven by the evangelism of a civilizing mission. The new Bengali middle class was equally keen to create a new moral order of genteel civility, cleansed of the coarseness and vulgarity of the popular culture of the streets and the marketplace.

In the remaining part of this talk, I will describe the conflicting strategies adopted by different urban groups in Calcutta in two specific arenas of public entertainment: theater and football. This will I hope illustrate what I said at the beginning about the importance of specific historical trajectories in understanding the struggles over claiming equal rights to the city.

English theater came to Calcutta as early as the eighteenth century. Several playhouses opened over the years. Most were short lived and all were run by expatriate amateurs. Even in the early decades of the nineteenth century, female parts were played by male actors because actresses were not allowed on stage. I'm quoting. "The code of directors"—this is the code of directors of the East India Company—"feared that handsome actresses in India might arouse a spirit of intrigue among the junior servants of the Company." And doubtless, in those days, when English women were so scarce, the advent of actresses would have created a great stir and possibly led to scandal. By the 1830s, however, there were a few theaters with professional actors and actresses, some with experience of the professional stage in Europe. Apart from British officials and businessmen, even Indian notables of the city, such as Dwarkanath Tagore, participated in the management of these theaters. Although Shakespeare and Italian opera were performed from time to time, the staple was light comedy and farce.

By the middle of the century, with the spread of English education among Indians in the city and the strong emphasis in the curriculum on English literature, Bengali young men with a college background began to be attracted to the English playhouses. It was expensive; as one of these Bengali members of the audience tells us, a ticket could cost as much as 16 rupees—which was more than a month's salary for most office employees—and a drink of brandy and soda from the bar cost four rupees. But they still went. Brought up on a fare of open-air performances in the round on mythological and devotional themes—or on the song, dance, and pantomime of the popular street culture—the new class of Indian men educated in the Western style began to dream of entirely new expressive possibilities in the tightly framed drama of the proscenium stage.

In 1848 there was apparently a minor sensation when it was announced that James Barrie of the Sans Souci Theater was producing Shakespeare's *Othello* with "a native gentleman" playing the Moor of Venice and Mrs. Anderson, daughter of the city's most famous actress, in the role of Desdemona. On opening night there was a commotion in front of the theater on Park Street with coaches and buggies going in all directions, people muttering, "By Jove! Barrie and the Nigger will make a

fortune." But the gates were shut and rumors were flying that Barrie was drunk; that Othello, enjoying his sword, had struck himself; or that Desdemona had eloped with a general of the army. The next day it was revealed that three of the actors who were army officers had been forbidden by their commanding officer to go on stage, and that the police were waiting to arrest Barrie if he did not stop the performance. It was never official clarified why the brigadier issued the order, but the consensus was that he did not approve of his officers appearing on stage with a native actor in the company of European actresses. Barrie was, however, an enterprising man. In two weeks he had replaced the army officers with new actors. *Othello* opened to mixed responses.

The *Bengal Hurkaru*, which was the most popular English newspaper of the time, was polite and patronizing. "[I]f the indulgent approval of the audience is to be taken as a criterion of success Baboo Bustomchurn Addy, this is the Indian actor, can have no cause to complain. Unquestionably there is ample room for improvement, little reason to despair. Experience will do much, for deprived of good models as the student has hitherto been, we are bound to make every allowance and to look with favorable eyes upon this dramatic offshoot of the native body."

The *Englishman*, however, was less charitable: "In the delivery . . . , the effects of imperfect pronunciation were but too manifest. This was to be expected, but not to the extent it occurred. Scarcely a line was intelligible." On a later performance, the *Englishman's* criticism was damning: "Whether our Native friend judged wisely or well in selecting so difficult a task, we will not venture to discuss, but that he failed in every sense of the word, both in conception and execution, we think everybody present must admit."

Not fortunately or unfortunately, this was the last time that an Indian actor played a leading part in a theater for Europeans in Calcutta. I say fortunately because instead of killing the enthusiasm of educated Bengalis for the stage, the sad experience of Baishnabcharan Addy only confirmed their conviction that they had to have a public theater of their own. After several short-lived amateur playhouses, the first professional proscenium theater for Bengali plays opened in Calcutta in the early 1870s. Amritalal Basu, one of the pioneers, describes in his memoirs how meticulously they studied the English theaters of the city in order to replicate the details of sceneries, props, lighting, orchestra—even the number of folds on the curtain. The only thing the Bengali Public Theater did not have was a bar.

By the late 1870s there were four or five theaters in the northern, entirely Indian part of the city competing with one another for the patronage of a Bengali-speaking public. The average price of a seat was a rupee in the front stalls and eight annas, that's half a rupee, in the rear—still expensive, but affordable for a large section of the city's residents and visitors prepared to splurge a little for a special evening's entertainment.

It is important to realize the significance of this expansive character of the theatergoing urban public. The Bengali Public Theater was created by and for the new English-educated Bengali middle class because it could not find a place in the English theater of the city. But the new audience it created was much wider than the educated middle class itself, including, as it did, poorer residents and visitors to the city who had never been to school or college and a large number of women from

middle-class homes who at this time had no formal education. Indeed, in deference to the prevailing norms of gender segregation, several theaters reserved the entire balcony section for women and provided female ushers to communicate with the men of their families sitting in the stalls. Of the different forms of cultural production that were deployed in this period to spread modernity and nationalism, therefore, the theater certainly had a far broader reach than either the novel or the newspaper. Even though the Bengali Public Theater was consciously modeled on the European stage, the differences in the nature of the urban public quickly moved it into aesthetic and technical directions that were quite different from those of modern European theater. Historical romance became the most popular of the many adaptations of European dramatic genres, with many Shakespearean motifs being freely employed, even though Shakespeare's plays themselves did not prove to be very successful. Satire and farce were also very popular, in which Molière and English comedy-hall routines were mixed with the pantomime and street-performance genres of Calcutta's urban popular culture. A new genre was the mythological, adapted for the proscenium stage from the devotional performances of Bengal's traditional Vaishnava sectarian culture. Most genres, even the historical romance, wove into their narrative structure the device of song and dance. On the first-anniversary celebration of the National Theater in 1873, the dramatist Manomohan Basu warned the enthusiasts of modern theater not to be swayed by the absence of song and dance in the high dramatic tradition of the West. He was saying, "India is not Europe. European society is very different from our own society. European tastes are entirely different from our native tastes." He reminded his audience: "In this country we can not accomplish anything at any time at any place without singing a song." The elimination of song and dance from the new theater, he thought, would be too radical an innovation. "We are moderates," he announced. "We would like not to destroy all our native traditions, but to reform them. We would like to reduce the frequency the songs in the traditional *jatra* performance, modify their manner of singing, and incorporate them into the appropriate narrative form of the theater." His advice was heeded. The Calcutta Theater—like the Parsi Theater of Bombay and the later forms of the Indian popular cinema, which many of you are familiar with—succeeded in developing an entirely new language of dramatic narration that employed the song as a crucial rhetorical device.

Several of the new theatrical genres were used to spread the message of social reform and nationalism. The power of the theater in reaching a wide urban public was palpable. Within four years of the launching of the first Bengali Public Theater, the colonial government enacted in 1876 a law to give itself the right to prohibit any dramatic performance that, in its opinion, was "scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene, or otherwise prejudicial to the public interest." The law was frequently used. In turn, the theater developed new methods of deception and subterfuge, often cloaking its message of anticolonial nationalism in an anachronistic historical plot or inserting fervently patriotic songs into a benign romance.

Another borrowing from the European stage had radical social implications. The Bengali Public Theater introduced women actors. They were drawn from among the professional singers and dancers living in the brothels of the city. It was a remarkable pedagogical project in which gentleman producers trained their illiterate actresses to play the sophisticated heroines and mythological goddesses featured in the new theater. The project did not meet with universal approval. The same dramatist Manomohan Basu, who I quoted earlier, poured scorn: "At last prostitutes

have been accorded public and equal rights with respectable men in respectable society. At last the eyes and ears of the Bengali audience have been gratified, and the new universal ethical society, like the newly laid sewers of Calcutta, have acquired both fragrance and speed." This time, though, his admonition was ignored. Despite the stigma of their origins, actresses of the Calcutta stage often found fame, money, and a certain recognition as professional artists. That itself was new and an entirely urban occupational category.

The Calcutta theater is a good example of the strategic politics of the emerging nationalist elite of a colonial city. Denied equal participation in a racially neutral civil society, the nationalist elite proceeded to carve out a separate public cultural sphere for itself. But in doing so, it also sought to reach out to a wider urban public, to educate it in its new and sophisticated tastes, and to persuade it to listen to the new doctrines of social reform and nationalism. Of all the means employed by the new nationalist elite to create a base of mass support in the cities, the theater was one of the most effective.

Let me bring this story of the urban public domain—and the competing strategies adopted by different groups and classes to claim an equal place in it—to our contemporary times by telling you something about the history of soccer in Calcutta.

Like other things British and urban, or soccer—or associational football, to use its proper name—began in Calcutta soon after its emergence in British cities. Being a largely working-class sport, it was played in the late nineteenth century by British soldiers stationed in India and by Europeans and Eurasians in the railways, the police, and other services. It was also adopted enthusiastically by rapidly growing numbers of Indians who started neighborhood football clubs in cities like Calcutta. The best white teams played against each other on the grounds of Fort William, the citadel of British colonial power in the heart of the city. The Indian teams played barefoot in sundry open spaces in the native quarters.

In 1889 a trades cup was launched to be played by bona fide football clubs only. Lo and behold, one Indian club was allowed to compete. It lost in the first round. In 1893 the Indian Football Association was started to run an IFA shield tournament along the lines of the FA cup. Each year, two or three Indian teams were allowed to play, even though Indians had no place in the association itself.

It is important to appreciate the strategic location of this new arena of competitive sport in the public space of the colonial city. The IFA Shield was played on the fort grounds, supervised by an association of white clubs and by white referees. The competitors were mostly British regimental teams from different cantonments all over India. But because it was an open tournament, Indian clubs also had the right to compete. The rule of freedom, in other words, had to apply. But as always, it was subject to the rule of colonial difference. In this case, the criterion invoked was a limit on the number of local teams that could be allowed to join without curtailing the number of visiting teams and thereby jeopardizing the "all-India" character of the tournament. For several years, only two or three Indian teams from Calcutta were allowed to play for the IFA Shield. The turning point in the history of Calcutta soccer—and, some say, in the history of nationalism itself in Bengal—was the astonishing victory in the Shield final of 1911 of Mohun Bagan, a club located in the northern quarters of the city over the East Yorkshire Regiment. The stands in the

ground could seat only about four or five thousand, and these spectators were almost entirely white. Outside, it was reported, there were nearly 100,000, most of whom saw nothing of the game and were informed of its progress by kites in the sky bearing the latest score.

The symbolic part of this victory over a British military team of 11 barefoot young men from the city was incalculable. It probably served to underscore the belief that despite the patent unfairness of the rule of colonial difference, the rule of freedom could still provide the opportunity to colonize people, to assert its claim to equality in the public spaces of urban modernity.

Equality in the city, as I have already indicated, was not merely a problem between British rulers and Indian subjects. There continued to be great differences in the twentieth century between different sections of Indians—divided by class, caste, gender, and religion—in terms of their place in the city. By the 1930s, not only the open Shield tournament, but also the premiere football league in the city had been opened to a few Indian teams, even though the championship was still dominated by white teams. The next transforming moment, however, was the rise of Mohammedan Sporting Club, which won the football league for five successive years from 1934 to 1938. This was not simply the assertion of a minority religious group in the public life of the city, which is how the story is usually told. It was also the claim of a section of the urban poor to belong to the city not merely at the sufferance of the wealthy elites, but as it were in their own right. Mohammedan Sporting recruited players mostly, but not exclusively Muslim, from all over India, but they commanded a mass following among the Muslim poor that was unprecedented. Few could afford to buy tickets for all the matches, but thousands thronged the ramparts of the fort, standing on top of boxes and even bicycles, or peering through handmade periscopes to catch a glimpse of the action. Don't go away, I have a few photographs of this. There are several books of memoirs that talk of how Muslim grocers and vendors and employees of restaurants would endlessly entertain the players of Mohammedan Sporting, refusing to accept money from their idols, who—by defeating both British and middle-class Hindu teams—had given them at least a taste of dignity in their wretched urban lives.

The image of a few thousand legitimate spectators within the football ground and many more thousands outside—without tickets but still participating in the event—is, I think, an accurate picture of the new social form of a postcolonial city like Calcutta as it emerged through the middle of the twentieth century. This was the period of the population explosion. In Calcutta, the partition of India led to an influx of refugees from East Pakistan that quadrupled the population of the city and its suburbs in two decades. They camped down in refugee settlements and squatter colonies, mostly outside the margins of legality, and tried to make a livelihood by joining the burgeoning informal economy. Like the spectators on the fort ramparts, they were given a place in the city even though they could not be treated on the same footing as proper law-abiding citizens.

I have elsewhere described the mode of affiliation of these population groups to the public life of the city as political society, as distinct from the legally approved associational forms of civil society. They lived on illegally occupied land, traveled on public transport without buying tickets, used illegal electricity connections, and yet the civic authorities tolerated their presence, even supplying water and drainage and providing food rations, health services, and schools because they were a part of the

urban population that had to be governed. The story is one of a differentiated, politically negotiated application of the rule of freedom to the urban population. It recognized the democratic claims to equal rights in the postcolonial nation-state, but differentiated between those were proper citizens and those who were not.

On the football ground, the rise of East Bengal Club as the chief public institution asserting the identity of the refugees from East Pakistan was the most important event in the postcolonial period. With the British teams no longer in the picture, East Bengal emerged as the principal competitor to Mohun Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting. The club had an overwhelming mass following in the refugee settlements of the city. Hundreds of overflowing buses would carry thousands of supporters, waving their red and yellow flags, from the dingy squatter camps to the football grounds located in the very heart of urban power and privilege. When East Bengal won, the stands would light up with rows of flaming torches set against the falling dusk. The torch was the club's icon. When hundreds of them lit up the Eden Gardens stadium, it was a sign that the refugees had come to stay and were determined their claims to the city. The domestication of East Pakistan refugees into the social fabric of Calcutta is one of the most remarkable stories of urban history anywhere in the twentieth century. They overwhelmed the native population by their numbers. They fought against and sometimes thrived in the long-standing and deep-seated cultural prejudices that marked them as rustic, clannish, unsophisticated, or quarrelsome. They competed fiercely for scarce economic resources. They radicalized the politics of the city and yet, unlike Karachi or Beirut or the towns of Jordan, there was never any political conflict between locals and immigrants. Today, the story of the refugees is already a distant memory, a story that grandparents tell on a rainy day. My hunch is that football and East Bengal Club had a great deal to do with the domestication of a potentially troublesome people. I was one of them.

The postcolonial city of middle-class neighborhoods jostling with working-class slums and refugee colonies is now giving way to high-rise apartment blocks and shopping malls. The spine of the city is shifting to a set of new highway corridors to the east, connecting the campuses of the information-technology companies with the airport. A lot of what I saw in the morning on Chinese cities reminded me of exactly what's going on in parts of Calcutta, these new sections of Calcutta. History is now seen mostly as a matter of preserving the colonial architectural heritage that might lend charm to the city and attract tourists. The image of Calcutta symbolized by Mother Teresa is now an embarrassment. The future is said to lie in the new global city of IT professionals and IT-enabled services seeking to seize the trades and jobs outsourced by companies in Western countries. A large part of the so-called informal sector or wage labor—so long tenuously integrated into urban life through their negotiations in political society—now face the risk of becoming redundant in the new economy. Already, decades-old squatter settlements are being daily dismantled, more by persuasion and some financial inducement rather than by force, and apparently with little resistance.

The Public Theater in North Calcutta is now virtually dead. East Bengal and Mohun Bagan still retain a popular following, but more in the district towns, not in middle-class Calcutta where young men and women—if they watch football at all—switch on to the English or Spanish Premier League on cable television.

Will the Calcutta of the twenty-first century be a pale copy of some standard model of the global city? If the past is any guide, I suspect not. Equality is a capacious and complicated concept, and the desire to have it can lead to the invention of many unsuspected strategies. Calcutta did not become just another British city in the nineteenth century. I doubt that it will become just one more global city in the twenty-first.

Let me just show you just a few pictures taken from old newspapers—so they're extremely grainy—on football.

This is a photograph from 1923, and it shows—this is the stands inside the ground, and you'll notice almost all these spectators are white.

These are the people who couldn't get in.

And these are what I said, people standing on bicycles. Outside the ground, of course.

This is what it looks like outside the ground.

Most of these are from the 1920s.

Such a common sight, on top of the lamppost.

This is a cartoon published in *Manchester Guardian* after the 1911 Shield victory of Mohun Bagan. I don't know if you can read it. But the kites in the sky, and the contrast between the white players with boots and Indian players barefoot.

This is a section of the Mohammedan Sporting spectators. Now these are inside the ground, 1930s.

And this is watching through periscopes. See those little boxes, completely handmade, made of wooden contraptions and little mirrors. They would be available on rent outside the ground.

OK, thank you.