“Each chapter is a brilliant incursion into one facet of ‘the Indian city’ as presented in this book. Together the authors give us a refracted account of that complex condition that is a city. The chapters regularly seem to be in conversation with each other, an unusual achievement for a collection.”

Saskia Sassen, Columbia University, and author of Territory, Authority, Rights

“Global flows have created deep contestations and hybrid conditions in Indian cities that are often incomprehensible to planners and policy makers. This book offers a nuanced and scholarly reading of this complex landscape through examining ‘potent samples’ at all scales across a range of Indian cities. An extremely well-timed book, given the intellectual void in the debate on contemporary Indian cities.”

Rahul Mehrotra, Harvard University

According to United Nations projections, India’s urban population will grow faster than that of any other country over the next 30 years, increasing by more than 350 million during that period. Despite this transformation, there are as yet few book-length treatments that address the political economy of the contemporary, post-liberalization Indian city in comparative perspective. Contesting the Indian City examines the contradictions and contestations of India’s current urban moment, as historically entrenched urban forms, rooted in cultural dynamics and legacies of Nehruvian state-sponsored modernization, face mounting pressure with the emergence of powerful new political actors around the push toward economic growth and the commodification of urban space. Bringing together a collection of theoretical explorations and empirical studies, the volume offers important insights into issues of politics, equity, and space relating to urban development in modern India. In doing so, it deepens theoretical understandings of the changes that Indian cities are experiencing, and of the comparative implications of the Indian experience for contemporary debates about urban politics. Enlightening and timely, Contesting the Indian City contributes greatly to urgent debates about the political dynamics that underlie urban development in contemporary India.

Gavin Shatkin is Associate Professor at the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs at Northeastern University. His research focuses on contemporary urban redevelopment practices in Asian cities, urban inequality, and community organizing and collective action around issues of shelter and infrastructure delivery. His book Collective Action and Urban Poverty Alleviation: Community Organizations and the Struggle for Shelter in Manila was published in 2007.
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CONTESTING THE INDIAN CITY

GLOBAL VISIONS AND THE POLITICS OF THE LOCAL

Edited By

Gavin Shatkin

WILEY Blackwell
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The Wiley Blackwell Studies in Urban and Social Change series is published in association with the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. It aims to advance theoretical debates and empirical analyses stimulated by changes in the fortunes of cities and regions across the world. Among topics taken up in past volumes and welcomed for future submissions are:

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The series is explicitly interdisciplinary; the editors judge books by their contribution to intellectual solutions rather than according to disciplinary origin. Proposals may be submitted to members of the series Editorial Committee, and further information about the series can be found at www.suscbookseries.com.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book project began with a simple goal – to bring together some of the excellent research that is being done on the political economy of India’s contemporary urbanization. When the idea for the book first emerged, it seemed remarkable, given the tremendous changes Indian cities were experiencing, that no similar volume had been published by an international press. The Indian case seems particularly important not only because of the sheer scale of urbanization there, but also because it is apparent that there are important insights to be gained from India’s distinct experience with the interaction between the global and the local in urban development. While the architecture of globalism – glass curtained high rises, monolithic shopping malls, condominiums surrounded by landscaped gardens – has certainly begun to transform cities, these physical changes are surrounded by intensely contested spaces and by equally contested political discourses. The daily experience of India’s cities – intense sensory experience fostered by the juxtaposition of activities in the street – reveals the limited purchase of ideals around a cleansed, orderly urbanism. Even in Gurgaon, which has become a symbol of India’s urban transformation, the landscaping ends at the gates of office building compounds, and the streets outside bustle with cycle rickshaws, vendors, and endless traffic back-ups. While much of the coverage of Indian cities in both the Indian and international media reflects an intense desire for a “global” transformation, on the ground urban redevelopment projects have been the subject of protest and political debate and conflict. This project therefore took as a point of departure an interest in the varied forms of contestation that were emerging and sought to bring together empirical investigations that focused on understanding how these contestations were shaping both the space and politics.

I also began this project with a sense that there was a great deal of new and original work to draw on in beginning to understand India’s urban politics and spatial change that had not been brought together before. Some of this research was being done by established scholars, but much more was
being done by junior scholars (including Jonathan Anjaria, Gautam Bhan, Lisa Björkman, Asher Ghertner, Ratoola Kundu, Neha Sami, Llerena Searle, Sanjeev Vidyarthi, and Liza Weinstein), many of whom have recently completed dissertations or are, at the time of this writing, still conducting their research and writing up their findings. Based in deep empirical investigation, their studies also draw on a rich theoretical literature on the Indian state, including the work of postcolonial scholars, as well as on an understanding of the changes in Indian society and politics that are emerging from increasing global trade and investment. The time seemed right to bring these scholars together and try to make an initial statement about what their collective work was saying about the state of India’s urban political economy. As this project moves toward completion, so too do other book projects that are making related statements. I hope that these works will be the beginning of a wave of research and writing on this critical topic.

I owe debts of gratitude to a great number of people, only some of whom I will be able to mention here. My initiation into the world of Indian urban studies began in earnest when I was co-coordinator of a theme year titled State, Space, and Citizenship: Indian Cities in the Global Era at the University of Michigan that was sponsored by the Trehan India Initiative at the university’s Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS). I am very grateful to Will Glover, who was director of CSAS at the time, for his intellectual contributions to that project, and also for his help with logistics and planning. I have learned a tremendous amount about Indian cities from Will as a colleague at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to Neha Sami, who co-coordinated the theme year with me while simultaneously working on her dissertation research. Neha shares equal credit for the theme year and was an absolute pleasure to work with. Thanks also to the staff of the CSAS, and particularly to David Merchant and Sreyashi Dey. Ravi Sundaram, who participated in the theme year as a visiting lecturer, was a great source of ideas and insight.

The funding for the theme year also supported a workshop that was intended to bring the contributors to this volume together to present their work, identify key themes and explore possibilities for pursuing a book project. The workshop was held in March of 2010 at the Center for Studies of the Social Sciences of Calcutta (CSSSC). I owe a significant debt of gratitude to the Center for its flawless execution of the workshop and to the faculty there for their participation. Thanks in particular to Surajit Mukhopadhyay for organizing the event, and to Keya Dasgupta and Sohel Firdos for participating in the workshop as discussants. Besides some of the authors in this volume there were several participants at the workshop who made significant intellectual contributions to the project, including Jonathan Anjaria, Solomon Benjamin, Gautam Bhan, Rupali Gupte, Ratoola Kundu, Prasad Shetty, and Ravi Sundaram. The workshop came during a period when I was a visiting
Fulbright scholar in Calcutta for four months in early 2010. I was based at
the CSSSC, and during that time I benefitted a great deal from discussions
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The people at Wiley have been an additional source of intellectual stimulation
and support. As editors of the Studies in Urban and Social Change series,
Jennifer Robinson and Neil Brenner helped immeasurably to bring the project
to fruition. The editorial board provided very helpful comments, which have
greatly strengthened the book. Jacqueline Scott has been patient and highly
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Finally, family provided the personal support that enabled me to complete
this project and that helped make my stay in India both professionally and
personally fulfilling. My children Arjun and Arushi made the time in Calcutta
a joy and helped me see India with wonder, through their eyes. Amita, Sanjay,
Akshay, Ananya, Nana, and Nanu made Calcutta home. Finally and most
importantly, I want to thank my wife Sudha. If it weren’t for her, none of this
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Gavin Shatkin
Ann Arbor
Introduction

Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local

Gavin Shatkin and Sanjeev Vidyarthi

India is experiencing a remarkable urban moment. At a historical juncture when the subversion of the Nehruvian project of state-sponsored modernism nears completion, the country faces dramatic changes with global economic integration and the emergence of new political coalitions around aspirations for an urban transformation. The period after the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 has seen the emergence of audacious schemes – plans for privately built new towns and special economic zones (SEZs), massive infrastructure projects, and the empowerment of corporate actors in urban governance – accompanied by drives to cleanse the streets of hawkers and to evict squatters on a very large scale. Yet such initiatives face daunting political obstacles in India, characterized as it is by a strong democratic framework in which the poor, strengthened by their numerical superiority and by a historical state rhetoric of grassroots empowerment, enjoy some success in contesting such initiatives and in defending their claims to urban space. The result is tension: tension between the egalitarian ethos inherited from traditions of socialism and Gandhian thinking and the hard driving utilitarianism of a globalizing business class; tension between the pluralist nature of Indian democracy and the allure of authoritarian models of urban governance; and tension between the modernist vision of a globally connected class and the daily incursions on the planned order of the city by the poor.

The collision of the seemingly unstoppable force of elite-driven visions of urban change and the seemingly immovable object of grassroots resistance plays out in numerous flare-ups and conflicts, the drift of which has yet to
make a decisive progress toward resolution. In West Bengal, the efforts of the ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) to expropriate agricultural land in Singur and Nandigram for an automobile factory and for a Special Economic Zone resulted in violent protests that eventually scuttled both projects (although the automobile factory eventually moved to another state) (Roy, 2009). In Mumbai, efforts to develop a major real estate mega-project in Dharavi on land currently occupied by a settlement of about half a million low- and moderate-income people and countless small enterprises have consistently faltered on the inability of the project backers to mobilize sufficient political and financial support to tip the balance toward implementation (Weinstein, 2009). In other instances the forces of globally oriented redevelopment have enjoyed greater success. In Delhi, for example, government and developers were quite successful in utilizing the Commonwealth Games, held in 2010, as a pretext for large-scale evictions and relocations and for the realization of major infrastructure and real estate projects. According to Bhan (2009) 45,000 homes were demolished from 2004 to 2007 in the run-up to the Games. The coexistence of progression and subversion of state and developer efforts to transform Indian cities is indicative of the indeterminate nature of change.

This book examines the changing dynamics of political power in Indian cities and their implications for the spatial and social development. In doing so, it addresses a relative lack of academic attention to the political economy of post-liberalization Indian cities (examples of some works that have drawn attention to themes of post-liberalization urban political change include Roy, 2003; Gooptu, 2007; Weinstein, 2008 and Sami, 2013). This lacuna is particularly surprising given that India’s urban population is projected to grow faster than that of any other country, more than doubling between 2010 and 2040 to reach 734 million (United Nations Population Division, 2007). This massive urbanization will almost certainly continue to be shaped profoundly by processes of integration into international networks of production, trade, and investment and by the impacts of the liberalization of city-building processes. Large cities will continue to be major sites of change – cities of 5 million inhabitants or more currently represent about a quarter of the country’s urban population, and their total population, combined, will soon exceed 100 million (ibid.).

By bringing together a set of studies based on the empirical investigation of urban political change in a number of cities, this volume contributes to the urgent task of formulating new frameworks for explicating the political economy of post-liberalization Indian cities. In doing so it seeks to move debates about India’s urban development beyond the polarization of two perspectives that are sometimes drawn in too sharp contrast. The first perspective focuses on the analytics of a convergence of India’s urban political economy and spatial change with models of political and spatial
change prevalent in other capitalist societies. Researchers working within such frameworks focus on the adoption of neoliberal models of governance advocated by corporate interests and imposed or propagated through international and bilateral aid organizations. Studies have examined efforts to reengineer urban governance so as to foster capital accumulation, most notably through the re-scaling of the state and empowerment of capital within frameworks of entrepreneurial governance (Banerjee-Guha, 2002; Goldman, 2011; Gooptu, 2011). The second perspective emphasizes the contextual factors that render the social and political dynamics of Indian cities distinctive. Most notable are scholars operating within the frameworks of postcolonial theory, who focus their attention on cultural resistance to externally imposed political and social projects. These scholars tend to view the agenda of liberalization as a successor to the colonial project of modernization and its postcolonial successor in nationalist modernism. They characterize the Indian state as shot through with the contradictions of the postcolonial condition, and therefore inherently limited in its ability to impose its desired social vision. Evidence for such an interpretation is sought in the chronic street-level subversion of the Indian state’s efforts to impose its visions of modernity on urban space, and in the prevalence of forces within the state that militate against any re-scaling of state power to empower municipal governments and the forces of capital (see for example Benjamin, 2008; Arabindoo, 2011; and Bandopadhyay, 2011). A notable recent example of such framings is Benjamin’s (2008) provocative argument that “occupancy urbanism” – the urbanism created by the capacity of the poor to barter votes for political protection from street-level politicians and bureaucrats for claims to urban space, and particularly for extra-legal claims to urban land – has largely thwarted state and corporate visions of change.

The approach taken in this book is to step back from the either/or framing of these issues and to revisit the questions that underlie both perspectives: What kind of urban politics is the post-liberalization period producing? How have actors who have sought to maximize opportunities for capital accumulation – real estate developers, corporate actors, consumer citizens, land brokers, and some actors in municipal, state, and national government – attempted to overcome the particular obstacles to urban redevelopment in the Indian urban context? What new models of urban politics, and what dynamics of spatial change, have resulted? By bringing together recent research that has focused on the changing roles of urban actors in political and spatial change, the book seeks to understand the distinct form that urban politics is taking in the interaction between the dynamics of postcolonial politics and the push toward economic growth and the commodification of urban space. The volume’s contributors approach these issues through the examination of different cities (Mumbai, Delhi, Jaipur, Mangalore, Bangalore) and of different facets
of urban governance and urban redevelopment. This examination is necessarily constrained, in its geographic and topical scope, by the limited number of contributions that can be made to fit into the volume. The shared focus of the studies on poorly understood questions about the shifting dynamics of power in Indian cities nonetheless provides useful insights toward rethinking our state of understanding these cities.

In this introduction we develop a framework for analyzing urban political change in India through a review of both India-specific and comparative literature on urban politics. We argue that analyses of Indian urban politics would benefit from the incorporation of recent theoretical work that has come to view the neoliberal project not as the top-down imposition of a coherent and homogenous ideology, but rather as a flexible and dynamic process, in which state actors at various scales apply market criteria to governance, in an effort to overcome context-specific obstacles to capital accumulation (Ong, 2007; Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, 2010a, 2010b). We argue that such a view of “neoliberalization” as a flexible and dynamic process helps to understand recent policy and planning experiments in India that have sought to overcome, or simply work around, the conditions of state incapacity to implement planning and regulation fostered by the postcolonial condition, to achieve goals of urban redevelopment and capital accumulation. This view helps to move beyond the assumption that “neoliberalism” is an inherently homogenizing force and to focus our attention on the distinct form that neoliberalizing processes might take in the Indian context and on the consequent specificity of the resulting politics and spatial forms.

Through a review of the studies in this volume and other recent literature on Indian cities, this introduction further argues that the process of neoliberalization of Indian urban politics has progressed, albeit tentatively and incompletely, through two channels. The first channel is that of national-level policy and planning initiatives. The national government’s post-liberalization urban policy agenda, we argue, has represented an experimental, iterative process that has sought, through trial and error, to encourage the re-scaling of institutional power through the empowerment of metro-level institutions; the empowerment of elite actors in metropolitan governance; and the commodification of urban space through the empowerment of state and corporate actors in their efforts to gain control of urban land. Successive initiatives, including the passing of the 74th Constitutional Amendment and the formulation of the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), together with its successor program, the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), have embodied reflexive efforts to draw a reform agenda designed to overcome the obstacles to market-driven redevelopment created by entrenched street-level politics.

This national state-driven project of urban reform has, however, experienced only sporadic and partial success and has left a continued state of institutional
Contesting the Indian City

fragility and instability at the municipal level. This state has frustrated the ambitions of corporations, consumer citizens, and others, who covet a vision of global urban transformation and the commodification of urban space. Hence we argue that these goals have progressed through a second channel – through a multitude of localized mutations in state–society relations, which have emerged as local actors have looked for opportunities in the fissures of power at the municipal level to gain pockets of urban political influence, and to reshape urban space and infrastructure. Such localized, grounded changes are perhaps the most pronounced and important finding of the studies in this volume. They have taken a number of forms, including the creation of project-focused coalitions aiming to achieve discrete redevelopment initiatives; the engagement of propertied actors in state-directed local collective action; the formation of public–private partnerships around urban governance and redevelopment and infrastructure projects; and the selective interpretation of certain aspects of urban political reform (such as reforms for political participation) in ways that favor the empowerment of the middle class and the elite. While provisional and incremental, these localized initiatives are nonetheless having a cumulative impact on urban space and political power. The studies in this volume provide tentative evidence that these grounded processes of political change – by facilitating the displacement of poor communities, the commodification of urban land, the increasing amount of urban spaces that are regulated by corporate interests, and the increasing scale of agencies of collective action of the wealthy – are bringing about a fundamental reallocation of access to space and power in Indian cities.

A further ambition of this volume, beyond developing frameworks for understanding urban change in contemporary India, is to explore the implications of India’s case for comparative studies of urban politics. Indeed India provides a stark contrast with the more thoroughly studied case of China, where scholars have focused on the capacity of the central state (and more specifically the Communist Party) to drive processes of spatial and political change in a much more effective effort to reinforce its political hegemony (Zhang and Ong, 2008; Hsing, 2010). The comparative aspect of this study will be dealt with at greater length in the conclusion. Suffice to say here that the case of India highlights to a greater extent the complex interplay between national state efforts to impose neoliberal governance models, local processes of recalibration of power around the emergence of new economies and the commodification of urban land, and the dynamics of local resistance. India’s case therefore advances our understanding of the dynamics of contestation that emerge as local agents – both those for and those against market-driven change – jockey for political influence at the local level. As a result, this case provides critical insight into questions that are central to debates about neoliberalization, particularly questions about the connection between processes of change in international and
national political ideology and about the translation of these ideals into the practice of politics at the local level.

Rethinking Understandings of Urban Politics in Post-Liberalization Indian Cities

Kushal Pal Singh (K. P. Singh), head of Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), India’s largest developer, tells journalists who interview him a rather fantastic story about the founding of the company’s landmark developments at Gurgaon, outside New Delhi (Bhandari, 2006). The story has Singh sitting under the shade of a tree, in May 1981, in the bucolic environs of pre-liberalization Gurgaon. A Jeep with an overheated engine stops, and, while the driver attends to the car, the passenger steps out for a drink of water at a nearby well. It is Rajiv Gandhi, son of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, himself destined to become prime minister three and a half years later, following his mother’s assassination. The two men begin talking, and soon a vision emerges of Gurgaon’s predestined transformation – of a new model of urban development that would lead India into a new era of economic growth and global relevance. Within 20 years the envisioned transformation was proceeding full steam, unleashed by economic reforms enacted during Gandhi’s seven years as prime minister; these included the liberalization of the property sector and marked the beginnings of India’s economic transformation. Strategically located just across the border from the National Capital Region, in the neighboring state of Haryana, Gurgaon emerged as one of the most important centers of trade and investment in the country. Singh, who had spent much of the 1960s and 1970s painstakingly accumulating more than a thousand hectares in hopes that deregulation of the property industry would unleash the market potential of this land, saw the settlement grow into a city of more than 2 million – and one that has one of India’s most impressive skylines. At DLF’s pinnacle, the wealth that Gurgaon generated propelled the company to third place on the list of India’s largest companies by market capitalization and made Singh the eighth wealthiest person in the world according to Forbes magazine (Forbes, 2008).

Some details of Singh’s story are likely apocryphal. What is notable, however, is the story’s interpretation that the vision of a transformed and globalized Gurgaon predated and anticipated the transformation of India’s economy and that Singh’s own vision of urban space had a direct impact on the direction of state power. This rendering of events highlights the fundamentally interdependent nature of the relationship between urbanization and state power. Cities are not simply acted upon and shaped by social and political processes that play out beyond their boundaries. They also shape those processes in their turn, through agencies that their own
growth engenders. In his early contribution to debates on urban entrepreneurialism, Harvey (1989: 5) highlighted this interdependence by insisting that cities must be conceived of as “spatially grounded social processes in which a wide range of different actors with quite different objectives and agendas interact through a particular configuration of spatial practices.” The logics created by liberalization – the commodification of land, the corporate imperative to create new spaces for new forms of production and exchange, the desire of an increasingly wealthy consumer class to experience new types of space – have fostered shifting “configurations of spatial practices,” which engender new forms of power and contestation across scale. Examples of the agency of spatial practices in reshaping social and political dynamics abound – from the impact of urban redevelopment coalitions on state and national-level economic development policy, to the influence of local public–private partnerships (most notably the Bangalore Agenda Task Force and affiliated institutions) on national urban governance initiatives, and to the role of public interest litigation around slum developments in Delhi in changing national law toward the poor (Ghertner, 2011b; Sami, 2013; Sami, this volume).

This point of theory leads to a point of research methodology. Urban political change cannot be understood through an examination of political ideologies or institutional arrangements alone. Researchers must also recognize the relationship between urban spatial relations and the formation of these ideologies and relations of power. As we will argue later, the dearth of explorations of the emerging agency of actors who have coalesced around new economic activities and land markets marks a significant gap in the study of contemporary urban politics in India. The review that follows will summarize the existing debates on urban politics in the context of liberalization-induced sociospatial and political change. It will highlight the need to develop new perspectives on state–society relations in Indian cities that better incorporate an understanding of the ways in which changes in the economy, in local politics, and in urban space lead to changes in state–society relations. The development of such perspectives involves a deeper interrogation about the roles of emergent political actors like real estate developers, about the restructuring of urban political power through political reform, and about the emergence of new forms of collective action around urban space.

A review of the recent history of post-liberalization urban development and urban planning and policy initiatives helps place the interrelationship between spatial and political change in context. A fundamental dynamic at the heart of the web of socioeconomic, political, and spatial transformations that occurred during this period has been the explosion of investment in new industrial and urban space. In 1991, faced with a balance of payments crisis, the Indian government undertook a significant deregulation
of the economy. The process involved reforms to the tax code, the lowering of tariff barriers, and the dismantling of regulatory restrictions on foreign trade and investment. India has seen steady and dramatic increases in international trade and investment ever since. Exports increased from $17.5 billion in 1991/2 to $157.7 billion in 2009/10, while imports increased from $19.4 billion to $303.7 billion (Government of India, 2011). Annual foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into India have risen more than 200 times, from $165 million in the 1991/2 fiscal year to $37 billion in 2009/10 (Government of India, 2005, 2011). FDI in real estate and construction rose more rapidly still, from an amount so negligible that until 2005/6 it was not even recorded as a discrete sector (and government figures report a mere $38 million in investment for that initial year) to $2.84 billion in 2009/10, when it was the second largest source of investment. The latter figure represents more than three times the value of exports in computer hardware and software, indicating the degree to which real estate has become a central focus of foreign investment.

This surge in money has had a transformative impact on both spatial and political change, as politicians and real estate investors, mesmerized by projections of continued growth, have maneuvered to capitalize on the development opportunities this process presented. As detailed by Searle’s contribution to this volume, reforms in the real estate sector have encouraged and enabled developers to play a central role in urban spatial development: foreign direct investment in townships was legalized in 2002; venture capital fund investment in real estate was allowed in 2004; and new incentives were provided for the development of Special Economic Zones in 2005. Developers have sought to build land banks in major Indian metropolitan areas, hoping that these holdings would put them in a position to deliver the kinds of large-scale planned developments and industrial complexes that cities are anticipated to require in order to respond to the projected demand for consumer housing and for office and commercial space. DLF, the country’s largest developer, established a model for such efforts in its development of a major new office, retail and industrial center in Gurgaon (Karmail, 2006). By the mid-2000s many large developers that had remained confined to specific cities went national, and DLF, Unitech, Sahara Group and Emaar MGF have competed to expand land banks across many cities. For a period in the mid-2000s, as the real estate sector was growing at more than 20 percent per year, Indian developers experienced massive increases in valuation – these valuations being driven largely by landholdings (Gupta, 2006). This thrust toward the commodification of urban space has in turn rendered land – including both “slum” areas and land on the periphery of cities – the subject of a great deal of contestation and political maneuvering, as politicians, bureaucrats, corporate interests, land mafias, and in
some cases farmers and community actors have jockeyed to seize control of the value created in this process.

The surge of money has also created political imperatives, which have been signaled through the emergence of the trope of infrastructure deficiency as a central feature of Indian politics. A significant expression of this trope is a recent report by the multinational consulting firm McKinsey & Company (2010), which argues that, in order to realize the potential for a fivefold increase in GDP (gross domestic product) between 2010 and 2030, India must invest $1.2 trillion in infrastructure during this period and the real estate sector must respond by building a “new Chicago” every year to meet the demand for some 800 million square meters of commercial and residential space. At the latter date, if projections of growth hold true, the Indian “middle class” will expand from 22 million households to 91 million – an explosion in the market for commodity housing and commercial space. And of course cities will be central to this process, accounting for close to 70 percent of Indian GDP by the 2030 target date.

The economic transformations of the liberalization era and the opportunities for corporate profit and economic growth that they created have fostered a tremendous urge for reform, which has been loudly articulated by business and political leaders (Nilekani, 2009). Since the 1990s successive national governments have sought to push through the vision of urban-centered accumulation embodied in the liberalization reforms of 1991 and modeled through the examples of “successful” urban transformations in Shanghai, Singapore, and elsewhere (Nair, 2000). The reform agenda has permeated politics at the national level and has continued with changes in the political party in power. While the initial wave of liberalization was undertaken during Congress Party rule, the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power from 1998 to 2000, continued these reforms and initiated a wave of privatization of public enterprises. Chatterjee’s chapter in this volume demonstrates how, in the case of the state of Gujarat, the BJP’s agenda of economic growth through liberalization has been married to an aggressive agenda of Hindu pride – a twist on the liberalization process that, she argues, contributed to the horrific communal riots that seized Ahmedabad in 2002. Indeed the state-level adoption of liberalization reforms has led to curious politics in other cases. Under the CPI-M, the state government of West Bengal paradoxically undertook aggressive measures to create new technology hubs and to seize agricultural land for corporate investment, rationalizing these measures as a means to economic prosperity and mass employment (Roy, 2003). These efforts led to a backlash centered in the CPI-M’s base constituency, the urban and the rural poor, and to the party being voted out in 2011, after more than three decades of leading the government.
A substantive focus of the project of urban growth undertaken through national government reform has been an effort to empower city-scale government and to render it more accountable and accessible both to capital and to (particularly property-owning) citizens, so that it can act more effectively in driving development forward. The post-independence constitution enacted in 1950 vested sovereign powers in national and state-level governments and left the powers of local governments undefined. Scholars have attributed this to the framers’ concerns that local politics could be a seedbed for communalism and corruption. The governance framework that emerged under this framework will be examined in more detail in the chapter by Weinstein, Sami and Shatkin in this volume. Suffice to say here that power has for the most part remained vested in state-level government and in state-appointed municipal commissioners who are Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, and municipal governments have remained relatively powerless. This framework has fed critiques of many business and political leaders to the effect that stronger municipal government is needed to achieve infrastructure and urban development goals, since state governments are too beholden to rural constituents and do not have sufficient incentive to pursue a strong urban development agenda (Nilekani, 2009). Critics further argue that the weakness of urban governance and the often indifferent and bureaucratic mode of city administration that has prevailed in state governments have enabled the proliferation of informal occupations of land by the poor – and also by the wealthy, although this is less frequently acknowledged. Indeed critics have noted the tendency of state actors themselves to engage in illegal occupations of land (Ghertner, 2011b).

Many of the reforms of the post-liberalization era have consequently focused on empowering city-level government to wrest control of land from the poor and their allies among street- and ward-level politicians and bureaucrats and to employ it in infrastructure development and economic development initiatives. One of the most significant reforms is the 74th Constitutional Amendment, passed in 1992, which for the first time defines urban local bodies, devolves to them significant powers, responsibilities, and sources of revenue, and creates a democratic and de-centralized governance framework in which they should operate (Weinstein, 2009). While critics argue that the 74th Amendment remains largely unimplemented due to the lack of a clear prescription for the process through which it should be realized and the lack of penalties for non-compliance by state governments, it nonetheless gives constitutional status to urban local bodies for the first time, thus providing an institutional and legal basis for them to play a strengthened role (Dupont, 2007). Another major reform effort was the national Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), aspects of which were notably modeled after experiments with public–private partnerships in
governance in Bangalore. Indeed, Nandan Nilekani, an information technology entrepreneur who was CEO of the Indian information technology company Infosys, played a formative role in developing program guidelines for the JNNURM on the basis of his central role in urban governance reforms in Bangalore (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011). Initiated in 2005, the JNNURM injected large amounts of infrastructure and local government capacity building funds into Indian cities (Mahadevia, 2011). As importantly, it imposed a number of conditions on states receiving grants that were focused on enabling urban redevelopment, including the modernization of accounting systems, improvements in property tax collection efficiency, a movement toward full cost recovery in infrastructure and service delivery, a more effective implementation of the 74th Amendment, and the repeal of the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act, a 1976 act that had placed ceilings on private land ownership and had granted states the authority to acquire open land in excess (Mahadevia, 2006). The JNNURM was clearly intended not only to improve urban infrastructure, but also to overcome legal and institutional barriers to development and to incentivize local political actors to pursue large urban development projects.

As is detailed in the studies of this volume (see for example the chapter by Weinstein, Sami, and Shatkin) and in research reported elsewhere, these reforms have fallen short of full implementation and have only partially realized their objectives, in large measure due to state politicians’ success in retaining their own privileges and powers by dragging their feet in the implementation of reforms and by maintaining control over funding. Yet these national initiatives have coincided with numerous state and local governance initiatives – some of them examined here in the chapters by Ghertner, Sami, and Searle – that have sought other means to empower municipal government and to assert an agenda of economic development. As will be detailed later in this chapter, these initiatives have created public–private partnerships in urban governance, have fostered mechanisms for the increased political participation of elite groups, and have stimulated private real estate investment in urban megaprojects.

The preceding review paints a broad picture of change in contemporary urban politics – change bred of shifting economic circumstances, new development pressures, and governance reform. These new conditions have led to a surge in the scholarship concerned with post-liberalization urban change. Yet, as alluded to at the beginning of this section, research has only begun to understand the ways in which changes in urban spatial relations are shifting the contours of political power – which leads to the empowerment of some actors and the disempowerment of others. A contrast with the much more thoroughly studied case of China is instructive. The past few years have seen the publication of dozens of books coming from a variety of disciplines (sociology, anthropology, geography, urban planning, and others) examining
the political economy of land development (e.g. Lin, 2010; Hsing, 2010); urban and regional restructuring (e.g. Ma and Wu, 2005; McGee et al., 2007); emergent patterns of urban poverty and social inequality (e.g. Wu et al., 2010; Zhang, 2001); and global influences in architecture and urban planning (e.g. Ren, 2011). In contrast, in the Indian case, Annapurna Shaw could credibly claim, in the introduction to a volume edited by her in 2007 and titled Indian Cities in Transition, to have produced the first multidisciplinary volume examining the dynamics of change in Indian cities in thirty years. There are of course numerous excellent volumes that have explored urban sociological, political, economic and anthropological issues, although these have generally not been framed around the dynamics of liberalization (see for example Hansen, 2001; De Neve and Donner, 2006; Nair, 2007; Ruet and Lamerewal, 2009). Some recent contributions begin to fill this gap. The volume Urbanizing Citizenship, edited by Desai and Sanyal (2012) analyzes contemporary urban change through the lens of citizenship, seeking to understand the changing experience of the city and changing access to the “right to the city” in a post-liberalization context. Anjaria and McFarlane’s volume Urban Navigations also explores the dynamics of post-liberalization urban change, deploying a “street-level emphasis on urban space-making” to highlight the complexity and contingency of post-liberalization spatial change (2011: 2). The present book shares with both of these volumes an interest in developing the understanding of urban change through an assessment of recent research. What the current volume hopes to add to these interventions is an explicit focus on shifting structures of power within frameworks of governance in Indian cities that are emerging together with efforts at reform and sociospatial change.

Why has the relationship between urban sociospatial change and changing structures of power in urban governance received relatively scant attention? The factors are numerous and complex, but we argue that the prevalence of postcolonial frameworks in urban studies is a significant factor, in that the focus of these frameworks on historically rooted social and cultural dynamics has drawn attention away from the analysis of contemporary drivers of urbanization. Rooted in a critique of teleology in social science theorizing, postcolonial theorists have sought to ‘provincialize’ dominant strands of urban theory, which have tended to assume a necessary end state of modernization based on models of the West, and to instead root theories in the Indian experience (Chakrabarty, 2002). They have done so by focusing attention on the ideological and political underpinnings of the construction of knowledge about India by the colonial and postcolonial elites, and by seeking to redress distortions in such constructions by examining the actions and narratives of the subaltern in an effort to reconstruct lost histories as articulated by those who have historically lacked power and voice. Through these modes of analysis, subaltern studies scholars have focused on the distinct subjectivities
that emerged in colonial and postcolonial situations and on the nature of state–society relations and identity politics in these contexts.

Partha Chatterjee’s (1993, 2004) analyses of the contradictions that emerged in the anti-colonialist national identity and of their implications for politics today have been particularly influential in framing studies of urban politics. From early on, Chatterjee (1993) argues, the formation of a nationalist identity in opposition to British colonial rule in India was founded on a distinction between an external domain, of the state and economy, which was dominated by the colonizers, and a “domain of sovereignty,” which consisted of an inner, spiritual world of culture and was rooted in caste, community, religion, and family. In the period after India’s independence in 1947, the state adopted a stridently modernist agenda of economic and political reform in its pursuit of political hegemony: the development of a secular political system based on civil society and the use of master planning to achieve goals of economic growth and social integration. Yet this modernist agenda coexisted and was in tension with identities springing from the “inner domain” – which continued to be perceived by a large part of the population as the essence of national identity, but which contradicted the modernist agenda in many ways. The resulting disjuncture between state narratives and practices and what Kaviraj (quoted in Harriss and Fuller, 2001: 8) refers to as the “vernacular everyday discourse” of a mass of the population has led to the gradual erosion of state legitimacy and to a chronic subversion of its modernist planning efforts. The result is that such efforts are regularly “reinterpreted beyond recognition” at the grassroots (Harriss and Fuller, 2001). In the urban context this has been manifest in the massive appropriation of urban public space for a variety of structures (vendor stalls, houses, temples) and activities (religious worship, manufacturing, bathing, defecating) deemed “private” in modernist discourse. Hence India’s deviation from the West in social and political development and in its urban form is not a manifestation of a pre-modern state that is ripe for transformation. Rather contemporary identities, social norms, and spatial practices have been precisely formed through India’s interaction with modernity and are rooted in a critique of the same.

Chatterjee’s (2004) recent work has focused on the idea of “political society,” which he contrasts with the popular notion of a civil society. While the concept of civil society refers to collectivities of right-bearing citizens, the concept of political society refers to collectivities from that substantial majority of the population of India which – by virtue of its poverty and the limited reach of state planning and formal economy – is compelled to live, work, and access services in contravention of the law. While bereft of basic citizenship rights, poor voters derive some political clout from their sheer number. Their influence creates a gray area, where discourses of modernization and citizenship have little purchase and people make political claims for access to
land, water, electricity, and other necessities on the strength of identity-based mobilization and political bartering. Thus the “messy business of striking deals between municipal authorities, the police, property developers, criminal gangs, slum dwellers, and pavement hawkers” becomes a predominant force in shaping politics and space in the face of developmental state planning and middle-class civil society (ibid., 142).

Chatterjee’s formulations have been the subject of extensive debate; scholars have particularly argued that his postulation of a “political society” is overly optimistic in its assessment of the agency of the poor. Baviskar and Sundar (2008: 89), for example, have turned Chatterjee’s argument on its head by arguing that the wealthy are increasingly the ones who are able to secure state protection for illegal claims to land and other resources, while the poor are constrained to relatively weak rights-base claims:

Chatterjee inverts what is actually the case: generally, it is members of the so-called civil society who break laws with impunity and who demand that the rules be waived for them, whereas members of political society strive to become legal, to gain recognition and entitlements from the state. The state’s differential treatment of these two classes is exemplified in the case of encroachments and irregular land use in Delhi. While the law was enforced to demolish the settlements of working class squatters, penalizing people who were victims of the state’s failure to build low-cost housing, it was amended to “regularize” the illegal construction and violation of zoning codes by well-to-do traders and homeowners.

Similarly, in the introduction to a recent volume on citizenship in Indian cities, Holston (2012) characterizes the concept of political society as being based less on empirical reality than on “folk categories” and calls for a reassertion of the concept of citizenship in Indian urban studies.

While the debate over the concept of political society continues to evolve in fruitful directions, the central thesis that the post-liberalization project of urban change has been fundamentally undermined by the micropolitics of resistance to its modernist underpinnings has profoundly impacted scholarship on the topic. Benjamin’s (2008) thesis of “occupancy urbanism” is one of the more influential manifestations of this argument. Other studies have examined the role of local bureaucrats in mediating between the interests of municipal officials and street vendors in the modernization drive (i.e. Anjaria, 2006); the rise of middle-class collective action and vigilantism in the face of state failures to modernize cities and “cleanse” them of appropriations of space by the poor (i.e. Baviskar, 2003); and the subversion of master-planned urban spaces (such as the planned city of Chandigarh, or neighborhoods planned on the basis of Clarence Perry’s Neighborhood Unit Concept) through reinterpretation and multiple acts
of appropriation by the urban poor (i.e. Nangia, 2008; Vidyarthi, 2008). There has also been a significant amount of work that traces contemporary visions of urban change to the modernist visions of the colonial era, often with the argument that these contemporary visions will share a similar fate (i.e. Hosagrahar, 2005; McFarlane, 2008; Arabindoo, 2011).

We argue that, although postcolonial perspectives have added a great deal to our understanding of Indian urban politics, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the interaction between sociospatial change brought about by the commodification of urban land, changing structures of political power, and social and cultural change at the grassroots. Such an understanding would help overcome the somewhat static interpretation of “the state” that is evident in some postcolonial research. The focus of urban research within the postcolonial tradition has largely remained upwards, on the nation state and its modernist ideology, and downwards, on grassroots contestation. Yet it is at the broader municipal and regional scales that we are seeing the coalescence of economic and political interests, and efforts to reengineer urban politics. Indeed the process of privatization of infrastructure and urban development, coupled with reforms in urban governance, represents an apparent effort by the national state to step back from its historic role as social engineer and primary arbiter and enforcer of modernity. Under the regime of de-centralization and privatization outlined in the JNNURM and other reforms, it is not the national state, but rather newly empowered municipal governments, private developers, and civil society groups of the elite that are tasked with realizing urban spatial change. By transforming urban land and real estate in Indian cities into a global commodity, the reforms of the last 20 years have also sown the seeds of countless engagements in collective action on the part of a wide range of actors who have access to this commodity or are in a position to act as brokers in its exchange. These include not only real estate developers and large landowners, but also middle-class families, corporations, farmers, and state actors at state, city, and neighborhood scales. With new economic activity and the loosening of restrictions on development, we are also seeing the emergence of new forms of development that are less regulated by the state: edge cities, special economic zones (SEZs), and new town developments. All of these represent new forms of master-planned urban space, conceived outside the state.

Hence post-liberalization urban reforms arguably represent an effort by the national state to do an end run around the obstacles to direct state engagement in spatial change by fostering an explosion of new agencies in urban development that are not hamstrung by the postcolonial state’s historical legacy of failed social engineering. Yet important dynamics of the urban politics that have ensued from this development remain unexplored. There is almost no literature, for example, on the real estate industry – the actors who shape it, the models of urban development they adopt, and their influence on
urban policy. Likewise, very little has been written about changing practices of state land acquisition and development, new models of zoning and land management, and the deployment of technologies of land management like SEZs (exceptions include Roy, 2003 and Jenkins, 2011). There has also been relatively little research on the impact of the JNNURM and of the 74th Amendment on political power; the existing studies tend to focus on the provisions for popular participation rather than on their impact on structural political change (see for example Coelho, Kamath, and Vijaybaskar, 2011). As Ghertner (2011a: 505) has argued, while research has focused on the capacity of ties between the poor and the local state to thwart the process of development of a “bourgeoisie city,” there has been very little effort to explore how the structural political changes that are being deployed have facilitated redevelopment and “to explain how new forms of urban governance have facilitated this process, and how new visions of urban space are practically imposed on those lower levels of the state that have for so long reinterpreted state plans to meet the demands of the poor.”

Such questions of city and regional scale political economy are, of course, central to the international comparative literature on neoliberalization and urban governance. This literature has focused on the particular problems of scale that the pursuit of economic growth through capital accumulation has posed for governments. Research has focused on the growing recognition by state actors of the critical role of cities and urban regions as centers of capital accumulation, which has led to cities and regions emerging as “geographical targets for a variety of far-reaching institutional changes and policy-realignments designed to enhance local economic growth capacities” (Brenner, 2004: 3). Scholars have sought to develop comparative perspectives on the emergence of a “new urban politics” – a politics of urban entrepreneurialism in which private sector and business interests play an increasing role in urban politics and policy, and in which city governments shift from a managerial focus in providing public services to one of “courting the private sector and cultivating economic enterprise across the urban landscape” (Macleod and Jones, 2011: 2444). In turn, this shift toward entrepreneurialism at the urban and regional level has implications for governance across scales, as state capacities are transferred “upwards, downwards, and sideways” to empower a variety of actors in government and civil society to play a role in fostering economic competitiveness (Jessop, 2002: 454). Attention has focused, for example, on the role of national-level governments in setting the macroeconomic framework for growth, on city and regional governments in developing infrastructure and in creating planning and policy frameworks for city competitiveness, and on the transfer of the provision of collective consumption goods from the state to community-level institutions through the imposition of marketized community-based delivery mechanisms.