Contextualizing Urban Narratives through the Socio-Spatial Dialectic

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PREFACE

Contextualizing Urban Narratives through the Socio-Spatial Dialectic probes into examining how the urban narratives explore the complexities of city life, including the diversity of its inhabitants, the challenges of urbanization, and the impact of social and economic disparities. They may delve into topics such as crime, poverty, gentrification, and the struggle for identity and belonging in different bustling metropolis like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Benaras, Edinburgh and Glasgow. This monograph provides a lens through which authors and storytellers examine and reflect upon the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of urban life.

I have extensively used the first two chapters of my Ph.D thesis titled "City as Text: Cultural Geography and Urban Encounters in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri" (http://hdl.handle.net/10603/199855). I have also incorporated the modified version of my two published papers – "Banaras as Text: Representation of Widows in Mona Verma's *The White Shadow*" (www.bcjms.bhattercollege.ac.in/v7/n1/en-v7-01-01.pdf) and "Glasgow as Text: Mapping the Urban Space in Scottish Fiction" in *JAST* 2.1 (2016): 15-19.

The monograph seeks to reiterate how the discourse of urban narratives refers to the specific language, themes, and ideas that are commonly found in stories set in urban environments – both the Orient and the Occident. It encompasses the way urban spaces are portrayed, the issues and conflicts that arise within these settings, and the social, cultural, and political commentary that is often embedded in these narratives. Furthermore, the discourse of urban narratives can serve as a platform for social critique and commentary on issues such as racism, inequality, and environmental degradation. It may explore the power dynamics at play in urban settings, the impact of urban planning decisions, and the consequences of rapid urban development.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent article titled "Postcoloniality, Religion, Geography: Keeping Our Feet on the Ground and Our Heads Up" the critic Gareth Griffiths asserts: "Land, and its extensions into theories of the construction of space and place, has emerged, alongside studies of the colonial body, as one of the most important recent sites for articulating contemporary cultural concerns." (2009, 445) Theories associated with landscape, place and space, a focal point of recent critical discourse as reflected in Griffith's statement quoted above, was in fact initiated during the second half of the twentieth century. The so long exercised linear and one-sided implication of the teleological forms of history as a dominating parameter in the field of criticism was radically resisted in the mid-1960s. As a result of such a revolutionary change in the field of social sciences, the concept of geography has become very much prominent in the field of critical theory that posits a direct challenge to the time-related traditional explication of cultural discourse. The social critic Elizabeth Grosz in *Space, Time, and Perversion* points out: "Even today the equation of temporal relations with the continuum of numbers assumes that time is isomorphic with space, and that space and time exist as a continuum, a unified totality. Time is capable of representation only through its subordination to space and to spatial models." (1995, 95) Vis-à-vis this perception of Time's subordination to Space, the famous social critic Doreen Massey too in the celebrated book *For Space* talks about the necessary unification of Space and Time and retrospectively points out that their obvious continuum was not in the focal point of discussion and remained consequently, yet unexpectedly, somewhat "unthought." (2005, 7) The French intellectual Michael Foucault is the first critic who discussed the notion of spatiality in the realm of the modern critical discourse. Vis-à-vis the contextual interdisciplinarity and the philosophical hermeneutics, Foucault in his famous essay "Of Other Spaces", with a tone of anticipation, proposes a probable "epoch of space":

> The Present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects

> points and intersects with its own skein. One should perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics oppose the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space. (1986, 22)

Using conceptual ideas like "space of emplacement" (1986, 22) and "desanctification of space" (1986, 23), "internal space" and "external space" (1986, 23), "heterotopias" and "utopias" (1986, 24) Foucault in the abovementioned essay clearly rejects the traditional positional superiority of history as a dominant, dynamic discourse over geography which has so long been considered to be stable, fixed and somewhat passive. In his other essay titled "Questions on Geography" (1980) Foucault laments for the long practiced passive approach to spatiality: "Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic." (1980, 70) To prioritize the dynamicity of space, Foucault offers a conceptualization of a relevant discourse on the viability of space in his most celebrated essay "Of Other Spaces":

> The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosions of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (1986, 23)

This intertwining and interweaving sense of space proposed by Foucault does not remain sacrosanct for a long time. Foucault's typical ideological position and proposition as reflected in his oft-cited statement in "Of Other Spaces" – "heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25) – has been contested by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his famous book *The Production of Space* (1976), in which Lefebvre discusses three vital dimensions of space: "lived space", "perceived space" and "conceived space" – these phrases sound ironical vis-à-vis Foucault's standpoint mentioned above.[1] That Foucault's epistemic formation of the theoretical conception of space is one-sided and has not been able to keep up with the existing gap between the epistemological and the practical is the central issue of Lefebvre's thesis that promotes or tries to promote a social notion of space which virtually converges the philosopher's space and real space, theory and practice as well as geographical place and social space. For further clarification, it would be relevant to quote from Lefebvre's

observation from*The Production of Space*: "Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder." (1991, 73) According to Lefebvre, with the disappearance of natural space from the critical domain what has become much more prominent and well accepted is the concept of social space: "To recognize space, to recognize what 'takes place' there and what it is used for, is to resume the dialectic; analysis will reveal the *contradictions of space*." (1991, 17, my emphasis) Throughout *The Production of Space* Lefebvre uses two concepts: "representation of space" (1991, 33) which virtually stands for maps, knowledge, and power, and "representational space" (1991, 39) which consists of the essential elements of social space - passions, memories, rituals and many more.

Vis-à-vis the gradual development of the theory of space in the contemporary critical discourse, the French theorist Michel De Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* very pithily defines space as "a practiced place." (1984, 117) Furthermore, the social critic Yi Fu Tuan's concept of 'topophilia' adds to this conceptual development of space; by his coinage 'topophilia' Tuan refers to the effective bond that exists between place and the dwellers of the place. In his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (1974) what he tries to point out is that the topophilic attachment of past days may only be realized through artifacts, like literature and painting which serve much more than mere visualization. By proposing that 'space' is more abstract than 'place', he coins the term "topophilia" to connote a sense of "fondness for place" which "incarnates the past" and "provokes pride of ownership and creation" (1974, 247). Thus the topophilic realization through literature and painting extends and generally goes beyond the particular place. By projecting a symbolic unification of sensibilities like people and environment, location and locution, these representations are not mere objects to be looked at but rather to be lived in because they randomly celebrate the networking power.[2] Taking a cue from both Foucault's proposition of "heterotopias" and Lefebvre's endorsement of socio-political implications of space, the American urban geographer Edward W. Soja in his *Postmodern Geographies: the Re-assertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1986), *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places* (1989) and *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies in Cities and Regions* (2000) builds up the formulations of spatial complexities and imaginaries.[3] In his discussion on the urban culture of Los Angeles in *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja uses the term "spatialization" to indicate "the increasing *reassertion of a spatial*

emphasis in ontological, epistemological, and theoretical discourse and in our practical understanding of the material world." (1989, 158, my emphasis)[4] This reassertion of spatial practice is the fundamental point of Soja and in his analysis he makes it very clear that the sense of space derives from sociality; in *Postmodern Geographies* he very emphatically negates any slight possibility of the existence of unsocialized space; the production of space has the obviousness of virtual socialization:

> A distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought. Geography may not yet have displaced history at the heart of contemporary theory and criticism, but there is a new animating polemic on the theoretical and political agenda, one which rings with significantly different ways of seeing time and space together, the interplay of history and geography, the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of being in the world freed from the imposition of inherent categorical privilege … New possibilities are being generated from this creative commingling, possibilities for a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism; a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being; a transformative re-theorization of the relations between history, geography, and modernity. (1989, 11-2)

In his observation Soja acknowledges C. Wright Mills' 1959 textual project, *The Sociological Imagination* for the reassertion of space whose roots lie in the "habitus of social practices." (1989, 17-8) Vis-à-vis this backdrop of the philosophical emancipation of space, the next part will focus on the critical studies related to the spatial dimensions of the city and its connection with cultural geography.

In connection with the theory of space and spatiality discussed at length in the previous unit, this unit will focus on the emergence of the concept of "cultural geography" which is also the focal issue of this thesis. Joseph E. Spencer and William L. Thomas in their Introduction to *Cultural Geography* (1969) very precisely analyse the phrase 'cultural geography' that has drawn much popular attention in contemporary critical studies:

> The concern of the cultural geographer remains the broad study of spatially oriented and spatially differentiated cultures operating through time on the surface of the earth as a means to the further and deeper understanding of human performance by other geographic specialists. More particular inquiry into the processes and functions of human systems in specific regional environments becomes the concern of some of the more specialized subdisciplines within the broad realm of human geography. (1969, 4)

After Foucault, Lefebvre, Tuan and Soja the concept of space is mainly taken up by David Harvey who very precisely maps a rupture between the modern and the postmodern conception of space in his oft-cited book, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (1989). This book offers Harvey's standpoint vis-à-vis the reformation as well as reformulation of space that has a latent tendency to denote the sense of cultural geography:

> Whereas the modernists see space as something to be shaped for social purposes and therefore always subservient to the construction of a social project, the postmodernists see space as something independent and autonomous, to be shaped according to aesthetic aims and principles which have nothing necessarily to do with any overarching social objective, save, perhaps, the achievement of timeless and "disinterested" beauty as an objective in itself. (1989, 92)

Cultural geographers tend to amplify the meaning of physical surroundings by reading the environment through the perspective of humanity. The collective social involvement of people and place as pointed out by the social critic Manuel Castells in *The City and the Grass Roots* (1983), produce a human centric interpretation of spatial environment: "Space is not a 'reflection of society', it *is* society … spatial forms … will be produced, as our objects are, by human action." (1983, 4, original emphasis) The strong connection between physical space and humanity dominates Castells' conceptualization of space. After Castells, Doreen Massey in *For Space* (2005) defines space from three different angles: first, space as "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny;" second, space as "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality;" and finally, space as "always under construction." (2005, 9) Space or the perception of space exists through the mode of association with the cultural geography of a particular place. In *For Space* Massey further clarifies the intersection as well as interpenetration of spatial dimensions:

> Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else. A space, then, which is neither a container for always-already constituted identities nor a completed closure of holism. This is a space of loose ends and missing links. For the future to be open, space must be open too. (2005, 11-2)

Thus, a cultural geographer focuses on the shifting stance of recent critical attention: "Instead of narrative, structure; instead of diachrony, synchrony;

instead of time, space." (Massey 2005, 37, my emphasis) As far as the critical approach to space is concerned, there has occurred a remarkable change in perspective from the modern to the postmodern times: modern critics conceive space from the point of view of physical geography, whereas postmodern critics consider space through the lens of cultural/human geography.[5]The postmodern notion of space celebrates heterogeneity, diversity and difference. Reading space through the postmodern lens, Julian Murphet in the essay "Postmodernism and Space" very precisely observes the figurative implication of space in postmodern times: "Space is swarming as it has never swarmed before, with movement, difference, colour, polyphony." (Connor 2006, 130) According to the sociologist Mike Crang in the book *Cultural Geography* (1998), the place-specific performance of cultural rituals, human beliefs and superstitions, life practices, contribute to the making of the sense of a space/landscape. If seen from this perspective, cultural geography may well be considered to be a "text" that may be read from different perspectives and different points of view because it celebrates the typical human drama in a space-specific context with the virtual obviousness of cultural engagement.[6]The cultural geography is essentially a site of multiplicity – the multiplicity of engagement and association.

Through the exposition and specification of the urban mode of living, it is understandable that the idea of cultural geography connotes the cultural engagement of the inhabitants of a particular place with the immediate social environment. As the space-specific standpoint determines the identity of the character concerned, the urban critic Jonathan Raban, by focusing particularly on city space and its representation in celluloid, comments in his much celebrated book, *Soft City*: "In cities, people are given to acting, putting on a show of themselves." (1974, 35) The idea of cultural geography is very prominent in the context of postmodern existence because culture, being not in conformity with lexical simplicity, is a virtual product of contesting ideologies.[7]Essentially and literally, the cultural geography of a place becomes the "space to which meaning has been ascribed." (Carter et al 1993, xii) The word "place" refers to the physical geographical entity, while the word "space" suggests the network of relations that defines social interaction in a particular place; in fact, "space" is much more than "place;" "space" is something in addition to "place."[8]The famous anthropologist James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*very precisely explains the space-place dictum*:* "An urban neighborhood, for example, may be laid out physically according to a street plan. But it is not a space until it is practiced by people's active occupation, their movements through and

around it." (1997, 54) This shift of focus from the traditional "place" to the contemporary notion of "space", and from physical geography to cultural geography is being celebrated in the every field of recent critical theory. Though the two words "urban" and "city" are considered to be synonyms, Lefebvre in *Writings on Cities* (1996) makes an important distinction between the two - "the city*,* a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact, and the urban*,* a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought." (1996, 103) In spite of Lefebvre's rigid distinction of the two terms mentioned above, social critics have realized that the urban social experience or the city's cultural geography is impossible without the material fact of the city. Allied with the interplay of tenderness and estrangement, competitiveness and closeness the claim of the city offers a strong sense of cultural geography. All the encounters are not innocent but rather they are complex and ambiguous, and this ambiguity renders, according to Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* (1961), the "ambivalent gifts." of city life (1961, 54) Consequently, the urban space is both "discursive and constructive." (Barker 2000, 292-3)

Cultural geographers in their studies try to focus specifically on the structural binaries apparent within an urban space. Center/margin, outer/inner, public/private – these binaries very often reveal two different aspects of city life, one which is extrinsic and relates to external reality, and the other is intrinsic and related to experiential reality: "The city … brought with it the expectation not only of outward assault but likewise of intensified struggle within: a thousand little wars were fought in the marketplace …" (Mumford 1961, 52) Significantly, in this perspective of the city, the human factor plays a very vital role. Vis-à-vis the abovementioned geo-critical studies related to the urban space, it would not be an overstatement to state that the city is more than a place, more than a mere geographical setting as Robert E. Park in the article "The City: Suggestions for the Investigations of Human Behaviour" points out:

> The city is something more than congeries of individual men and social conveniences … something more, also, than a mere constellation of institutions and administrative devices … The city is, rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with the tradition. (Gelder and Thorton1997, 16)

So, without the city-dwellers, the conception of the city is incomplete. From the above analytical remarks made by cultural geographers, it is clearly understandable that the various human experiences associated with

inhabiting in a city space produce a meaningful image of the city. One of the earlier critics of urban space, Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) explains the necessary connection between city space and human inhabitants within a city space: "Like a piece of architecture, the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time … we must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived by its inhabitants." (1960, 3) By equating the potential growth of a city to "a marvelous palimpsest" (1968, 3), the urban sociologist R.E. Pahl in the Introduction to *Readings in Urban Sociology* (1968) observes that a city is not simply a mere "physical artefact;" rather a city nurtures some obvious 'social entities'; in short, cities are what "society lets them be." (1968, 4)[9] From the perspective of the twentieth century critical parameter, the conceptualization of city as space and the subsequent consideration of the city's cultural geography as a matter of discourse have enriched not only the theoretical field, but also the field of literature, because such discourses have provided a lens through which one can interrogate the city life from a broader point of view. Therefore the city, according to Louis Wirth's view in the essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life", is "the product of growth rather than of instantaneous creation", (Reiss 1964, 62) which becomes the "most immoderate of human texts" (De Certeau 1984, 2). Consequently, the textualization of city as space is bound to convey the human perspective of city, which becomes interesting as a subject of study from the point of view of cultural geography.

This monograph will extensively discussthe theories of space and it will also attempt to show the connection between city space and cultural geography. The perspectives of different social theorists related to space, city and cultural geography discussed in this chapter will evidently help us in properly understanding the representation of the urban spaces in literature. The next chapters will focus on the literary representations of city space and, by doing so, an attempt will be made to properly amplify the interface of city space and cultural geography.

CHAPTER I

NARRATIVIZING THE URBAN SPACE(S): THEORETICAL ISSUES AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

> "It is an old association; over and over we tame the spatial into the textual and the conceptual; into representation." (Massey 2005, 20)

Before the appearance of French philosopher Henry Lefebvre in the theoretical field, Raymond Williams, the cultural critic, using the socio-political perspective, analyses the nature of the existing gap between two different places: the Country and the City. In his book *The Country and the City* (1973) Williams, by examining different literary texts and the parameters of social and economic growth, vehemently rejects the traditional conception that endorses the fact that rural life is simple, innocent and somewhat utopian, while city life is full of unpredictable complexities.[1]As far as the history of English Literature is concerned, many poets have textualized urbanity in their literary works. For instance, Abraham Cowley represents the 'crowd, and buzz, and murmurings' of the city space ("The Wish"), William Wordsworth laments the 'din of towns and cities' ("Tintern Abbey"), P.B. Shelley feels that "the City's voice itself is soft like Solitude's" ("Dejection near Naples") and Rudyard Kipling focuses on the revival of city in "Cities and Thrones and Powers". In the modern era, T.S. Eliot presents the image of an urban 'wasteland', full of discordant penetration:

> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violent air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal (*The Waste Land*, 371-6)

One can further add the postmodern poet Philip Larkin's suave urbanity as reflected in his book of poems *The Less Deceived* (1955) and *The Whitsun*

Weddings (1967). Apart from the canon of English poetry in which one encounters various literary representations of city spaces, there are instances of such similar representations in other genres of English literature –Jacobean city comedies like Philip Massinger's *The City Madam* (1632) and Richard Brome's *The City Wit* (1653) and Victorian fictions, particularly of Charles Dickens and of William Thackerey. Though Dickens himself was famously "obsessed with pacing the London streets" (Parrinder2006, 227), he projects a different image of London that goes against the traditional representation of the city.[2]

The urban critic Phil Hubbard in the book *City* points out that cities "foster creativity" (2006, 3) through the trajectory of eventful encounters. Vis-à-vis the city's social centrality, postmodern geographer Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) proposes that the urban landscape may be treated as "text" because it nurtures the elements of reading: "The landscape has a textuality that we are just beginning to understand, for we have only recently been able to see it whole and to "read" it with respect to its broader movements and inscribed events and meanings." (1989, 157) It is this significant view of Soja that has been contextualized in the argument of this thesis. That the landscape has its own textuality which can be read, is central to the understanding of the notion of "city as text". Through the interplay of urban and verbal decay and through the juxtaposition of utterly retrograde and provincial, in postmodern fictions like C. MacInnes's *City of Spades* (1957), Doris Lessing's *Four Gated City* (1969), Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1974), Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), Martin Amis' *London Fields* (1989), Rutherford's *London: The Novel* (1998), Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2005) and the novels of Iain Sinclair and Ian McEwan, the representation of the city becomes a dramatic "text" to be read and reread; the representation of the city invites close attention to its significant encounters of power politics as Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* (1961) points out in an analytic observation: "The city … ceased to be a stage for a significant drama in which everyone had a role, with lines to speak: it became, rather, a pompous show place for power; and its streets properly presented only two-dimensional facades that served as a mask for a pervasive system of regimentation and exploitation." (1961, 196)In their textualization of the urban space in the fictional world, postmodern British novelists, particularly Amis and Sinclair, it is interesting to note, have used the concept of the "flaneur".[3] Phil Hubbard in his book *City* credits texts written about city life because these texts "are valuable not only because they offer detailed descriptions of individual buildings, neighbourhoods and locales, but also because they

locate particular social groups and individuals in these spaces, mapping out the fractures of social class, race, gender, age and sexuality which characterize city life." (2006, 69) The different textual representations of urban spaces connote the idea of heterogeneity that defines city life. In fact, it is impossible to capture all the aspects of city life within a particular textual representation, because the city space is ineffable:

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of *an urban 'text'* they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of the spaces that cannot be seen … The networks of these moving, intersecting writing compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (De Certeau qtd in Gupta 2008, 219, my emphasis)

In the Preface to *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (1981) literary critic Burton Pike, as he examines the presence of the "city" in the Western literary canon, observes that the city in Western culture has always been a "problematic" one (1981, 1). Thus, the different literary authors' attempt to portray city space, as mentioned above, is, in fact, an act of transforming the physical city into the textual pages. The urban critics or analysts like Watson and Gibson began to focus on, in the Introduction to *Postmodern Cities and Space* (1995), how the city dwellers "think, represent, live and create space" (1995, 2) in different cities through their urban experiences in this era of globalization, when city means many things – "a spatial location, a political entity, an administrative unit, a place of work and play, a collection of dreams and nightmares, a mesh of social relations, an agglomeration of economic activity, and so forth." (Hubbard 2006, 1) Allied with the germs of psycho-geography, R.E. Park's Introduction in *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (1925) maps the sense of self-sufficiency of the city space that ultimately results in some kind of autonomous identity of the city, nurturing a sense of great expectations:

> The city ... is something more than a congeries of individual men and of social conveniences – streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones, etc.; something more, also, than a mere constellation of institutions and administrative devices –courts, hospitals, schools, police and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is, rather, *a state of mind*, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this

> tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature. (1925, 1, my emphasis)

The city, being much more than a mere physical setting, offers a kind of psychological osmosis ("a state of mind"), whereas the writings on the city may be considered to be textual responses to the continuous shifting sense of urban dynamics. As cultural spacing is essential for determining the location of the character concerned, Doreen Massey in *For Space* (2005), by quoting Derrida, points out that spacing has an obvious implication of "textualization." (2005, 50) As far as the textualization of the socio-cultural aspect of a city is concerned, Julian Murphet in the article "Postmodernism and Space" points out the difference between the modern and the postmodern outlook on the city: "Quite unlike the 'unreal city' of modernism, which seduced even as it repelled, the postmodern city deploys its simulated, self-duplicating surfaces with the goal of repelling desire itself." (Connor 2006, 118) Thus, the textual representation of the city has undergone a significant transformation from modern to postmodern times.

Vis-à-vis the textual representation of the urban space, Kingsley Davis in his Foreword to Jack P. Gibbs' *Urban Research Methods* (1961) very rightly points out: "The abundance of the moralistic and reformist urban literature attests both the newness and the significance of cities." (Gibbs 1961, xii) Thus the newness involved in the textualization of the city/cities is replete with the urban caricature that offers the readers a significant trope of cultural transmission. The physical geography of a city virtually becomes a readable text through literary representations. Different critics from many perspectives have focused on different salient features of city life.[4]The urban sociologist Kevin Lynch in his book, *The Image of the City* (1960) emphasizes the regular exchanging pattern of social engagement in a city where "on different occasions and different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across." (1960, 1) Another urban critic Jonathan Raban in the celebrated book *Soft City* (1974) has focused on the "plastic" nature of the city that adds sensation to urban living.[5] The textualization of urban life and environment leads to the creation of narratives that celebrate the cultural geography of the city space. In her seminal work *The Cultures of Cities* (1995) Sharon Zukin, by examining the cultural constructions of cities through social interaction and psychological exchange, focuses on the construction of power relations in the urban space: "The look and feel of cities reflect decision about what – and who – should be visible and what should not."

(1995, 7) The reference to these various types of criticisms related to the city space is important, because these will help the readers to interpret the textualization of the city in a new dimension. In a recent study, Peter J.M. Nas et al in their erudite introduction to their book *Cities Full of Symbols* (2011) project an interdisciplinary approach to unearth the city's different layers of cultural matrix – the "morphologic, demographic, economic, social-cultural, administrative and planning dimension." (7) Vis-à-vis such positions and expositions regarding different discourses on the city, cultural critics like Joe Moran emphasize on the necessity of the "textualization of social space" through different modes of representation because it is only through the representation that a city's myriad impressions are palpable:

> Cities are clearly material entities, products of some of the traditional concerns of geography such as labour, land and capital, but they are also textualized. In a sense, the city can only ever be understood textually, because it is far too complicated and labyrinthine to be encapsulated in its material totality: we only ever have access to a selective interpretation of it … Interdisciplinary approaches to the city … tend to focus on the textualization of social space within the material reality of the city itself, while relating this to its representation in other kinds of text: novels, poetry, films and other media. (2007, 167)

Without this prescribed textualization, the proper sense of city can never be fully perceived. Referring to J. Duncan's book, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (1990), Hubbard, by specifying a particular time period, points out that the notion of "city as a text" became a "widespread approach to urban geography since the late 1980s." (2006, 60) If one examines English literary texts, it would not be a Herculean task to note that the city, in most of the cases, becomes more than a setting; in fact it becomes a significant character in the text – a character that impacts on the nature of the other human characters leading their daily life. The next unit of this chapter will briefly discuss the textual representations of the city in the field of Indian English literature. This discussion will eventually guide us to understand the very approach of the writers to city life and space, and it will also help us to locate their uniqueness as Indian authors who have textualized the city in quite a different fashion.

The India-based urban critic Kusum Lata Taneja in *Morphology of Indian Cities* states that the landscape of India bears the "heterogeneous geographical elements for urbanization" (1971, 42) and this urbanization has been effectively textualized, instances of which are replete in Indian English literary texts.[6]Cities have been represented in various ways by

different Indian authors belonging to different periods of Indian English literature. In Raja Rao we find that the notion of a city is burdened with the responsibility of civilizing and protecting the rural backward class. As the villagers in Rao's novel *Kanthapura* (1938) believe or at least try to believe: "We shall go. Oh, we shall go to the end of the pilgrimage like the two hundred and fifty thousand women of Bombay. We will go like them, we will go …! *Men will come from the city, after all, to protect us!* We will go …!" (1970, 166, my emphasis) In the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning-novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Amitav Ghosh focuses on the transnational encounters of two particular cities during the Partition – dramatic Calcutta and traumatic Dhaka – the one resembling the other; as the anonymous narrator narrates his inner feelings:

> … the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old-history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass broader. (1996, 233)

By making a comparison between the Calcutta of the past and the Calcutta of the present Joyonto in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* states: "The real Calcutta, the thick laughter of brutal men, open dustbins, warm and dark, where carcasses were sometimes discarded, did not exist. He knew Calcutta would not be as kind to them as it had been to him." (Mukherjee 1990, 41) In *Oleander Girl* (2013), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on two families of North and South Calcutta and the precious moments spent by the family members at the very heart of the city. Bombay (now Mumbai) becomes a meeting place in Salman Rushdie's fictions that generally offer a multicultural space of incidental encounters. In a sense, Bombay becomes the commercial capital of India where the negotiations of different spatial dialectics continuously occur and recur. In his poetic passages the city-based poet Nissim Ezekiel focuses on the psychological topography of space-specific affinities in Bombay. By projecting a sense of urban geography and cultural dimensions of a particular city, Vikram Chandra's *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997) and Ardashir Vakil's *Beach Boy* (1997) explore the busy life style of Bombay and the characters' psycho-geographical sensibilities vis-à-vis the city's urbanity. Khushwant Singh's *Delhi* (1990), like Anita Desai's *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), is an artistic exploration of city poetics that we find in the Indian capital. In Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011) the urban angst of Delhi arrests the growth of the characters'

expressive spontaneity and results in relational breakdown and economic turbulence. Apart from the aforementioned texts, there are many Indian English literary texts that narrativize the urban space from different perspectives: Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* (1994), Kamala Markandya's *Pleasure City* (1982), Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics* (1999), and Kenize Mourad's *In the City of Gold and Silver* (2013).[7] Even Mahesh Dattani, the only Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Indian English dramatist, has textualized urban culture and environment in his plays like *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991) and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998). The representation of the city in Indian English literature has changed since the time of Raja Rao. Due to the impact of globalization in India, Indian writers now are more interested in textualizing the city from the perspective of technological advancements that have become very apparent in contemporary city culture. Manjula Padmanava's *Harvest* (1997), Piyush Jha's *Mumbaistan* (2012) and Mahesh Dattani's *The Big Fat City* (2014) are glaring examples of such literary representations where we find the technology-based networking solidarity among the city's characters. In addition to these, Arunodaya Chaudhuri in his collection of plays titled *Eleven New Plays* (2013) shows the strong technological connection between the four metropolitan cities of India. As far as the literary representations of urban spaces are concerned, it is very much prominent that technological innovations in the field of science, commerce and telecommunication have impacted upon the shape, structure and content of literary narratives that define the contemporary nature of Indian English literature. Vis-à-vis the interface of literature and urban space, it is usually the setting of a fictional narrative that provides a broad canvas for showing urban life and culture.[8] Philip Trew's view regarding this issue is very noteworthy:

> Contemporary fiction has been concerned too with the abstract quality of provincial urban dynamics … *As a site of narrative and culture the city is mobile, existential and yet perversely monumental*, combining in contemporary fiction the globalized economy with both the localized dynamics of intersubjectivity and a sense that culture always creates a sense of loss through its very ongoing adaptation, or evolutionary survival. (2004, 89-90, my emphasis)

With regard to the representation of the city in literature, the writers' approaches to Western cities and to Indian cities are different because the existential perspectives of the people living in Oriental and Occidental cities vary due to their positional roots. In this context, R. Champakalashmi in her book *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization* (1996) states: "The impact of the western city has also led to a sharp distinction being made in the studies of

Western and Asian cities, the western cities as symbols of economic vitality and political autonomy, and the Asian cities or urban forms as predominantly political and cultural rather than economic phenomenon." (1996, 1) The city, as a product of culture becomes a veritable contact zone that celebrates the territorialized culture (having a bond between culture and location). When an author attempts to textualize a city, the relationship that develops between a city and a text is reciprocal in nature and this aspect has been addressed by the literary critic Jesse Matz in *The Modern Novel* (2004):[9]

> Modern *city life* deeply changed the very nature of the novel … It meant new modes of contact: people were thrown together in new ways, without the kind of knowledge of each other they might have had in other, older places … Fiction, to be true to this new life, had to develop new registers of intensity, speed, and flux … So one way the novel responded to the new spaces of modern life was to trace the swift and continuous shift of urban stimuli; another was to compensate for urban excess by providing readers with emotional restoration. (2004, 67-8, original emphasis)

As the cities have been the powerful incubators of Indian English literature for a long time, it is significant to mark how the city-based texts mentioned above become potential sites for offering the dialectical display of the nuances of the urban spaces concerned with the characters' psychological topography that regularly encounters the cultural geography of social existence.[10] The theoretical issues related to city space and the notion of cultural geography that has been elaborated in this chapter will be used in the next chapters to study the intricate relationship between city and context.[11]

CHAPTER II

DISCOURSES ON DELHI AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

You men of these eastern regions
Knowing me beggarly state you mock me;
You snigger amongst yourselves and ask me
Where on earth can you have come from?
Let me tell you!
There once was a fair city,
Among cities of the world the first in fame;
It hath been ruined and laid desolate,
To that city I belong, Delhi is its name. (cited in Singh 2010, 53)

The above quoted lines of Meer Taqi Meer from his poem "There Once Was a Fair City", translated into English by Khushwant Singh has the germs to straightjacket the urban spaces of Delhi in the modes of discourses. Through the textualizations of urban agglomeration, the cultural geography of Delhi may be read vis-à-vis the parameters proposed by urban critics as "complex structures, hierarchies of power, racialized and classed cartographies and exclusive zoning." (Tickell and Ranasingha2018, 301) The urban galaxy of Delhi through the act of spatializing as reflected through different writers' visitations of the city's narrative geography, will be examined to search what went into the making of the city's spatial coverage in the fictional representations like Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Khushwant Singh's *Delhi: A Novel* (1990), William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* (1993), Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011). This chapter, by taking recourse to Khushwant Singh's edited anthology *City Improbable: Writings on Delhi* (2001) and Vinay Lal's edited book *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in Its Plentitude* (2013), will focus on the abovementioned novelists' ideological responses to the symbolic experiences of Delhi and its spatial ambit. Allied with contestations and negotiations through the disjuncture of the representational politics of location and the referential

fixity of location, Delhi is obviously "rich in literary-urban narrative traditions." (Tickell and Ranasingha 2018, 301) By projecting the existential dilemmas vis-à-vis the constant changing pattern of the city, the representations, as will be discussed, become potential reflectors of the city poetics against the backdrop of power politics.

The cultural and political geography of Delhi becomes highly textual as it provokes to be engaged with various types of discourses related to different social contexts. Through the negotiations of altered space and altered time, Delhi offers its amenities and proclivities to the readers through the bifurcation of a conceal/reveal mode. Nonetheless it is also important to note that the city has drawn the attention of the national as well as of the international readers. William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* (1993) did exactly for Delhi what Dominique Lapierre did for Calcutta in *City of Joy* (1985) -the international exposition of the spatial codes of the city's local cultural matrix. Urban critics like Patrick Geddes in *Cities in Evolution* (1949), Kusum Lata Taneja in *Morphology of Indian Cities* (1971) and Annapurna Shaw in *Indian Cities in Transition* (2007) have all focused on the changing patterns of urban spaces and all the three titles of the abovementioned books bear witness to this fact of metamorphoses as a constant element in the formation and emergence of the Indian urban spaces. Even Arthur Gallion and Simon Eisuer in their book *The Urban Pattern: City Planning and Design* claim: "Cities are being continuously rebuilt, after a fashion, and decentralization is not only coming, it is here." (1963, 232) Though metamorphoses are obvious vis-à-vis the conceptualization of urban spaces, the cultural geography of Delhi/New Delhi is unique in the sense that, as Malvika Singh observes in her book *Perpetual City: A Short Biography of Delhi*, "no other city, despite repeated attempts to destroy it, or neglect it, continues to grow and reinvent itself from age to age." (2013, 3) In fact, Malvika Singh's use of the epithet "perpetual" very pertinently claims the spirit of the city which is deeply rooted in historical backdrop: "As I grow older, I too, have moved into another phase of exploring life, past and present, in this city, and find that I have just about scratched the surface of an incredibly complex historical reality … The decoding never ends in this perpetual city …" (2013, 5-6) These sentences/sentiments claimed by the author sound too personal to encounter Delhi's urban frontier which has a long story-telling history. Shahjahanabad that we now call Old Delhi was the last Mughal capital of India and in 1911 and later more prominently in 1931 the British Government laid the foundation stone of the imperial capital of India – the "jewel in their crown"– New Delhi. The renowned critic of the city Narayani Gupta's *Delhi between Two Empires 1803-*

1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth (1997) is a significant case study of the city's historical establishment. This historicity of Delhi is further reiterated by Malavika Singh:

> In the fifties, there was a quiet, insular and 'protected' New Delhi that lived alongside a vibrant, decaying Shahjahanabad or Old Delhi as we know it today. One 'city' slept at ten, Old Delhi rocked through the night. In many ways, these twin cities stand for an India of then and now, confident yet confused, culturally proud but looking to intimate that which was, at the time, unattainable. (2013, 22)

This observation may well be supplied to support the observation of urban critic Sophie Watson who in the oft-cited book on urban discourses titled *City Publics: The (Dis)Enchantments of Urban Encounters* tries to conceptualize the urban public space as "a site of potentiality, difference and delightful encounters." (2006, 19) Even this duality of Old Delhi/New Delhi forms a crux in Anita Desai's most celebrated novel on this city *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Let me quote a passage from Desai that radically promotes an evolutionary shift vis-à-vis the city's poetics and politics of existence:

> Old Delhi does not change. It only decays. My students tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb. Nothing but sleeping graves. Now New Delhi, they say is different. That is where things happen. The way they describe it, it sounds like a nest of fleas. So much happens there, it must be a jumping place I never go. Baba never goes. And here, here nothing happens at all. Whatever happened, happened long ago–in the time of the Tughlaqs, the Khiljis, the Sultanate, the Moghuls – that lot … And then the British built New Delhi and moved everything out. Here we are left rocking on the backwaters, getting duller and greyer, I suppose. Anyone who isn't dull and grey goes away – to New Delhi, to England, to Canada, the Middle East. They don't come back. (2005, 8)

Existing social boundaries and continuous configuration of boundaries through the city-dwellers' act of living, as reflected in the abovementioned quotation, have the typical tendency to denote the trajectories of convergence and divergence. The renowned author Rana Dasgupta in his much acclaimed book *Capital: A Portrait of Twenty-First Century Delhi* (2014) makes a comparative study of Delhi, Mumbai, and Calcutta; and the comparative studies even cover the social web of life through the confrontation of Old Delhi and New Delhi: "The old was dying, the new was in preparation, and we were living in the in-between …" (2014, 39) Though history shows us that the city celebrates the colonial/postcolonial encounter, the city has also gone through a terrible communal fury which

has resulted in the enigma of urban ruins. In spite of many assurances in Desai's novel ["Anyway, you will be quite safe here, outside the city walls. There won't be riots here …" (Desai 2005, 108)], the readers find random "arson, looting and murder in the city." (Desai 2005, 125) The interplay of traumatic violence and dramatic tension in the city forces to promote the novel through observations like - the city was "in flames that summer" (Desai 2005, 67) and the city was "burning down;" (Desai 2005, 91) such observations bear obvious reflections of a valley of violence. The noted Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie who writes a precise Introduction to Desai's novel very pertinently observes: "This is not a novel of people who are forced to leave their homes by Partition, or face violence because of it; it is an altogether subtler tale of how Partition changed the world of Old Delhi." (Desai 2005, ix) It would be relevant to mention that the social critic Talja Blockland in the book *Urban Bonds* (2003) notes how social groups are constructed in the city space for the common interest of the group members. In her seminal work *The Cultures of Cities* (1995), Sharon Zukin rightly hints at the construction of unequal power relations in cities: "The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not." (1995, 7) As far as the history of Indian cities is concerned, urban spaces are habituated to go through riots – Jamshedpur in 1979, Delhi in 1984, Bombay in 1992, Ahmadabad in 2002 and most recently Delhi in 2020. In fact Vibhuti Narain Rai's *Curfew in the City: A Novella* (2016) is a brilliant exposition of the regular eruption of violence in Indian cities. It is important to point out that Desai's *Clear Light of Day* was published in 1980 and in 2020 we again find the disturbing elements of a riot in Delhi. Even after forty years things have not changed that much!

This article is an attempt to refer to the crucial spatial codes of the city's cultural matrix on the characters' psychology that is always full of what the city critics map as "empirical nuances of city life." (Hubbard 2006, 7) In *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), renowned novelist Ahmed Ali projects the socio-cultural study of colonial Delhi that led to the call for freedom. The tell-tale title iterates the fact that the beginning of the British rule in Delhi posits with the identity crisis of the Muslims in the city and, to a broader extent, the identity crisis of the whole nation. The clash of cultures and the ongoing formulation of "Othering" is quite clear in the following quotation from Ali's passages to Delhi:

> It was the city of Kings and monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles. But no King lives there today, and the poets are feeling the lack of patronage, and the old inhabitants though still alive, have lost their pride and grandeur under a foreign, yoke … where are

> Babur and Humayan and Jahangir? Where is Shahjahan who built the city? …gone they are, gone and dead beneath the all-embracing earth. (1984, 2)

The changing faces of the city have constantly been recurred in various discourses offered by the urban critics. The following observations of Malvika Singh in *Perpetual City: A Short Biography of Delhi* are indeed the precise cultural imaginations of the changing topography of Delhi: "Metropolitan Delhi, the city of today, sits upon that last *bloody layer* of the last century. Building on the remains of the past, dreaming of a possible future is what makes Delhi, Delhi." (2013, 11, emphasis added) And again: "Dilli had changed forever. A *dreadful polarization between communities* that were, till recently, considered to be the same, had been planted in the soil of this ancient city." (2013, 107, emphasis added) Undoubtedly, all the above quoted observations are volcanic eruptions of the discourses on Delhi's cultural geography. Even Vinay Lal in the Introduction to his edited book *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in Its Plenitude* (2013) has placed the violence of Delhi on emphatic mode and he believes that these deeply ingrained psychological wounds are hard to be erased from the root/route of the city:

> Delhi, as much as Lucknow, still bears palpable reminders of the brutal suppression of the 1857 rebellion: tough many have written of the city of memories, evidently one can also invoke the city as a space of memorialization – not merely a space filled by monuments and memorials, testaments to the captains of industry, nationalist heroes, and men and women of science and arts, or to episodes in the city's history, but also more elementally as a space that, in the first instance, generates passions and thus permits the very exercise of memorialization. (2013, xxxiii)

Thus the conception of space is highly textual because it heavily engages with the discourses of power vis-à-vis social contexts. Travelling through time, space and history to understand the urban sprawl of Delhi, Khushwant Singh's *Delhi: A Novel* (1990), William Dalrymple's *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* (1993) and Mala Dayal's *Celebrating Delhi* (2010) offer geo-critical explorations of the spirit of the city. Through the images and issues like eunuchs and brutality on the Sikhs, the exploited and oppressed image of Delhi has been sketched by renowned novelist Khushwant Singh in *Delhi: A Novel*: "What freedom? Freedom for what? Loot, kill. Everyone talk freedom – don't know what freedom means." (376) This statement offered by a character named Budh Singh who works as a night watchman may be served as the disjuncture between distance

and desire among the city dwellers in the midst of cultural imposition and social proposition. Apart from the abovementioned novels, Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich like Us* (1986) presents, portrays and projects the political image of New Delhi as Amit Chaudhuri did in the representation of Calcutta in *Freedom Song* (1998). Undoubtedly, Delhi forms a pivot in Sahgal's awareness as is evident from his two other novels - *The Day in Shadow* (1971) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977). By narrativizing the topology and the genealogy of Delhi, Manju Kapur's novel *Custody* (2011) forms a major strand vis-à-vis the literary representations of the city; this street novel captures the corporate life style of the city dwellers and how they have been customized in this "custody" like existence.

What is important to point out is that Desai in her exploration of the city poetics of Delhi in *Clear Light of Day*, much like Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) relies on the image of a veranda: "The veranda ran all around the house and every room opened out onto it." (Desai 17) It is expected that the miniature version of the city can be captured by standing/sitting on the veranda. Vis-à-vis the reading of a city's spaces through "selection and omission" and "the balance of intuition and intention" (Turchi2004, 25), the readers find incorporated stories and retrospective reasoning as offered by Bimla in *Clear Light of Day*: "Here things were left unsaid and undone. It was what they called 'Old Delhi decadence'." (Desai 2005, 20) The urban spaces of Delhi offer and promote multi-textured trajectories that bear testimony to the proverbial sayings of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya – "Dilli is still far away." Rukmini Bhaya Nair in the essay titled "City of Walls, City of Gates" included in *City Improbable: Writings on Delhi* points out the aspect of Delhi being a gated city: "Delhi is 'Dehali', i.e. 'threshold', 'gateway', glorious etymological truth of the capital of India, deeply embedded in its samsaric imperial heart and trivial bureaucratic self-images and centrist complacency, likely to be quite drowned in the flood of five-star freebooting now overtaking it." (Singh 2010, 283) Traversed by multiple effects and affects the city, Rukmini Bhaya Nairremains impervious to the factors of claiming and disowning the city through the mythological metaphors: "Delhi is possibly the fastest growing city in India, which strains its resources beyond belief, and it has probably been heading this way from the time Delhi was Yudhistir's mythic Indrapastha! Hence, the endless fantasies of 'the walled city' in Delhi, the desire for a place of escape in a city of no escape." (Singh 2010, 284) Various literary representations of Delhi go into the very root of the city by reconfiguring the socio-cultural ethnic elements within as well as beyond the walls of Delhi.[1]The cultural critic E.D. Varughese in the oft-cited book *Reading*