

# The separation of spaces and cultures in mumbai

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The introduction of the economic reforms in 1991 shifted the national conversation around development to become more individualistic and consumption oriented. The new economic, political and social conditions created by globalization affected new forms of affiliations and contestations among the Marathi speaking middle and upper classes, the non-Marathi speaking elites and middle classes, and the masses. It widened the gap, both socially and spatially, between the middle classes and the lower classes. These interests have been very important in reframing the culture and the spaces of the city of Mumbai. Mumbai, in addition to severe socio-economic inequalities, faces similar skewed up dynamics of space. The separation of spaces and cultures in Mumbai started in the colonial time. During the colonial period, the official colonial public spaces were marked by their representations of Gothic architecture, Western music and theatre and use of English language as did Bombay's commercial elites who also developed their own community cultures and their languages. The working class, who were marginalized, both culturally and spatially and established cultures which challenged both the colonial and native elites in terms of class, caste and colonial domination.

The contemporary symbiosis of the state and the middle classes in making Mumbai a global city can be traced back to these cultural formations where the middle classes started creating their own exclusive associations, clubs and societies which among other things focused on social and moral reforms based on their interpretation of traditional Indian culture. At present there are several kinds of middle class political organizations and activism in Mumbai which are asking for reforms through the state; reforms many of

which further marginalise the lower classes. In his study Anjaria (2009) in examining the “citizens’ groups” of present day Mumbai found that they want to bring more order in the city’s public spaces which has essentially entailed the removal of poor populations from such locations. The various migrant groups in Mumbai, especially the middle and rich classes have historically settled largely according to their linguistic, regional and communal preferences which helped them to build and maintain economic, cultural and nationalist linkages within and outside their communities. This led to a new framing of the city’s politics based on the right to space. Contradictory trends of interests based on language, locality, and class became key for the identity formation in the city.

Over the years the spatial inequalities have become so wide that more than half the city lives in deplorable informal settlements like slums, pavements, near railway tracks, and under bridges with little to no access to basic services and civic amenities while the small section of elites and the mushrooming new middle classes live in lavish gated communities where all with services are available to them. These informal settlements are overcrowded, without proper ventilation and public toilets, and have high morbidity rates. In addition, the spaces where the informal settlements are built are not in most cases owned by the people living there which makes the issue of the right to land and physical space a critical one in the city since these settlements face the bulldozers time and again. Since the people living in these places also have an informal unsteady employment, their lives become marginalized both literally and figuratively.

The colonial administration created parastatal institutions like the Bombay Municipality Corporation (BMC) in 1888 and the Bombay Improvement Trust in 1898 to make the city orderly and legible with the help of various forms of intervention. These institutions then became sites for the middle class intelligentsia to further assert its influence since they were the ones who were employed in these institutions. This middle class intelligentsia was mostly largely drawn from outside the merchant classes, particularly from the upper caste and upper class men. Following English Education Act 1835 which supported English as the language of instruction and a Western curriculum, the status of these men was determined by educational credentials, particularly in terms of English language skills.

Post-independence the domination of the upper and middle classes and the English speaking class continued in the urban politics as they were in control of the various state institutions responsible for brining development policies and programmes. They then also became responsible for planning and executing policies for welfare and upliftment of poorer sections of society.