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A neo-Gandhian interpretation of the urban

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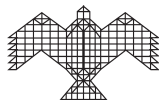Bangalore, India

Functioning anarchy of Indian cities
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FUNCTIONING ANARCHY OF INDIAN CITIES

INTRODUCTION

When John Kenneth Galbraith referred to India as the "world's greatest example of functioning anarchy", it was no more than a light-hearted aside in an article on the economic policy options available to the country a decade after its independence (Galbraith, 1958). If more than half a century later the comment still finds its way into popular discourse it is not because of any broad based ideological shift towards an extreme libertarian ideology. The term anarchy has rarely been used in a positive sense in Indian political discourse. Even when the chief minister of the short-lived Aam Aadmi Party government in the nation's capital city claimed to be an anarchist, it took the form of political repartee rather than any meaningful discussion (Some say I am an anarchist, yes I am: Arvind Kejriwal, 2014). The attractiveness of the term 'functioning anarchy' must then lie in less theoretically sophisticated domains. It is, more often than not, an expression of dismay that a country that can achieve high growth rates cannot achieve a semblance of order. The unwillingness to accept any

form of order imposed by an authority from above, and the price that demands, is quite evident to even someone passing through India's cities. Chaotic city traffic ensures pedestrians pay a price, sometimes with their lives ('Cyclists and pedestrians account for over half of all road fatalities', 2013). It is not unknown for riots to break out over statues (Jaoul, 2006). Even in one of the industries the country is most proud of— the information technology units in Bangalore — there is a divergence between the working norms for women in practice and that prescribed in law. The nature of the industry makes it necessary for women to work at night, while the law of that state does not allow it. And this anarchy is beginning to take a toll on several elements of basic civic life, including the safety of women in Indian cities.

In the search for an approach that will help understand how and why this widespread disorder has become deeply embedded in Indian cities, this paper falls back on the ideas of one of India's most celebrated politicians — and possibly underrated thinkers — of the twentieth century: MK Gandhi. While Indian

officialdom grants him near sainthood by referring to him as the Mahatma, the tools he used to understand Indian society, in the process of generating what was arguably the largest political mobilization of the twentieth century, have not received sufficient critical attention. By distilling a method from his writings, without at the same time offering a predetermined commitment to accept all his judgements, this paper hopes to develop what can be termed a neo-Gandhian approach that will help better explain the working of Indian cities, if not some of the broader issues in understanding urban spaces.

The paper begins with a brief exploration of the nature of anarchy in India's cities, focusing on the mix of identity politics and gender issues that has become increasingly life-threatening. It then outlines an interpretation of Gandhian thought that emphasizes his method while deliberately ignoring his judgements. In the process it uses his concept of Swadeshi to make a distinction between what can be called perceptible and imperceptible spaces. The paper then goes on to outline the working of this method in the urban sphere. Finally, it takes this method back to the challenge of understanding the explosive mixture of identity politics and gender issues that threaten to make Indian cities extremely difficult for women to live in.

The anarchy of Indian cities

The disregard for authority in Indian cities is as widely dispersed across the country as it is diverse in nature. Moreh, a border town in the state of Manipur in the northeast of India, is a base for the illegal flow of arms across international borders (Lian, 2013). And if we consider such disregard for authority a problem confined to remote parts of the country, we need to consider the case of units in Dharavi slum in the centre of Mumbai that process hides for leather exports to the developed world under conditions that are clearly inhuman (Mahmud, 2010). This substantial diversity ensures that each case of the challenge to central authority has its own unique features.

While there need not be any clear pattern across the various cases of urban practices that challenge centralized authority, there are certain instruments that can get be used in very different situations. Among the more frequently used instruments to disregard authority imposed from above in urban India is the phenomenon of a Bandh, or complete shutdown. A group within an urban entity — ranging from a small town to the country's financial capital, Mumbai, — can force a complete closure of all activity for a fixed period of time, usually a day. This instrument gained legitimacy as a valid tool of protest against British authority in the colonial era, where claims could be made that it represented the interests of all Indians against a foreign government. The instrument continued into the post-independence era as means of protest against the state, even when the group calling for a bandh could not claim to represent all of local society. When this

conflict, between those calling for a bandh and the larger society that was forced to pay the price of a complete shutdown, reached the Kerala High Court in 1997 it ruled that "calling for a bundh by any association, organization or political party and the enforcing of that call by it is illegal and unconstitutional" (Bharat Kumar and Anr vs State of Kerala and Ors, 1997). The Supreme Court of India upheld the view of the Kerala High Court noting that 'There cannot be any doubt that the fundamental rights of the people as a whole cannot be subservient to the claim of fundamental right of an individual or only a section of the people" (The Communnist Party of India (M) vs Bharat Kumar & ors, 1997).

Despite the strong affirmation of the ban on bandhs by the highest court in the land the call for bandhs and their enforcement has not stopped. If anything it has moved on from the political space to the social space. The death of a film star in a southern city can bring about a complete closure of a city. This could be termed to be within the political space in states like Tamil Nadu where the film stars have transformed themselves into politicians, but it also occurs in states like the neighbouring Karnataka where the biggest stars have often chosen to stay out of the political space. The death of the Kannada film actor Raj Kumar not only resulted in the complete closure of Bangalore in April 2006, but also in the loss of several lives in rioting (Murthy, 2006).

Among the trends in Indian cities that have spurred the movement of instruments like Bandhs from the political to the social space is the growing role of identity. While Indians, like anyone else, have multiple identities the urban circumstances in individual cities tend to create situations where some individual identities become more important than others. The political and social mobilization around the issue of the birthplace of Lord Ram in the 1990s saw a rise in the focus on religious identities in several Indian cities (Chibber & Misra, 1993). The effective merger of the largely Tamil speaking Cantonment areas with the Kannada speaking City areas of Bangalore saw a rise in the language identities in that city (Nair, 2005). And the significance of a particular identity varies not just across place but also across time. Bangalore which saw bloody language riots has also had communal riots at other times (Nair, Language and the Right to the City, 2000)

The preoccupation with identity in Indian cities has, not entirely surprisingly, had its effect on the family and the individual as well. Seemingly forgotten identities like that of the gotra have not only been revived but turned into an instrument of oppression. The gotra is a lineage that is believed to be traced over many centuries, and traditionally marriage between couples belonging to the same gotra is banned. Some caste networks have seen the re-emergence of resolve to use violent steps to enforce the ban on marriage within the same gotra. This has resulted in young couples being murdered, often with the consent of the parents of the bride, in what are

euphemistically termed "honour killings" (Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011). These murders typically have the sanction of the local Khap panchayats. As the decision moves back and forth between the family domain and the social, an entire discourse justifying such killings is built around it. And a prominent place in this discourse is provided for comments on the dress westernised women wear, thereby seeking to virtually justify aggression against them on the streets. Consequently, women are among the most vulnerable to the growing anarchy in Indian society.

Understanding this widespread disregard for authority to the point of large scale disorder comes up against several methodological challenges. The contributions to this disorder range from the level of individuals to that of multiple identity groups within a society, raising questions about the appropriate unit of analysis. Again, the fact that the situation varies so substantially across both time and place makes it difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a single grand theory that explains it all. This has sometimes led to a more nuanced interpretation of large theoretical frameworks. But it is not always clear whether the nuances a situation demands are completely consistent with the basic premises of that theoretical framework. Alternatively, there is a tendency to abandon all- explaining grand theories and focus on everyday understandings of specific situations. While this approach has provided a literature of great empirical value and insights, it does

not fully address the question of what exactly in the experience of one situation can be taken to understand another. It is in order to find an approach that meets the twin challenges of identifying the appropriate level of analysis and addressing the variation situations provide that we turn to an interpretation of Gandhi's ideas.

A neo-Gandhian method

Interpreting Gandhi's ideas more than a century after his first major work was written poses two challenges. First, as someone who insisted that 'my life is my message' there are no texts making out his arguments to an academic audience. What we have to function with is a hundred volumes of his Collected Works, consisting of writing targeted at a wide range of audiences from children and homemakers to political leaders. Any consistent framework to be drawn from these volumes must then be put together by those reading these volumes. These interpretations, particularly among his followers, have often focused on the lifestyles he advocated rather than the tools of his social analysis. In order to gain the benefits of Gandhi's insights into socio-political processes it is necessary to shift the focus to the instruments he used to understand society. This would involve constructing a methodological framework for understanding society based on Gandhi's writings; an exercise that involves bringing together diverse elements of Gandhi's thought from different places in the hundred volumes of his Collected Works.

The second challenge lies in addressing the situational dimension of Gandhi's thought. This is clearly a critical component of Gandhi's thought and is indeed what brought us to his ideas in our search for an explanation for the disorder in India. But by its very nature an analysis of a situation in a part of a large country in the early twentieth century cannot be simply transferred into situations prevailing in the early twenty-first century. We need to distinguish between the instruments of analysis that he used and the judgements about specific situations that he made. Continuing with his judgements poses serious difficulty both because of the change in the situations as well as the fact that they were the product of Gandhi's unique personality. There is thus little to be gained by adhering strictly to his individual judgements and prescriptions for specific situations. What can have a longer term value is the method he used to understand specific situations.

What we need to do then is to construct a methodological framework based on Gandhi's thought. This framework, as we shall see in a while, would recognise a role for judgements, but would not treat Gandhi's prescriptions and judgements to be the only ones available. What we are looking for then is the method Gandhi would have used to understand specific situations, and not the judgements he would have made in coming up with his diagnosis of that situation. This is not entirely unlike the argument that doctors trained in the same method of diagnosis can still, for a variety of reasons including limits on available information, come up with different judgements and prescriptions.

At the core of this adoption of a diagnostic method in social analysis is a need to consider all the factors that could have an impact on a given situation. Such an inclusive approach does not leave much room for a single all-explaining general theoretical model. Gandhi's scepticism about grand ideological models, at a time when ideological politics was quite dominant across the world, was based on his belief that "it is not possible to enunciate one grand principle and leave the rest to follow of itself" (Gandhi, 1958-1993, Vol 88, p 59). This is not to be mistaken for a complete rejection of theory or models. Theoretical models are useful abstractions that could help understand specific process at work in a situation. But the role of each such model could change from situation to situation. There could be situations where the processes captured by a particular model would be overwhelming, leaving little room for any other factors to come into play. In such cases the model would appear to be comprehensive and providing all the explanations that are needed. In other situations the same model could be less relevant, and the processes it captures could be overwhelmed by contradictory processes. To cite an example from common sense, gravity would explain why a pencil falls to the floor when dropped, but it does not prevent an aircraft from taking to the air. There are social situations

that can be completely explained by class conflict just as in others an individual's response to the market may overwhelm the dynamics of class conflict. Rather than posing these situations as evidence of contradictory theories, the neo-Gandhian method would treat them as varied situations requiring different diagnosis and prescriptions. The analysis would then begin with an assessment of the situation.

In analysing the dynamics of a situation Gandhi provided primacy for action. Gandhi endorsed a concept of action that he found in his interpretation of the Bhagvad Gita. "Karma means any action, any bodily activity or motion. In the Gita's definition of the word, however, Karma includes even thought. Any motion, any sound, even breathing, are forms of karma. Some of them we cannot avoid performing. Some of them we perform as a matter of necessity. Some others are involuntary" (Gandhi, 1958-1993, Vol 32, 148). This broad definition of action goes beyond seeing actors as primarily a part of a network. It provides a framework that allows for the inclusion of any activity that could influence a situation.

An action in a particular situation can then be seen as the result of the urge to act and the process of carrying out that action. The urge to act is primarily dependent on aspects of knowledge, which includes three elements. First, there is what we know. This varies from individual to individual and across time. Second, there are the elements of what we know that we bring to bear on a particular action. This choice

can be the result of variety of influences at the personal and social level. The media, for instance, can play a significant role in deciding what aspects of what we know we choose to bring to bear on a particular situation. And third, there is the subjective element in knowledge. If we go by the Duhem-Quine thesis any experiment is an evaluation not just of the hypothesis but also of other factors such as the equipment used (Sawyer, Beed, & Sankey, 1997). There is thus an element of judgement in deciding that the influence of these other factors on the result of the experiment is not significant. The role for the subjective in knowledge in a neo-Gandhian method would not stop at such elements. The subjective element of knowledge would also extend to the questions we choose to ask.

The treatment of knowledge that develops an urge to act is not unconnected to the process of carrying out the action. The choice of the means to carry out an action is influenced by the treatment of knowledge. If we believe that the knowledge we possess is the absolute truth there would be a tendency to be intolerant of other viewpoints. At best there would be belief that there is a need to educate others about the absolute truth. Again, if our knowledge is conceived in terms of systems and there is a case made out to move from one social system to another, it could be argued that the change should be made as rapidly as possible without worrying too much about the costs of the transition. This is the certainty that

underlies most revolutions, whether it is of the communist kind or the case for shock therapy in post-communist Russia. Here again a great deal depends on the subjective approaches to knowledge and the process of implementing an action.

This critical role for knowledge contributed to Gandhi providing a prominent place in his writings for his concept of truth. Built into his idea that 'truth is God' was the belief that while an absolute truth does exist it was not accessible in its totality to the ordinary mortal. What we had to function with then was relative truth (Gandhi, 1993). Gandhi's idea of relative truth is perhaps best understood in comparison to Popper's idea of science. Popper used falsifiability to demarcate science from non-science, and then made a case for focusing on science alone. Relative truth would then, like science, be based on rationality or what Gandhi chose to refer to as reason. The demarcation between science and non-science would then broadly correspond to Gandhi's distinction between reason and faith. But unlike Popper, Gandhi could not limit himself to reason alone. Since his method was built around the primacy of action, and people acted even in the absence of complete knowledge, actions could have elements of both reason and faith. All that Gandhi would insist on was that reason must always have precedence over faith.

The use of the term faith could be interpreted to mean a specific religion, especially since Gandhi was a deeply religious person. But that could be a very limited understanding of faith. There is reason to believe Gandhi provided a much wider interpretation of the term. In any case, since our concern here is not so much an evaluation of Gandhi's ideas as an attempt to put together a consistent method, it would be more rewarding to treat faith as a belief that allows us to act even when there is still an element of doubt in the knowledge underlying that action. The nature of this faith will necessarily vary from individual to individual, as how one deals with doubt has an element of subjectivity built into it.

The room for alternative reactions to doubt should ensure that all subjective judgements cannot be treated equally. The challenge for a scientific analysis would not just be to reduce subjectivity but to improve the quality of subjectivity that cannot be done away with. The quality of subjectivity would be influenced by at least two other influences. First, all individuals are not the same. Gandhi endorsed the view available in traditional Indian philosophy that there are three gunas: the pure, the passionate and the dark. He argued that "All three exist in us. We should make a special effort to cultivate that which we want to strengthen" (Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gita, 1996, p. 245). The infinite combinations of the various degrees to which these three gunas are present in an individual influence several dimensions of an individual, including the quality of her subjective judgements. Second, the mere existence of doubt does not mean anything

is possible. We may have a doubt as to whether A or B would happen, which does not make C equally likely; at a certain point at sea level on the equator we may doubt whether it would rain or not, but that does not make it equally likely that it will snow.

The variety of subjective judgements possible makes it necessary to also take on board at least some of the major influences on the way subjectivity is used. It is here that Gandhi's concept of Swadeshi gains particular significance. The concept has been identified in popular discourse with the particular use to which it was put in the Indian nationalist movement: a demand for protection against imports. But when Gandhi chose to define it in 1916 he provided a more abstract statement that was not directly linked to territorial issues: "After much thinking, I have arrived at a definition of Swadeshi that perhaps best illustrates my meaning. Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote" (Gandhi, 1958-1993, Vol. 13, p 219). Since he said this in an address to Christian missionaries and does not refer to territory we can take it that it was meant to refer to a wider context than just territory; it could mean our immediate cultural surroundings, linguistic surroundings and the like. In terms of the requirements of a neo-Gandhian method we can take Swadeshi to mean the tendency in us to prefer our immediate geographical, cultural, linguistic and other surroundings when acting in the midst of doubt.

This view of Swadeshi increases its role in times of uncertainty. When we enter situations of greater uncertainty and doubt we would tend to seek out ideas and individuals who are closest to our immediate surroundings. A systematic consolidation of individuals who share similar immediate surroundings could generate three trends: these individuals could identify themselves as belonging to that group; they could be seen to be belonging to that group; and over time a discourse could emerge about that group. The existence of these three conditions would see them gaining a social identity in Kwame Anthony Appiah's sense of the term (Appiah, 2007). Societies going through periods of uncertainty would then see increasing awareness of identities. To the extent that individuals have a plurality of immediate surroundings based on their territory, their language, their religion, and much else, there could be a plurality of identities. The dominant identity could then be determined by the nature of uncertainty in a particular situation. Coping with a social conflict around religion could see individuals seeking their immediate religious surroundings and hence emphasizing their religious identity; class conflict could see the strengthening of class identities, and so on.

As individuals try to protect their interests, either individually or as parts of identity groups, they can come up against individuals and groups with other interests. These conflicts can emerge at different levels, including those between individuals

as independent members of society, those between individuals within an identity group, those between individuals across different identity groups, those between identity groups, and so on. When capturing each of these conflicts the appropriate unit of analysis would itself vary. Those conflicts that have a prominent place for the individual would require the individual to be the unit of analysis. At the same time while identity groups consist of individuals, they could have a dynamic of their own. They would have their own demands and aspirations. It is possible that in some social situations individuals who have previously identified with one identity group may choose to identify with another. But the identity group would not be able to change the demands it raises as easily. A class conscious society may suddenly be struck by a spate of communal riots. A group that remains loyal to its class identity would then lose relevance, but its demands would strictly speaking not change. Such situations would be better understood by focussing on identity groups rather than individuals. Thus the choice of the appropriate unit of analysis is itself dependent on the situation that is being analysed.

The emergence of such conflicts of interests between individuals and groups leads to a search for a consensus that all parties can live with. We can see the process of searching for such a consensus as negotiations. Ideally these negotiations would be carried out through formal institutions that allow for the representation of all viewpoints and interests. But these negotiations need not always be formally recognised as such. The arguments in such negotiations need not also always be expressed verbally; they could be done through mass mobilization and displays of anger on the streets. In understanding these various negotiations in search of a consensus, the neo-Gandhian method would focus on three major instruments that each party could use. The first major instrument is the empowerment of the individual or the group. This empowerment could come from a variety of sources. It could be the result of the economic capital that an individual or group has access to. It could also be the ability to mobilize large numbers in the political space. Social and cultural capital can also contribute to the empowerment of an individual or group. The second instrument in negotiations is the availability of options. An employee of an information technology firm could increase her ability to bargain for a higher salary if she has the option of getting another job. The third instrument is that of fairness. The need for fairness can increase the moral pressure that is often exerted in a negotiation. Even in the most militant conflicts there is the argument that one side has been treated unfairly.

The nature of these negotiations would vary depending on the space they take place in. Once we take on board the idea that human actions have both an objective component that is based entirely on rationality, as well as a subjective component where Swadeshi, or the

preference for immediate surroundings, can play a role, it becomes important to distinguish between perceptible space and imperceptible space. There is of course now a wide recognition that space goes far beyond its physical characteristics. Following Lefvebre (Lefvebre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991) there has been considerable interest in the social production of space. This in turn has led to greater attention being paid to public space, and what would make it more democratic (Habermas, 1991). Even as this discussion takes space well beyond its physical dimensions much of this work remains within the realm of what is perceptible. The effort has largely been to perceive the working of power, race, gender, and other influences, on a given space. This space can be understood within the strict norms of rationality. There is however also another space, one that is imperceptible. This is the space that is created by our loyalty to our immediate surroundings. As in the case of the Gandhian version of Swadeshi the immediate surroundings here are not confined to the territorial dimension, but extend to other elements like culture and intellectual identities. This loyalty is primarily determined by a sense of association, more than rationality. And this space too can be contested. A typical example of a contestation of imperceptible space is the debate in France over the right of Muslim women to wear headscarves. The loyalty to a religious culture that leads to these acts is essentially imperceptible. All that can be seen here is the occasional

consequence of this loyalty, such as when a Muslim woman defies the ban and wears a headscarf. Again, the role of self-respect in the building of an identity in India is essentially imperceptible. Its magnitude is only seen when it leads to specific acts like a self-respect movement. Thus while perceptible space is best understood in rational terms, imperceptible space requires a greater role for Swadeshi, or our preference for our immediate surroundings over the more remote.

Within these spaces the negotiations could be carried out in a variety of arenas. Places where knowledge is generated, ranging from educational institutions to playgrounds, could all be arenas for negotiation. Again there are arenas which determine the choice of particular bits of knowledge that get used in a negotiation. These arenas range from the media to cultural institutions. Negotiations can occur in different specific arenas even for a similar conflict. A wage negotiation that is built around the empowerment of workers would, more often than not, take place within the workplace. This would be particularly true when workers use a strike to strengthen their case. At the same time a wage negotiation based on exploring alternative job options could well take place in a pub. The arenas of imperceptible space are by their very nature more difficult, even impossible, to explore in detail, but it is possible to identify acts that can affect negotiations in that space. Tearing down the flag associated with a particular identity group or throwing carcasses in front of a

place of worship have all been known to generate riots in India.

By their very nature these negotiations do not always result in an ideal situation. Those with greater empowerment and options could enforce an outcome that is not fair. Such outcomes may be accepted only because a fairer outcome is not realizable. Once an outcome is accepted it would generate certain practices. In our wage negotiations at the workplace example it would formalize work commitments that have been agreed upon. Over time it would create a regular practice of individuals negotiating at the workplace and then following the commitments that have been agreed upon. This repeated acceptance of a practice with a role for specific individuals would meet Rom Harre's definition of an institution "as an interlocking double-structure of persons-as-role-holders or office-bearers and the like, and of social practices involving both expressive and practical aims and outcomes" (Harre, 1979, p. 98). Similarly, even the process of meeting in pubs to seek out alternative jobs would be an institution.

A neo-Gandhian method would then trace the actions of individuals and identity groups and the negotiations they generate to arrive at a bargained consensus. The practices the bargained consensus throws up would then form the basis for institutions. A society where a bargained consensus has been accepted for a period of time would be a stable one. But this stability could falter with changes at each stage in the process. If there is a change in the empowerment of individuals and identity groups, or a change in the options available, or a moral transformation that results in a new sense of fairness, the existing bargained consensus would be challenged. And even if a fresh bargained consensus is arrived at, it need not be consistent with the existing institutions. A gap between existing institutions and what is accepted on the ground would generate demands for institutional transformation.

THE METHOD AND THE CITY

When we put the neo-Gandhian method to use in understanding cities, an area that immediately comes into focus is the role of identities. In whatever way we choose to define a city there is a significant place for its size and density of population. In such a larger arena an individual can find herself in a position to activate a multiplicity of her social identities. The city allows for the emergence of multiple identity groups. Each group provides an opportunity for the individual to identify with that group, be identified as belonging to it, and be a part of a general discourse around that identity, thereby meeting Appiah's requirements for a social identity. And an individual need not be confined to a single social identity. She can adopt a social identity that is global at her workplace, and spend the evening being a part of a local social identity associated with, say, a football club. When an individual moves seamlessly from one identity to another reflecting all the facets of her personality she can explore all the dimensions of her

individuality. Such a seamless movement between social identities would be possible when the institutional practices associated with each identity are well established and stable. Cities that allow for the full expression of individuality are then typically those that have established and largely unchallenged social practices.

Not all cities are however characterised by a stable set of social practices. Even cities that have stable social practices for some time need not have them always. Cities in the midst of a transformation can find new groups being empowered at the cost of others. Technological change can result in the emergence of new options for individuals even as it could lead to the demise of earlier options. The rise of information technology has transformed the character of several cities. Sometimes social change can be accompanied by new moral norms and consequently changes in the idea of what is fair. Such times of change can increase the level of uncertainty that an individual faces. Her association with a social identity need not then be confined to treating it as a means of expressing an aspect of her individuality. She may also seek security from the group of others associated with that identity. A time of social conflict, even when it is not violent conflict, may generate sufficient uncertainty, even fear, in an individual to a point where she would find it necessary to tap whatever sense of security being in a group with a shared identity can provide. Cities in India that have witnessed communal conflict have been known to

see communities tending to live together in closely knit colonies. Cities of greater uncertainty, or phases when cities go through greater uncertainty, are then more likely to see the rise of identity groups in the social and political space. To the extent that these identities are built by invoking loyalty to one's immediate surroundings, it provides a greater role for imperceptible space. At times of communal strife in countries like India the negotiations take place in imperceptible space before they are revealed in, say, the choice of areas of residence.

Individuals and identity groups can often act in ways that seek to enhance their role in both the perceptible and imperceptible spaces. In the process they may be forced into negotiations with other individuals and identity groups. A significant part of these negotiations can relate to defining the boundaries that individuals and identity groups would like to draw. These boundaries can range from those that are primarily concerned with the requirements of an individual, such as the need for privacy, to those that delimit the public sphere where there should ideally no limits for any individual or group. While these boundaries are sometimes linked to a specific geographical spaces within a city that need not always be the case. As Saskia Sassen has argued, we can distinguish between two kinds of boundaries, "One is that the border is embedded in the product, the person, and the instrument: a mobile agent endogenizes critical features of the border. The other is that there are multiple

locations for the border" (2008, p. 416). While the latter is linked to a particular territory, the first is not. The mobile boundaries can be quite striking in cities in the developing world, as in the case of individuals in luxury cars driving through areas of stark poverty.

In this situation of multiple negotiations, a bargained consensus, if it exists, can be quite fragile. A change in any of the three elements of negotiation could break it. The empowerment of particular social groups within a city could be dramatically transformed by a variety of factors. The influx of capital into a city could find fresh demands on perceptible as well as imperceptible space. While much of the negotiations for land and power are in the perceptible space, the negotiations to redefine what the values the city identifies itself with are often in the imperceptible space until the results of the negotiations are visible. Similarly, though at the other end of the economic spectrum, a massive burst of migration of labour could also generate fresh negotiations in both the perceptible and imperceptible spaces. Even as their struggle to find a livelihood in the city will alter negotiations in the perceptible space, their negotiations with the fears of moving into the city will largely remain in the imperceptible space. Again, the options available in a city are also not unchanging. Economic options could change with a transformation in the economy for better or for worse. A number of factors could change the social options too. A change in the sex ratio, either due to migration or

female foeticide, cannot but have dramatic social consequences. And the morality accepted by different individuals or groups in the city is not unchanging either.

The impact on the city would depend not only on the results of these multiple negotiations but also on the processes of negotiations. Cities where empowerment is enhanced through access to violence would necessarily face the adverse consequences of the process, even if a bargained consensus is finally reached. And after bargained consensuses are reached, it remains to be seen whether the practices they create are consistent with existing institutions. If they are not, much would depend on the ability of the city to change the nature of its institutions.

Bargaining in Indian cities

When understanding Indian cities it is important to place them in the context of urbanization. At last count — the 2011 Census of India — less than a third of India's population lived in urban areas. It is possible to find fault with these official figures and make a case that they underestimate the extent of urbanisation. But even after making these adjustments, it is difficult to ignore the fact that a majority of India's population still lives in villages. This dominant rural context is not without its influence on the country's cities. Significant sections of the inhabitants of India's cities retain a connection with their village for at least two reasons. First, these connections are built into the nature of migration from the rural to the urban.

It has been shown that families do not typically move from the village to the city in one unit. The man tends to move first. After he has found employment the wife joins him. If the wife is able to find employment, they usually prefer to leave the child with the extended family in the village until she is old enough to take care of herself in the urban environment (Pani & Singh, 2012). This extended process of migration ensures a sustained link between the inhabitants of cities and their villages. Second, the connections are also protected because the family in the village can play the role of a safety net to the urban migrant. When they lose their jobs in a city with a high cost of living and have difficulty finding another soon enough, they could return to the relatively low cost existence of their villages (Bhowmik & More, 2002). Even when this option is not exercised, the fact that it exists acts as a safety net.

The process of urbanization is also not evenly spread out. There are states like Tamil Nadu where the process has gathered considerable momentum with close to half its population living in urban areas in 2011, in contrast to states like Bihar where only a little over a tenth of its population was living in urban areas in that year(Census of India, 2011, Provisional Population Tables). These uneven processes of urbanization encourage migration across the country, sometimes from the relatively backward states of the north and the east to the relatively better developed ones in the south and the west. The distances involved in this migration does not completely remove the temporariness of the process. At times of urban distress or tensions there is a tendency to return quickly to the place of origin even if the distance involved is several thousand kilometres. In August 2012 there were rumours in the south Indian city of Bangalore that there would be attacks on migrants from the northeast of the country. Though no such incident was actually reported the fear of the attacks saw tens of thousands of migrants from the northeast fleeing Bangalore (Srivatsa & Kurup, 2012).

This vast and diverse process will necessarily throw up very different situations. The emergence of identity groups, the creation of perceptible and imperceptible spaces, and the negotiations in these spaces would all vary quite substantially across different situations. A meaningful analysis would take the neo-Gandhian method to specific situations. We can then return to the issue we started out with: the identity and gender related crisis, using the case of the Indian capital of Delhi.

The city of Delhi has been a centre of power in India for many centuries, extending long before the colonial era. In the process the city has been shaped and reshaped by multiple imaginations backed by the resources and power to enforce whatever the imaginations demanded. As the city has grown it has engulfed villages as well as sites of historic significance. The grandeur of the plans for the city

reflected the confidence of its rulers, past and present, feudal and democratic, which was not always equalled by the quality of planning. As the planners focused their attention of what had to be constructed they did not always have time for the needs of those who were carrying out the constructions, especially migrant labour. "Thus the building of planned Delhi" as Baviskar points out, "was mirrored in the simultaneous mushrooming of unplanned Delhi" (Baviskar, 2003). This process has had its effects on the identity groups the city has thrown up.

Among the multitude of identity groups in the city there are three broad categories that deserve closer attention for the purposes of the phenomenon we are trying to understand. First, there are the identity groups that are related to the rural. These groups includes both those who have come to the city — the migrants — as well as those the city has gone out to, that is, the villages that have been absorbed into the city. Often the migrants, for want of better options, live in the villages that have been absorbed into the city. This leads to the emergence of a variety of identity groups that bring the rural ethos into the city. Second, there is the labour that has been brought to construct the city. The extremely difficult conditions they have to live in ensure that this activity attracts primarily those who are among the most depressed in the rural areas. As the most depressed in rural India are often Dalits there is a broad caste identity that brings these groups together. The third set of

identity groups can, for want of a better word, be termed 'urbane'. These groups are dominated by the ascendant middle class that is comfortable with a role in influencing state policy. These groups can include a wide set of individuals including those in the bureaucracy, the media, academia, and possible even a section of activists.

These three sets of groups negotiate to define borders in both the perceptible and imperceptible spaces. In the perceptible space the conflict is largely over what happens on specific pieces of land. This is not just a matter of a battle for ownership, though that is undoubtedly important. It is also a matter of how others use land. For several 'urbane' identity groups the idea of squatter colonies dotting their well-planned metropolis is unacceptable. Efforts are consistently on to remove them. In the imperceptible space the battles are often over issues related to self-respect and pride. For those who have little to gain in the perceptible space, the imperceptible space becomes even more critical. As the Dalit construction workers live in fear of their hutments being demolished, they rely more on the imperceptible space their identity group provides. It becomes important to, say, construct and defend an Ambedkar statue, if need be with their lives.

The course of negotiations in both spaces is influenced by the empowerment of the three identity groups, the options available to them, and their sense of fairness. For the identity groups with a strong rural connection the scope for

empowerment through economic means is somewhat constrained. While the higher real estate prices could provide some relief for the landed sections of these identity groups most of them do not have the resources to carry out long-term development on their land. The smaller land holders in particular have to make do with a one-time benefit from their land. The inhabitants of the villages that have been absorbed into the city also typically do not have the education and other skills needed to do well in the urban environment. Those who had a dominant status in the village hierarchy, in particular, find it difficult to find a social place in the city that provides a comparable status. There is then an effort to try and rebuild that status through a display of conspicuous consumption, often wiping out much of the money realized from the one-time deal on their land.

This trend has had a major impact on gender relations. Marriages are traditionally the time when the family displays its economic and social status to the society at large. With their social status eroded by the city, the focus is on demonstrating their economic status. This has increased the costs involved in weddings (Anderson, 2003). And since this cost is usually borne by the bride's family in addition to the payment of a dowry, it results in a sharp spurt in the costs of bringing up a girl child. The patriarchal bias against the girl child now gains an economic rationale.

The limited economic options available to this group take them towards the political space. Democratic politics allows this identity group to make use of its numerical superiority. In addition to their numbers in the city, they can tap their rural connections to find room for themselves in caste based politics. The competitive nature of this politics does raise the economic costs of entry. The Centre for Media Studies has estimated that Indian politicians were expected to spend S 5 billion in the 2014 elections (India's spend on elections could challenge US record: Report, 2014). With the pursuit of state power, directly or indirectly, becoming a major and expensive objective, there is sometimes less contempt for bending the rules of public office for private gain.

The Dalit identity groups is in an even worse position as far as economic empowerment is concerned. As migrants who have usually escaped the extreme distress they face in their rural communities, their economic resources are extremely limited. Politically too they are not as numerous as the identity groups with strong rural connections, with Scheduled Castes accounting for less than 17 percent of the population of the urban areas of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Census of India, 2011). With lower empowerment and fewer options their focus has been primarily on the fairness element of the negotiations. They have built a compelling case, around the extreme exploitation they have had to face for centuries, for reservations in the state apparatus. The consistent use of this approach demands that they remain cohesive. The loyalty

to the identity that is demanded by this group provides a prominent place for their negotiations in the imperceptible space, with activists reacting quickly, and sometimes aggressively, to any possibility of their being slighted.

The identity groups with the greatest economic empowerment are undoubtedly what we have termed the 'urbane'. The much maligned strategy of public sector investment followed in the decades soon after independence was not without its successes. The public sector and its trade unions helped expand the middle class (Sridharan, 2004). This class could then make use of public investment in education, including technical education. The resultant technical manpower benefited substantially from the globalization led by the communication revolution (Heitzman, 2004). As jobs in the information technology sector grew so did the middle class. Some members of this middle class went on to tap the capital markets and the global demand for outsourcing to create what are now billion dollar companies (Lee & Park, 2010). The massive expansion of the middle class saw its influence growing in a number of directions including the media. The strength of these 'urbane' identity groups was consolidated by the fact that it retained the option of moving to the developed world. This option could be exercised not only by individuals seeking employment but also companies seeking profitable locations for their business. In the aggressive pursuit of its interests a sense of fairness has not always been

a priority for several of these 'urbane' identity groups.

The negotiations between these three sets of identity groups have had a variety of effects on Delhi, and indeed other Indian cities. To cite just one example, it has changed the course of the debate on corruption. While the identity groups with rural connections were increasingly dependent on the political space, the 'urbane' identity groups found it difficult to dominate that sphere. It was then in the interests of the 'urbane' identity groups to focus the nation's attention entirely on the corruption of the political class. And the media did play an important role in presenting that message. This and several other consequences of the negotiations between the three sets of identity groups that we have identified fall outside the purview of this paper as its focus is on the effects of these negotiations on the gender crisis in Delhi.

Gender was not quite a direct issue in the negotiation between these identity groups. The identity groups with rural connections were in the process of commercializing patriarchy. The Dalit groups were not in a position to challenge the decisions of others, even if they wanted to. And the low priority to fairness in most of the 'urbane' identity groups meant that the gender issue did not play a major role in their discourse. The issue did force itself into national prominence when the brutal gang rape that led to the murder of a student in December 2012 brought the question of security for women to the

forefront. But the resultant discussion did not go far beyond the question of security for women. While this is undoubtedly an issue of critical importance, seeing it in isolation ensured that it was treated primarily as an issue involving the law creation and enforcement agencies. The laws on rape were made more stringent and the ways of policing received much needed critical attention (Jha, et al., 2013). But by treating it as essentially a criminal act the social dimension of the issue die not receive too much attention. Not surprisingly, later efforts to mobilize the public on the issue have received only lukewarm response.

While the gender issue may not have become a direct bone of contention in the negotiations between the groups, it was not without its indirect effects. The inability of the identity groups with rural connections to protect their status in an urban environment led, as we have noted, to the commercialization of gender bias. With the availability of scanning technologies it became possible to actually affect the gender ratio. The child sex ratio turned adverse quite sharply across urban India from 1043 boys per 1000 girls in 1981 to 1109 boys per 1000 girls in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). This trend has had its impact on overall sex ratios. As we can see in Table 1 the sex ratios measured in terms of number of men per 1000 women tabulated from the 2011 census is adverse to the women in rural Uttar Pradesh and rural Haryana, the states bordering the National Capital Territory of Delhi. What is more worrisome is that the Child Sex Ratios in these states are worse than the existing sex ratios, suggesting a possible strengthening of the bias against the girl child. And when the migrants move from the rural areas of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to Delhi they find a sex ratio that is even more adverse. Delhi has more than 150 extra men for every 1000 women. This imbalance is made worse by the limited scope for interaction between young men and women. A combination of tradition and security concerns has ensured that women fear staying out after dark on the roads in India's capital city. The scope for even basic interaction is then the workplace.

Table 1: Sex ratios in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and the urban areas of the National Capital Territory of Delhi

	Rural Uttar Pradesh	Rural Haryana	Urban areas of NCT of Delhi
Sex ratio	1089.73	1134.27	1151.57
Child sex ratio	1103.37	1197.18	1145.49
Workplace sex ratio in agriculture	2716.11	4599.40	--
Workplace sex ratio in household industry	1842.93	2595.61	6401.45
Workplace sex ratio in other economic activities	4196.53	5426.81	6109.91

Source: Tabulated from Census of India, 2011
Note: Sex ratio is calculated as number of males for every 1000 females

And here the imbalance becomes worse as we move from rural occupations to urban ones. From a workplace sex ratio of a less than three men for every woman in agriculture in Uttar Pradesh the ratio jumps to over six in the urban areas of Delhi.

This imbalance has had two visible effects. First, it has created conditions that make it more difficult to control adolescent sexual crimes. In the Delhi rape case of December 2012 one of the rapists was a minor. Second, and of greater consequence for the longer term development of gender relations in India, there is a serious problem of a shortage of brides in some of the areas where the gender bias has had an impact on sex ratios. The shortage of brides should normally see a willingness to relax traditional norms in order to make it easier to get a bride for their sons. There is in fact some evidence of a relaxation in the rules as far as intra gotra marriages are concerned (Larsen & Kaur, 2013). But a competition for brides is inconsistent with a strong patriarchal bias. The more patriarchal caste groups have thus moved in the opposite direction. Rather than allowing the shortage of brides to alter gender relations, the focus of some caste groups has turned towards gaining greater control over the process. They have fallen back on identity to try and retain control over the brides that are available. The enforcement of the ban on same gotra marriages, through brutal means if need be, is an effort by a caste group to retain control over marriages in the community, and thereby over the availability of brides.

This process could also have consequences that could go beyond the gender issue. In the process of generating and enforcing gender related diktats, communities have had to fall back on traditional dispute solving mechanisms. The Khap panchayats carried out by elders in the community, usually the elite, have regained some of their traditional prominence. These courts that are held before the village community summon the offending couples and their parents, and pronounce judgements that can go against the law of the land (Yadav, 2010). While it is much too soon to say whether this will develop into a full-fledged alternative judicial system, it is worth noting that the political class has stayed away from criticizing Khap panchayats.

CONCLUSION

As the experience of cities across the world reveals an increasing tendency to resist any effort to place them in a general theoretical model, the neo-Gandhian method allows us to deal with this variety. By shifting the focus from a consistent model to deal with all situations to a consistent method to diagnose individual situations it allows us to capture the entire range of situations that cities can throw up. The primacy it provides for action allows room not just for rational thought underlying an action but also for the role of doubt. It recognises the subjective element in dealing with doubt, developing the concept of Swadeshi to reflect the preference for immediate

surroundings over the more remote. This preference contributes to the tendency to form identity groups. As individuals have multiple identities they would like to move from one identity group to another depending on the identity that they would like to emphasise at a point of time. Cities that allow this to happen are usually stable ones where individuals can be part of so many varied identity groups that it would appear that identity does not matter. But in cities of greater uncertainty individuals tend to move towards identity groups that would give them greater protection in a crisis.

Individuals and identity groups can then bargain for space in the city. Much of the bargaining is in the perceptible space dominated in cities of the developing world by land and political power. But there is also a demand for space that is imperceptible; space that allows for emotions like self- respect. The importance of imperceptible space increases for identity groups that do not have great success in the bargaining for imperceptible space. These identity groups then pay a great deal of attention to elements that appear insignificant in perceptible space but are critically important in imperceptible space, such as erecting statues.

The city then becomes an arena for bargaining between individuals, and between identity groups. The course the bargaining takes depends on the empowerment of individuals or identity groups; the options available to them, and the idea of fairness in that city. As these elements are all prone to change, the bargaining process is a dynamic one. But there are times when a certain consensus is accepted even if everyone does not believe it is ideal. As cities create practices around these bargained consensuses, they create the basis for institutions.

The disorder that we see around urban India is aided by disconnect between the negotiations of changing cities and institutions that reflect the bargained consensus of an earlier era. The frequent absence of authority cannot then be treated as just bureaucratic or political inefficiency in implementing the rule of the law. The inability of these institutions to provide a platform for negotiations taking place on the ground often results in identity groups taking their argument to the streets, sometimes with violent consequences. The neo-Gandhian method allows us to focus on this gap between negotiations and institutions as a major cause of the disorder in Indian cities.

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