

Environment and Urbanization

<http://eau.sagepub.com>

The city from here

Environment and Urbanization 1996; 8; 101

DOI: 10.1177/095624789600800201

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://eau.sagepub.com>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



International Institute for Environment and Development

Additional services and information for *Environment and Urbanization* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://eau.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://eau.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://eau.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/8/2/101>

The city from here

Photographs by Achinto

Text compiled by V. Ramaswamy

Achinto is a Calcutta based photographer and has documented extensively life, labour, community and habitat in India's villages and cities. He is currently working on the theme The Child and the City.

V. Ramaswamy is a public policy consultant and writer. He is presently social development coordinator for the Calcutta Environmental Management Strategy and Action Plan (CEMSAP), a project run by the Department of Environment, Government of West Bengal, India, assisted by the ODA.



Howrah
Bridge

One should be grateful that such a city as Calcutta exists. Where else in the world is there a city so refreshing? To sit in the dust of Calcutta is better than to grace the throne of another dominion....

Mirza Ghalib⁽¹⁾



Baby
Crawling

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
... their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

From *The Prophet* Kahlil Gibran



Mother
and
Child

The living body requires an environment appropriate to it which cannot vary beyond certain limits in any direction without rendering life impossible.

Auguste Comte

**Boy
Amidst
Garbage**

There are flames dancing in the farthest corners,
throwing their shadows on a group of mourners.
Or are they lighting up a feast of poetry and wine?
From here you cannot tell, as you cannot tell
whether the colour clinging to those distant doors and walls
is that of roses or of blood.

From *The City from Here* Faiz Ahmed Faiz⁽²⁾

**Boy
with
Knife**



Father
with
Son
Reading

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or does it fester like a sore -
and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over -
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes



Tank-makers at Work

The new international division of labour is constructed around a pattern of inclusion or exclusion in a world-wide development process, segmenting countries and societies through their differential relationship to a dynamic, but increasingly unequal, model of socio-economic organization. ...

Only a few segments of the productive structure participate in the process of new peripheral industrialization. At the same time, the overall deterioration of the economic conditions determines that unemployment and underemployment, misery, hunger, illness and individual violence are on the increase, particularly in the major urban centres, the new magnets for all forms of human despair. ...

particularly in the major urban centres, the new magnets for all forms of human despair. ...

The current process of restructuring is fragmenting the social fabric of the planet. It is also recomposing it, but only in part, into a structure that primarily suits the interests of dominant governments and corporations, and of those areas or institutions for which the dominant powers have specific interests.

People, regions and countries react against such trends of structural disintegration. In most cases there is a survival reaction with an expanding informal economy defining new rules of the game in most cities... Yet, the path is so narrow that, as soon as people and nationals address the issue of their autonomous articulation in the world's economic structure, old and new patterns of dependency combine to close the exits... For the majority, it makes it increasingly difficult to reverse their position of dependency, thus undermining the chances for an improvement of their living conditions.

Manuel Castells⁽³⁾



Girl, with
Baby, Near
Pig

How will I return to you, my city,
where is the road to your lights?
My hopes are in retreat,
exhausted by these unlit, broken walls,
and my heart, their leader, is in terrible doubt.

From *City of Lights*
Faiz Ahmed Faiz⁽⁴⁾



**Small
Girl
Acrobat**

What is, need not be; what may be, can be better than what is.

Alfred de Grazia⁽⁵⁾



**Boy
Peeping
From
Behind
Pillar**

The public sphere is... what one might call the factory of politics - its site of production. When this site of production - the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable - is caught in a scissors-grip between private appropriation and the self-eliminating classical public sphere; when this public sphere threatens to disappear, its loss would be as grave today as the loss of the common land was for the farmer in the Middle Ages... The loss of land also means a loss of community because, if there is no land on which the farmer may assemble, it is no longer possible to develop a community. The same thing is happening again, on a historically higher plane, in people's heads, when they are deprived of the public sphere.

For these reasons, this use value, this product, which is the "public sphere", is the most fundamental product that exists. In terms of community, of what I have in common with other people, it is the basis for processes of social change.

Alexander Kluge⁽⁶⁾



Girl on a
Swing

The city is a place for multiplying happy chances and making the most of unplannable opportunities.

Lewis Mumford⁽⁷⁾



Boy
Across
Fence,
Blowing
Balloon

References

1. Mirza Ghalib, the great Urdu poet (1797-1869) lived in Calcutta during 1828-29. Ghalib found delight in the "black town" that repelled European visitors. His remembrances of Calcutta's "cool breezes" and "pleasant waters" provide a happy contrast to the stink that overwhelmed visitors such as Rudyard Kipling; quoted in Rabindra Kumar Das Gupta (1990), "Old Calcutta as presented in literature" in Sukanta Chaudhuri (editor) (1990), *Calcutta: The Living City*, Vol. 1, *The Past*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
2. Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1992), *The Rebel's Silhouette*, translated by Agha Shahid Ali, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
3. Castells, Manuel (1989), "High technology and the international division of labour", *Labour and Society*, Vol. 14.
4. See reference 2.
5. de Grazia, Alfred (1973), *Kalos: What is to be done with our World?*, Kalos Press, Bombay.
6. Kluge, Alexander (1991), "The public sphere" in Brian Wallis (editor), "If you lived here: the city in art, theory and social activism", a project by Martha Rosier, Dia Art Foundation, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No.6, Bay Press, Seattle.
7. Mumford, Lewis (1938), *The Culture of Cities*, Harcourt Brace, New York.