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Volume: 4, Issue 3, 2017 (July-Sept)

## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW, EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND SPORTS STUDIES (IJLESS)

<http://www.ijless.kypublications.com/>

ISSN:2455-0418 (Print), 2394-9724 (online)

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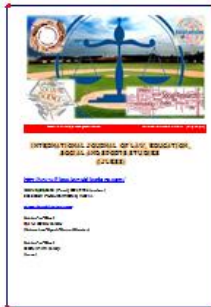


**Article title: What is Millennial Delhi Writing?**

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**ABSTRACT**

Millennial Delhi has been writing itself fervently. This paper focuses on the Delhi based novels being written from around the turn of the twentieth century and attempts to explore the probable reasons behind the veritable boom in the twenty first century. The objective of the study is not just to see how these novels document Delhi but also to co-relate the version of urbanity available in Delhi to the writers' subjectivity, positionality, and spatiality. From campus goers to new migrants, old citizenry, foreigners, diplomats, the colony wallahs, "centrally located", peri-urban society dwellers- all share in an uncanny compulsion to write the city. The narratives are meandering, seeking, groping, hiding, finding, and ultimately unfinished like the city as Delhi becomes an active participant in the form, structure, language and thematics of the novel. The paper presents a survey of the millennial Delhi novel where the experiential city and the hyper-real city converge in journeys that negotiate more than anything else the urban dilemma of propinquity vs. distance, community vs. reclusivity, citizen vigilante vs. blasé stranger, development vs. deprivation, civicism vs. alienation, aspiration vs. corruption and many such visual and existential polarities splattered all over the urban landscape.

Keywords: Delhi novel, campus novel, detective fiction, crime fiction, memoirs, postmodern Delhi, global city

**INTRODUCTION**

Millennial Delhi has been writing itself fervently. It is evident from a boom in the books writing the city in several different ways at the turn of the century. The Delhi oeuvre has been swelling and growing not only numerically, but also in terms of voices, patterns, locations, genres that now are inscribed in it. This paper focuses on the Delhi based novels and attempts to explore the probable reasons behind the boom in the twenty first century. In surveying the novels, the idea is not just to see how these novels document Delhi as a city but also to see how the version of urbanity available in Delhi is interpreted through the writers' subjectivity, positionality, and spatiality to become an active participant in the form, structure, language and thematics of the novel. Millennial Delhi finds it hard to remain impervious to the very dense yet disparate; bursting at the seams; eye-ful, mouthful, and fistful maelstrom they encounter at every moment and turn in the city. From campus goers to new migrants, old citizenry, foreigners, diplomats, the colony wallahs, society dwellers, "centrally located", peri-urban self-styled back-to-nature havens- all share in this uncanny compulsion to write and thus exorcise the demon of the hydra-headed city. Many a times the narratives are cast in the image of the city itself, and are meandering, seeking, groping, hiding,

finding, and ultimately unfinished. Thus, as we will see in the millennial Delhi novel, the experiential city and the hyper-real city converge in journeys that negotiate more than anything else the urban dilemma of propinquity vs. distance, community vs. reclusivity, citizen vigilante vs. blasé stranger, development vs. deprivation, civicism vs. alienation, aspiration vs. corruption and many such visual and existential polarities splattered all over the urban landscape.

Millennial Delhi is or aspires to be world city or global city. A city which serves as an important node in the global economic system is titled a global city. Thus, a 'global city' is one which has a direct and tangible effect on global affairs in socio-economic terms. Patrick Geddes and John Friedmann use the term 'world city' to indicate the form and extent to which the city is integrated with the world economy and the functions which it performs internationally. In the contemporary context, the use of the term 'global city' was popularized by sociologist Saskia Sassen in her work *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Sassen, 1991) preferring the term over other probable terms like 'world city', 'supervilles' or 'informational city'. In economic terms, 'global city' status is considered to be a prestigious asset due to which surveys today attempt to classify and rank cities as *world cities* or *non-world cities*. The standard characteristics which primarily make cities eligible for the title of world cities include the presence of a variety of international financial services, especially in finance, insurance, real estate, banking, accountancy, and marketing and headquarters of several multinational corporations. Using relational data, Jon Beaverstock, Richard G. Smith and Peter J. Taylor made the first attempt in 1998 to define, categorize and rank global cities while working at the Loughborough University (United Kingdom). They established the Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC) which published a roster of world cities in the *GaWC Research Bulletin* 5 ranking cities on the basis of their connectivity through four "advanced producer services": accountancy, advertising, banking/finance, and law. The GaWC inventory identifies three levels of global cities and several sub-ranks as given below: Alpha++ cities (like London and New York) are those which are vastly more integrated with the global economy than all other cities.

- i. Alpha+ cities are those which complement Alpha++ cities by filling advanced service niches for the global economy.
- ii. Alpha and Alpha- cities are cities that link major economic regions into the world economy.
- iii. Beta level cities are cities that link moderate economic regions into the world economy.
- iv. Gamma level cities are cities that link smaller economic regions into the world economy.
- v. Sufficiency level cities are cities that have a sufficient degree of services so as not to be obviously dependent on world cities.

GaWC has issued latest rankings in 2016. New Delhi ranks at Alpha- in this roster. In 2008, the American journal *Foreign Policy*, in conjunction with the Chicago-based consulting firm A.T. Kearney and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA), published a ranking of global cities, based on consultation with Saskia Sassen, Witold Rybczynski, and others. *Foreign Policy* noted that "the world's biggest, most interconnected cities help set global agendas, weather transnational dangers, and serve as the hubs of global integration. They are the engines of growth for their countries and the gateways to the resources of their regions." The index examines the city's current performance based on business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience and political engagement. The ranking are being constantly reviewed since 2008 and latest updated in 2016. Delhi has spiralled down continuously from a ranking of 41 in 2008 to a ranking of 61 in 2016. New Delhi has slipped 20 points since 2008. It has faced stiff competition since 2008 from other global centres such as Warsaw, Rio de Janeiro, and Osaka. Said Mike Hales, partner at AT Kearney and one of the authors of the Global Cities report about New Delhi:

New Delhi would do well to continue to focus on improving information exchange through increasing access to internet for its citizens and continue to improve in news agencies and Google presence. In political engagement, the city ranks at number 10, rising from number 35 in 2008.

This is a testament to the capital city's internationalisation. New Delhi excels in think tanks and embassies and consulates," he said.

In the context of Delhi as a global city, Veronique Dupont in his exhaustive study, 'Dream of Delhi as a Global City' (2011), uncovers the implications of the global city construct on South East Asian post-colonial cities. In cities which Shaw (2007) terms as "cities in transition", globalization is a 'work in progress'. In the context of Delhi, Dupont finds the term "globalizing city" more appropriate than 'global city'. (Sandhu and Sandhu (2007, Dupont, 2011, p. 535) This is because these cities might not fit the bill of Friedmann and Sassen's definitions, but they do experience widespread consequences of globalization. As Dupont writes,

Delhi is not a hub of international finance, yet, since the 1990s, it has displayed its ability to interact with other global cities. Like other large Indian metropolises, it provides the global market with some direct investment opportunities and outsourced services. Hence, some scholars argue that Delhi could be considered a new type of global city, fitted into a network of complex flows, mobilizing information and communication technologies, and increasingly using the internet. (Dupont, 2011, p. 541)

A pursuit of global city aspirations and images has become obligatory for city planners and governors, even though it means a pursuit of barricading and stuffing urban experience into pre-planned demarcated spaces, disproportionate encouragement to those sectors of development and investment which have a global outreach, governmental policies which tend to echo international strategies promoted by organizations like the World Bank and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), and development of a particular type of infrastructure catering to the middle classes and trans-national population. Images of high-tech progress in the city, urban structures like high-rises, shopping malls, business centers, gated housing communities, highways and flyovers proliferate to project the stereotypical image of modernity also proliferate in this imitative global rat race.. The most spectacular impact in terms of Delhi has been on the outlying districts like Gurgaon and NOIDA- which have emerged as "new townships" with mushrooming of high-end residential complexes, replete with modern commercial, recreational and educational amenities and foreign sounding names and NRI architects to boot. These "spaces of global cultures" and "new spaces of exclusion" receive their target clientele from processes of international migration inherent in global enterprise. Equally significant in promoting ultra-luxurious lifestyle are the malls which epitomize consumerist culture, fetish for foreign stuff and new leisure pastime. Corporate hospitals with interiors, comforts and services matching five star hotels are normally located in these middle class districts to complete the "new landscape of consumption". New swanky airport, showcase metro project, Commonwealth games, glittering hotels, entertainment parks, even temples (Akshardham)-all cumulatively attempt to piece together the image of the 'global city'. This economic imbalance also creates what has been called "socio-spatial disorder" (Banerjee-Guha, 2002). Vishnu Prasad (2013) builds an interesting comparison between the fate of Istanbul and the fate of Delhi in recent times. With reference to a Turkish documentary, *Ekumenopolis*, directed by İmre Azem, he underscores how the rapid growth of the city of Istanbul is generating two polarizing prospects for the future of the city. On the one hand, the Turkish state is committed to making Istanbul a global city; the cultural, artistic, economic and financial node of the region. On the other, the ordinary citizens of Istanbul, the immigrants who flock to the city in search of livelihoods, "the quasi-visible proletariat who lubricate the city's burgeoning service sector", find no place for themselves in this vision. What can, therefore, be said beyond doubt is that this imitative urbanisation is creating extreme pressure on today's wannabe cities. As they aspire to become global cities, they simultaneously fail to provide even the most basic amenities to large chunks of their inhabitants.

Cities today, however, are even more complex than described by the terms 'global city' for this complexity, extending from the realm of economics, has entered into all walks of life. Indicating the same, Edward W. Soja (2000) gives the global city a different title - that of the post-metropolis,



under which he aggregates the radical transition which engulfed the modern city with the onset of the third urban revolution. The main characteristic of the post-metropolis is its formal complexity in which deterritorialization and reterritorialization processes converge. On the one hand, the idea of place and community gets diluted, while on the other, boundary lines between urban and non-urban, interior and exterior, city and suburb, gated and street get strengthened by the emergence of new spatialities recolonising the city. The global postmodern city, thus, is a summation of the many matrices presented above. Delhi defies meta-narratives post liberalisation of the 1980s. A first wave of reforms 1985 onwards paved way for a full fledged policy of economic liberalization in 1991, largely in response to globalising factors like compulsions created by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. With the realization that the cities although home to only one-third of the country's population contribute to three fourth of the country's GDP, budget and policy were dedicated to improving their economic efficiency through decentralization, deregulation, Private-Public Partnership, infrastructural development, availability of modern amenities and encouragement to commercial activities. This transformed the visual and structural character of the city. This also expanded the geographical unit of the city to National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD) covering 1484 sq. kilometres. The urban sprawl, however, continued unabated leading to the development of peripheral towns (e.g NOIDA and Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh and Faridabad, Gurgaon, Bhiwani, Rewari, Bahadurgarh in Haryana) eventually leading to the establishment of the National Capital Region (NCR) Planning Board in 1996. In 1991, the Union Territory of Delhi attained the status of a quasi-state and in 1996, NCTD further expanded to the conurbation titled National Capital Region (NCR, area 46, 208 sq. kilometres). In 2017, NCR's population has been estimated at 24 million. Delhi's per capita income is Rs. 2,80,142, over three times the national average.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The postmodern, the neo-liberal and the global together produce pluralism and hybridity in the city of Delhi. This affects the language and literature of the city as well. Language and culture have now to be understood in terms of socio-linguistic and socio-cultural arrangements of mobile resources producing a hybridity which can be described as a boundary defying, critical and resistive tool which presents itself as an alternative discourse that questions the very idea of a dominant culture and a unique canon. (Rani and Alsgoff, 2014) In the multiplicity of genres, linguistic codes, locations, identities and inter-relations displayed in the contemporary literature emerging from the city, this hybridity has been signified. Narayani Gupta wonders, "Where is the 'south Indian' who will write a story set in the India Coffee House, where is the Jamia, DU or JNU novel?" (Gupta, 2008) Patwant Singh, the author of *Delhi: A Deepening Urban Crisis* regrets, "Literature here is mostly still written to present the smoothest possible picture and to impress outsiders." (Singh, 2008) Maintaining that there are serious gaps in writings on Delhi, Dalrymple is anguished by the fact that "... Delhi has been at the centre of India's history for at least 1,000 years (closer to 4,000 if you believe the stories about Indraprastha), it's amazing that there isn't a whole library of fine literature--academic and non-academic--about the city." (Dalrymple, 2008) Ranjit Lal, the author of *Life and Times of Altu Faltu*, observes "I'm a bit surprised by the paucity of fiction, because Delhi can be so full of interesting stories for people to write about. One problem with Delhi might be that there isn't an identifiable ethos--different pockets of the city have completely different cultures." (Lal, 2008) Despite the deeply felt dearth of representative literature on Delhi and life in Delhi, the quality and volume of literature has been steadily burgeoning over the years. 'Delhi novel' is not a recognised genre like the 'Bombay novel' as yet. The paper catalogues and probes the many cultural micronarratives emerging from the many Delhis which simultaneously live in one geographical space to build a conclusive case for a solemn consideration and canonization of the term and genre 'the Delhi novel'.

#### DISCUSSION

Postmodern Delhi has begun to produce what is called 'the campus novel'. The three campuses from Delhi which have made their presence felt on the literary horizon are Indian Institute

of Technology (IIT) Delhi, Delhi University (DU) and Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU). The IIT has had a few celebrated chroniclers in the persons of Chetan Bhagat (*Fives Point Someone*, 2004), Amitabh Bagchi (*Above Average*, 2007), and Tushar Raheja (*Anything For You Ma'am: the love story of an IITian*, 2006) followed by Neeraj Chibba's *Zero Percentile: Missed IIT, Kissed Russia* (2009), Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* and Suman Hossain's *A Guy Thing...A Magical Love Story of an IITian* (2008) and Saumil Shrivastava's *A Roller Coaster Ride - When An IITian Met a Bitsian Girl* (2010) and S V Divaakar's *The Winner's Price: Life Beyond the Campus* (2012). The other two campuses are only slowly warming up to the immense commercial and literary potential of campus life. After *Five Points Someone* many institutions have felt the urge to tell their tales. Sachinn Garg's *A Sunny Shady Life* (2009) is a novel about Sunny Singh who is a student at DCE (Delhi College of Engineering) and his engineering life. *The Awakening- A Novella in Verse*, written by Rita Joshi, was published in 1993. It views the campus life in India in the modern times particularly from a lecturer's point of view. This lecturer has returned from Cambridge and is new to Indian campus and education system. Her experiences and responses in the campus form the nucleus of the novel. Ms. Joshi is a literary critic and reviewer, teaching English at Delhi University. Anuradha Marwah Roy is another such novelist whose remarkable novel *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) puts together the trials and tribulations of young researchers and aspirants to jobs in the academia. Manju Kapoor's *Home* (2006) also depicts the tryst of its female protagonist Nisha with campus life at Daulat Ram College. *JNU: Sumthing Of A Mocktale* by Soma Das (2006), a former post-grad student at the university is the quintessential JNU novel. Her book takes a look at JNU politics and culture that is characterized by jeans, kurta and jhola. Taken together, the cultural production coming out of Delhi takes "the university is a metaphor for the universe" (Sebastian). As Astik Sinha notes, "These novels are a huge success among the alumni fraternity, college goers and those who wish to set foot in those campuses." (Sinha, n.d.)

Delhi University till a long time was home to a literary revolution or Renaissance of sorts producing what has been termed the Stephanian School of Literature. Amitav Ghosh, Rukun Advani, Mukul Kesavan and Shashi Tharoor are some famous Indian English Writers who can be seen to belong to this school. Leela Gandhi dismisses the Stephanian School of Literature (or the acronym which Shashi Tharoor uses SSSL) as "nothing more than an interesting accident" (Gandhi, 1997). Accident or otherwise, it is difficult, however, to contend that the elite, witty, privileged, Ivy league, cosmopolitan, and diasporic ex-Stephanian has remained the front-runner in the pursuit of Indian writing in English for a very long time. On the one hand, the Stephanian canon and image represents the politics and culture of 'dominant' forms, while on the other it offers a proxy for the nation, pre-dominantly in middle class terms. The three traits associated with this cultural production were elitism, Anglophilia and deracination. (Tharoor, 2005, p. 220) To these may also be added what Brinda Bose calls masculinity. (Bose, 2000) Tharoor does not quite subscribe to the idea of SSSL but he asserts that

Whether or not there is an SSSL, there is certainly a spirit that can be called Stephenian: after all, I spent three years living in and celebrating it. Stephania was both an ethos and a condition to which we aspired. (Tharoor, 2005, p. 220)

He accepts that Stephania influenced him greatly, giving him his basic faith in "all-inclusive, multanimous, free-thinking cultures". (Tharoor, 2005, p. 223) However, Stephania is not the only muse which he and his Stephens fraternity have known for most of them hailed from highly privileged and erudite backgrounds and graduated into the same if not higher echelons. Thus, Tharoor makes light of the whole idea of SSSL as it derives neither form nor content exclusively from St. Stephens College. Whether the protagonist is a student or a teacher, whether college life is central to the narrative or has a formative influence, the campus novels nevertheless write the city in a significant manner. With the emergence of Delhi as an important educational hub attracting students from not just India but all over the world, it has started being written eloquently from the campuses.

Life on campus constitutes a very impressionable, albeit transient and nascent phase, in a person's *bildungsroman* or *kunstlerroman* of development. Therefore, these narratives throb with the rawness and energy of youth and the aspirations and perceptions of future claimants to the city. The cut-throat competitive city and society can be glimpsed through the deeply etched rivalries and divides in the microcosmic University campuses. The divides originate both from without and within. The highly idealised and romanticised academia provides fodder for a lot of humour and satire when the veils slip in close encounters. Academia today has a sizeable trans-national membership and the cultural roller-coaster of individuals who study or work in several cities informs many of these narratives. It is a time characterised by discovery and 'locations' matter a great deal- the city holds an important key in unlocking the memories and meanings of this poignant period.

Sanjay Kumar, in his *Changing Electoral Politics in Delhi*, observes that Delhi has developed a dualistic, "schizoid" character (Kumar, 2013, p. 117). Traditional values collide with contemporary global forces and distinctive cultures "overlap, merge, interact and assimilate" creating a continuum of perplexing complexity. As the whole notion of the city has undergone a radical shift, so he emphasizes that "The city of Delhi needs a new definition" (Kumar, 2013, p. 117). Prior to 1947, people used to talk in terms of 'New Delhi' and 'Old Delhi', but then in the 1980s the city was perceived in terms of 'Yamuna Paar' and the rest, the former by and large referring to the lower income groups. With emergence of new types of housing communities and ancillary townships, now the ambit of the twin-cities has enlarged to three cities in one: 'the central city', "trans-Yamuna" and the peripheries. Writings on Delhi begin to emerge not only from educational institutions but also from these new pockets of habitation. Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007) is the first novel that documents the phenomenon of the rise of the new middle class universe of co-operative group housing societies of Indraprastha Extension and Mayur Vihar. *Above Average* is a coming-of age story of a young lad as he learns the tricks of the trade to make it to the hallowed portals of the IIT, gradually outgrowing the idyll of the school days to emerge into higher innocence at IIT Delhi. The adolescent world of Arindham Chatterjee is nestled in East Delhi's middle-class locality, Mayur Vihar, just as Bagchi's own is, as his parents come to live in Purbasha Apartment in Mayur Vihar upon retirement. The travails of Arindham Chatterjee at IITD are well documented as Bagchi's protagonist charts the course of any bright 'Science' student for whom IIT is the professional el dorado but once there, the hard hitting realities of life about oneself, relationships, and the academia transform it from the chosen land for the select few to a land of eternal conflicts and turmoil. What is less noted, however, is how the novel maps an emerging cultural ethos, quietly sneaking upon notions of centrality and elitism in Delhi, in the new geographies stretching the frontiers of Delhi.

Interested in mapping two phenomena in particular, viz. "how the middle class views itself, and how the internal lives of people are affected by the landscapes they inhabit", Bagchi also accomplishes the pioneering task of declaring the arrival of new landmarks in the narrative spaces of Delhi (Bagchi, 2011). Bagchi's alter-ego, his protagonist, hails from a family of bureaucrats and thus has resided in that consecrated abode of bureaucrats, Lutyens Delhi, for the first fifteen years of his life. The unmistakable sense of loss is evident in the sentence where he describes his dislocation to East Delhi: "Then my father retired and we had to move east of the Yamuna, to Mayur Vihar" (Bagchi, 2007, p. 26). Describing the environ around his Society as consisting of "clouds of dust", "stray dogs", "small dark children in torn vests and coloured shorts", "paan shop", "a patch of dust" meant to have been a park, "foreign liquor shop", "evening hawkers" and "large open drain which marks the western boundary of Mayur Vihar phase 1", Bagchi underscores the drabness of this 'middle income group' locality. Arindham Chatterjee, like Bagchi, is one of the hordes arriving on the Yamuna flood plains as part of the third wave. The Co-operative Group Housing Society (CGHS) is a new type of housing which nurtures new lifestyles and new bonds. The by-laws of 'Housing Society' formation seem designed to create islands of homogeneity over which neo-identities and neo-communities are based. In order to form and construct a 'Housing Society' over one of the hundred

odd plots carved out on both sides of NH24, a group of 60 or more creditworthy applicants had to be collected. More often than not, these constituents of CGHS shared affiliations along professional, regional, or religious lines. In case of Arindam (or Bagchi), 300 superannuated gazetted officers, mostly Bengali, formed the Society which had four grey towers and three four storeyed buildings with two oblong patches of grass near the south end of the Society, trees along the boundary and a square water tank in the centre. Demographically, the Society consisted of “original members” and tenants- the former a homogenous variety and the latter a mixed group of young professionals, not-so-thriving businessmen and the likes. Two other localities figure in this new constellation of habitats- Mandawali and Preet Vihar. While the former is a terrain inhabited by the “natives” of the villages of East Delhi- the cattle herders and milk sellers (also feared later as bandit brigands), the latter is the fairy tale world of the affluent, residing in fancy “kothis” or new baroque mansions. As Arindam’s friend Bobby’s stories proved, the two worlds are perceived at odds with each other in almost a primordial kind of conflict as if the older world sought revenge on the conquistadors for the dispossession of its rights and lands. The mandawali doodhwallas (milkmen) featured in Bobby’s tales as the inexorable destroyers of the virginity and chastity of the princesses of Preet Vihar. The Society world also brought about democratisation in human relationships of a type not conceivable in bureaucratic conclaves. Arindam’s friendship with Bobby is a puzzle he himself cannot figure out:

Bobby and I became friends; I never figured out why. The friends I made at school or the people I came to know when we lived in New Delhi were, like me, the children of government officers, class 1 officers at that, or of professional or academics or rich businesspeople. My falling in with them was somehow, natural. But with Bobby I often wondered how it was that we came to be so close. (Bagchi, 2007, p. 41)

Trans-Yamuna or East Delhi, thus, is a product of historical, urban and demographic shifts where homogeneity and heterogeneity intersect at many angles to give rise to a culture of “peri-urbanisation: the formation of ‘mixed spaces’, midway between urban centres and rural spaces, transitional spaces subject to multiple transformations – physical, morphological, socio-demographic, cultural, economic and functional” (Dupont, 2005, p. 10). On account of peri-urbanisation, pre-existing social and cultural overlap gets further heterogenised, polarised and fragmented in new settlement patterns on metropolitan peripheries. In the context of Delhi, the peripheries have been put into the service of the brimming housing and other requirements. 1960 onwards, the urban better-off preferred to live in more spacious units available in new settlements on urban peripheries or beyond city limits. Delhi has witnessed the huge upheavals in its peri-urban space and what Bagchi calls the “third wave” of urbanisation explosion in Delhi with the establishment of Co-operative Group Housing Societies creates a series of contesting claims in these spaces. This third wave, a product of the policy decision of the urban planners to provide for middle class housing on the peripheries, affected not just the peripheries but the entire city, in fact the entire region. Peri-urbanisation has paved way for the development of elite forms of housing and amenities in NCR. With a concentration of upwardly mobile professional class in these outer limits of the city, infrastructure and transportation facilities have been designed accordingly thereafter. The establishment of Co-operative Group Housing Societies thus set off a chain reaction which led to an intensification and gentrification of the phenomenon of peri-urbanisation in the entire NCR.

Not only do new localities emerge on Delhi’s literary horizon, but old ones also get repainted in the hues of millennial postmodernity. There is a literary movement to reconstruct Delhi’s urbanity in consonance with the diversity of lived experience of its inhabitants. Navtej Sarna’s *We Weren’t Lovers Like That* (2003) takes a long, hard look at some of the hitherto iconic places in Delhi. *We Weren’t Lovers Like That* has a strong resonance from Navtej Sarna’s childhood days. For Sarna, Delhi has always been home. “But today I feel a sense of loss for Delhi that was a few decades ago,” he says (Sarna, n.d.). Sarna graduated with a degree in commerce from Sri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi. He subsequently joined the Law Faculty and earned his LL.B. degree, did a diploma in journalism



and eventually appeared for the civil services and joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1980. In *Weren't Lovers Like That*, Aftab life falls apart in the new millennium as he turns forty and his wife of fifteen years leaves him for another man taking their son with her. Ask Sarna why he chose to make his protagonist, Aftab, bitter and cynical, he replies, "We must face up to reality. What is the point of writing about ideal love relationships when they are not so; or writing about an ideal Delhi which is in fact crumbling". The lanes and by-lanes of Delhi are redolent with Aftab's many moods and metaphors. As he says, "These streets have grown up with me" (Sarna, 2003, p. 3). Connaught Place, the celebrated hotspot and showpiece of the Capital, is represented through the eyes of a person bearing the burden of misery and rejection. As survival becomes an everyday struggle, the inner and outer turmoil get inextricably linked to each other. About Connaught Place, he says, "generally speaking, a lousy place. It is one of the lousiest places in Delhi; in fact it is the lousy centre of what has become, for the most part, a lousy city" (Sarna, 2003, p. 22). The seedy surroundings visible from his Connaught Place office curdle his creativity. He could see the Campa Cola factory and Shankar Market- "the catacomb of dingy shops...a crazed world of the cheap, second hand, the cut-throat" (Sarna, 2003, p. 55). This is a Delhi which is embroiled in the postmodern condition of splintered reality. The disparities are so deeply engraved in the urban landscape that it is appropriated differently by each man and moment. Now micro-narratives of selves and localities penetrate the definitive meta-narratives and bring out idiosyncratic alterity of places which tend to be eulogised in touristy literatures.

Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel *Corridor* is another such work which approaches Connaught Place inside out. Sarnath Banerjee was born in Calcutta in 1972 and lives and works in Delhi, India. His first novel, *Corridor* (2004), was commissioned as a part of a fellowship awarded by the MacArthur Foundation, Chicago is often projected as India's first graphic novel. Describes Hemant Sareen: "*Corridor* is the work of an ethnographer and a chronicler of urbanity" (Sareen, 2010). Several non-linear narratives track the existential dilemmas and psychopathologies of some of the regular clients of a "used books" shop in the corridors of Connaught Place, New Delhi's crumbling crowning glory of a colonial-era shopping centre. A narrative that has often been described as Kafkaesque, meanders into New as well as Old through four oddball characters. There's Jehangir Rangoonwala- the Socratic bibliophile book shop owner of used books guarding his domain with a keen eye inviting his customers to buy as well as sell stories. One of the customers is Brighu, forever searching for rare reads and rarer love. Next in que is Digital Dutta vacillating between desires and ambitions immersed in his reveries of Marx and H1-B visas. And last but not least is the old Delhi denizen, the just married Shintu, engaged in a convoluted search for an aphrodisiac to perk up his libido. The description of an exhibition showing Banerjee's work describes *Corridor* as a "journey through fragile post-colonial spaces in the metropolises New Delhi and Calcutta that are almost unknown in the West." The novel presents a post-modern perspective of "fragmented realities in the cities of the subcontinent; (to bring) the past and the present in relation, in order to examine stereotypes, myths and morality in post-colonial India." These spaces are incomprehensible to the west owing to their indigenised cultural milieu, yet these fluid spaces of Delhi in the twenty first century are recognizable to the distinctly western perspective of post-modernity. Reminiscing about his days in Delhi, Banerjee adds,

There was this feeling of stumbling about in the city, waiting for things to happen, like the characters in the book *Corridor*. We all had this strange feeling that life is elsewhere. There was a sense of melancholy and this sensation that there are great things outside, while you are walking on the Ashoka Road. The evening would fall in Connaught Place and your mind would fill with expectations that something would happen, but nothing was going to happen and you were just going to go back home." (Banerjee, 2014)

While Banerjee has lived in a lot of cities across the world, one city that occupies his consciousness significantly is Delhi. He is nostalgic, romantic, enchanted and bitter towards Delhi, where he has

spent most of his formative years. It is a place where most of his inspiration was born and nurtured. He has often referred to himself and his characters as “hustlers” in Delhi. He confesses that he hasn’t met the kind of people he met in Delhi anywhere else – sellers of aphrodisiacs, Mr. Mukesh who wants to raise the rent every year, a man doing hatha yoga across the street to increase his sexual prowess, two brothers who had an editing studio by the day which magically became a shady modeling studio by the night, a carpet manufacturer who wanted to fund music videos etc. “So there existed a very colorful world. You just had to step outside and there were stories waiting for you in each and every corner.” Most of his characters and stories do emanate from these corners.

Ankush Saikia’s *Jet City Woman* (2007) traces what it says on its back cover “the circuit of desire, drugs, violence, and greed that exists at the fringes of Delhi” and self consciously “casts light on lives that have so far been peripheral to the grand narrative of this city – students from northeast India, Tibetan and Afghan refugees, Anglo-Indians”. (Saikia, 2007) A turbulent love story of a young student from Shillong and enigmatic Naina, it engages with the not so glorious face of urban Delhi with hazy lives, careers, and dreams. The dotcom boom, the teeming BPO industry, the retail and hospitality sector sell many a dreams to the girls and boys of the north-east who throng the city in search of a fulfilling life.

The so-called “mercurial Naina” is the objective co-relative for the city itself. She is as inscrutable and unstoppable and as desirable and unshakeable like the city itself. While the narrator has a string of relationships with fellow northeast girls but Naina, the Jet City Woman, remains his ultimate and unattainable object of desire. Inability to score with Naina is equivalent to inability to square with the city. Like Naina leaves her lover groping in the dark, similarly the city leaves the small town girls and boys on the edge of a precipice. As if the cultural, almost racial divide within one’s own country, is not enough to perplex this large segment of Delhi population, the inherent schisms in a megacity like Delhi make it even more difficult to adjust and adapt. *Jet City Woman* begins with the image of auto-rickshaws waiting in long queues for CNG at a pump outside a five star hotel, while inside you have elite artists and buyers in a wine and cheese art exhibition. Delhi, thus, is like a character in the book which needs to be dealt with. The novel articulates the double challenge which these young boys and girls from northeast face: the challenge of dealing with the big, bad city as well as the challenge of dealing with how the rest of the nation deals with them.

As Amitabha Bagchi writes in his review of the book, “There are several radical possibilities inherent in a novel about an immigrant group coming from the periphery of the Indian imagination to the centre of the Indian nation. Saikia has staked a claim to these possibilities by being an early mover.” (Bagchi, January 15, 2008) Located in the transition rife in the Delhi of the 1990s, the novel is an early attempt to problematize notions of centrality by propelling the periphery into vivid visibility.

Another group which faces many challenges living in Delhi tells its tale through Sushmita Bose’s *Single in The city* (2010) making a relevant addition to the list of narratives emerging in the city. As is evident, this group comprises of career women living on their own in Delhi. They face the threefold challenge of being a woman, being a working woman and being a small town woman. ‘Single in the City’ has been converted to an anecdotal novel by compiling a series of articles which Sushmita Bose wrote for The Hindustan Times, the newspaper she works for. Having moved in from Kolkata, she writes about the daily travails of coping with an alien city. Delhi’s own Bengali kingdom, Chittranjan Park, is her natural choice of residence. Like Chang Town and PG accommodations and parties “up north” are a mini northeast providing a cultural oasis to the northeast students in Saikia’s novel, Chittaranjan Park serves the same cushion to inure the migrant Bengalis from the sudden culture shock they might otherwise receive. The book speaks of the many pitfalls in the path of a young woman migrant professional, but it also has a note of celebration about the emancipated and independent life available in the big city. As a reviewer of this book writes, “I would recommend this book to all the single working ladies. It will help you discover the joys of singledom (sic) and financial freedom and know what all is there to know about living alone in a city.” Thus, the big city

is an uncharted territory which offers adventure, escape, discovery along with identity, success and memories.

Delhi is fast emerging a popular setting for crime and detective fiction. British-origin journalist and writer Tarquin Hall, who has been living in New Delhi for the last few years and is married to an Indian, is well known for his Vish Puri series- *The Case of The Missing Servant* (2009, 2010), *The Case of the Man Who Died Laughing* (2012) and *The Case of The Deadly Butter Chicken* (2013). The series is set in Delhi has Vish Puri operating out of Khan Market as its protagonist sleuth. Hall offers an interesting insight into Delhi: "I never planned to write detective fiction. My main interest was in writing about modern India and I decided that a private investigator would be a good way to describe it". Tarquin Hall explains his choice of Delhi as backdrop thus:

**How does Delhi function as a backdrop for your books?**

Delhi is a fantastic backdrop. I lived here in the 1990s, and then I'm back here now. I have seen it change. The size of the city is staggering compared to what it was in 1997-98. You have so many people coming in from rural areas, a lot of them very poor. That makes a city interesting. There's the growth of the middle classes and the creation of very concentrated wealth in certain areas. Show of wealth has become acceptable. In a city like Delhi, where you get so much social changes, upheaval and pressure on resources, you tend to get a lot of crime as well. I think the same goes for Sherlock Holmes. What made Arthur Conan Doyle popular was describing a city that had gone through remarkable change - the industrialisation, growth into the largest port in the world and becoming a great financial centre. That made London a fascinating backdrop. I think Delhi is going through that now. (Hall, July 14, 2012)

Thus, the overflowing population in Delhi ridden with disparities and anxieties makes Delhi a crime pot boiler like no other city. Apart from the diversity in men, manners and mannerisms, Delhi also offers diversity in terms of seats and sites of crime. As Delhi has emerged as the encapsulated version of the many contradictions and conflicts engendered by the historical, socio-political and developmental roller coaster of India, crime fiction set in its innards has begun to find global acceptability. With the genre getting increasingly cosmopolitan and multicultural, the city stories find a resonance across nations and milieus are recognised across peoples. *Delhi Noir*, edited by Hirish Sawhney (2009), is an anthology of crime fiction which not only penetrates to the dark and seedy locations otherwise invisible in literature, but also unearths an "alternative" vision of a city or society which claims a compelling place in the complete picture. Warns the publishers' blurb, "This is India uncut, the one you're missing out on because mainstream publishing houses and glossy magazines can't stomach it. It offers bone-chilling, mesmerizing takes on the country's chaotic capital, a city where opulence and poverty are constantly clashing, where old-world values and the information age wage a constant battle." Apart from exposing the "diverse cultural and geographies which make up the city", *Delhi Noir* also writes the city in a different mood and light variously described as "dystopian brooding", "macabre desolation", "fever dream" and "malicious, unforgiving and ruthless", 'extreme inequality and injustice in a gargantuan city', and 'ugliness that shadows the India Shining story'. Thus crime fiction and noir based in Delhi penetrates not only the labyrinths or maze of dark existential and nihilistic dilemmas but also endangered moral and ethical core in postmodern urbanities.

Delhi continues to be written through memories and experiences of both natives and visitors. Malvika Singh's *Perpetual City* (2013), in its two sections- perpetual city and changing city- documents Delhi right after the independence and its subsequent evolution to what it is today respectively. Subtitled 'A Short Biography of Delhi', attempts to document "How did this small settlement, founded in the lee of an ancient range of hills in eighth century by a Tomar Rajput chief called Suraj Pal, become one of the world's great cities, home to nearly twenty million people... (Singh, 2013). When she was 12 years old, her parents, journalists Raj and Romesh Thapar moved from Bombay to

Delhi in the 1950s to found the literary journal Seminar in 1959. The historian Romila Thapar is her aunt. She met and later married Tejbir Singh, the grandson of Sir Sobha Singh and the nephew of Khushwant Singh. While describing the Delhi of 50s and 60s, the author paints a vivid picture of how life in the city then was all about enjoying its charming monuments, the quaint beauty of Connaught Place, labyrinthine Old Delhi gullies, musical evenings, and culinary delights. As she explains in a newspaper magazine article, she knows no other way of writing a city with which she has such intimate ties except through her empirical knowledge of it. In the second part, she traces how the gradual grip of political and bureaucratic corruption and corporate giants ate into its beauty, harmony and serenity. At the same time however, she emphasizes how Delhi “has grown into a very exciting city at all levels: culture, literature, journalism, art, fashion.” This is the reason she chooses the title and theme of “perpetual city” to describe the boundless energy of the city which as she says “keeps on adding value” (Singh, December 6, 2013). Rana Dasgupta’s *Capital: A Portrait of Twenty First Century Delhi* (2014) on the other hand, digs into the dark soul of the outwardly scintillating city. While Malvika Singh’s is an unmitigated perspective of the insider in the city, Rana Dasgupta wades through the choppy waters of an outsider trying to settle in this city. Born and brought up in the United Kingdom, Dasgupta arrives in Delhi in the year 2000 when there is a strong anticipation of economic change in the country and the city. This anticipation, however, materialises not just in economic boom but also into violence, conflict, greed and avarice. The inexorable forces of savage capitalism only serve as a fresh wound into the already traumatised past of this long suffering city. While the world tended to see Delhi as an “emerging” city assuming equitable and consistent growth patterns for its population, the book draws attention to the fact that there may have been gains, but they are fraught with clamour and contestations. Economic change has ushered in a fresh wave of social tension and violence, which in fact, is the truth of not only Delhi, but most cities in the South Asian region. Dasgupta, therefore, sees the dream of the city come true and not come true at the same time where one dream thrives at the cost of another dream and the individual dreams scuttle collective dreams.

Raza Rumi comes back to the city of Delhi from the other side of Partition to seek a panacea to the traumatic memory of partition and hate politics of nationalism. As Rumi says in his book *Delhi by Heart*, “The brutal political divisions in South Asia during the twentieth-century have not been accorded due importance as a psychological phenomenon. People affected by Partition in India, Pakistan, and especially Bangladesh have not undergone the much-needed healing process. Truth and reconciliation of the South African kind still remains a vague dream yet to be realized.” (Rumi, 2013) Though Raza Rumi’s *Delhi by Heart* appears to be yet another traveller’s account, but the travel in this case is not simply geographical. As the writer belongs to Pakistan, hence, travel to India, a country treated as “enemy” in the nationalist discourse, is a travel across a schizophrenic divide where politically and militarily one does not belong while historically and culturally one does. It is a culmination of a long process of “unlearning” India as he meets Indians in ideologically neutral territories like institutions of higher studies, UN missions and Asian Development Bank where he worked and then in India where he arrived as a staffer of an international organisation. It is his firm belief that renewed interaction and propagation of tolerant philosophies like Sufism can accomplish the much needed emotional and psychological healing in tormented cities. Having disburdened himself of the baggage of seeing India as the other, he begins to write this book to not only discover the shared cultural heritage of the two countries but also to “transcend boundaries and borders and reject the ills of jingoism spun by nation-state narratives, which permeate our troubled consciousness” (Rumi, 2013, p. xi). In the process of writing an alternative mythology to the mythology of hostility, Rumi’s *Delhi by Heart* accords a place of prime significance to the cultural heritage of Delhi for its immense healing and philosophical potential, a heritage which for this reason needs to be carefully guarded against the globalising glitter of steel and glass.

CONCLUSION



To conclude, the paradoxes inherent in a “globalising city” fuel the writing of Millennial Delhi. They constitute both the pleasure and the problem of living in its congested and contested space. Narratives emerge from the cusp of modernity and post-modernity, regional and national, peripheral and central, frustration and aspiration and memory and reality. To quote from an unlikely source, a novel from the detective fiction series by Tarquin Hall, *The Case of the Deadly Butter Chicken*, the essence of being in Delhi is associated with finding form in formlessness:

Yet, in her heart, Mummy was a city person, and the lack of aesthetics didn't bother her all that much. She thrived on the *tamasha*, on being in the middle of a crowd in the busy vibrant markets. The smell of *aloo tikki* frying in hot oil, the sight of dyers pulling cotton saris out of great vats of steaming liquid and twisting them dry, the haunting sound of kirtan spilling out from the gurudwara- all these things made her feel alive. (Hall, 301)

Formlessness, as the acclaimed writer of a very recent (2015) Delhi novel, “She will Build him a City”- Raj Kamal Jha- explains is a given for a Delhi narrative today as neither he as author nor his nameless characters as agents steer the narrative, but only and only the city. Intertwining what he calls the “fictions of daily life” of a mother waiting for her daughter to emerge from coma after a traumatic incident, a super-affluent man living in toxic alienation and dissociative fugue, and an orphan who charts his own destiny in a nightmarish surreality, the tale of necessity tells of no glorified or showcase heritage or global capital, but of fault-lines like slums and orphanages as well as sick minds and unfulfilled hopes:

In the last 10 years, the number of people in the cities in India for the first time has gone up, more than the number of people that live in villages. When you have a lot of social and political and economic fault lines – fault lines make wonderful stories, I think. And I think you will see more and more people telling those stories. There are a lot of stories waiting to be told. (Jha, 2015)

Against the metronomic rhythms and disrupted designs of the city, hope prevails only in fantasy and futurity. Jha, thus, underscores the future of Delhi writing not only in locating it at fault-lines but also at in a way at indeterminate levels of spatiality, humanity, urbanity, morality and predictability.

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