

Old City, New City: Locating the Past in Urban India

An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference
September 25-26, 2009
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

As part of the first Trehan India Initiative Theme Year at the University of Michigan, a two-panel interdisciplinary graduate student conference will be held September 25-26, 2009. This Theme Year, entitled “State, Space and Citizenship: Indian Cities in the Global Era,” takes urbanization to be one of the defining elements of change in contemporary India.

Offering a ‘historical turn’ to the issues raised by the Theme Year, this interdisciplinary graduate student conference centers on the question of how the past is regularly—or irregularly—bounded, contested and re-framed in the dynamic discourses of urban planning, development and citizenship in India. What are the various avatars assumed by ‘the past’ in the context of contemporary urbanization (e.g. tradition, heritage, the authentic indigenous, nostalgia, official histories, subaltern interpretations)? What is the role of the past in urban planning and development agendas, claims to citizenship and space, and the changing discourses of the state? How is the past encountered, designed, or interpreted as material, discursive, and/or symbolic?

Taking these questions as a point of entry, paper proposals will ideally engage ways in which urban centers in India have been witness to increased negotiations between how things used to be and how things ought to be. These contestations occur between—and within—citizen groups, government departments, corporations, NGOs, urban planners and other stakeholders. The re-fashioning of mill compounds in Bombay, the redevelopment of the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi, and the bulldozing of half-century-old settlements (such as Sansi and Vaghari) in Ahmedabad all point to what is an ongoing entanglement between the embodied pasts and imagined futures of these urban spaces and their citizens. Claims are made and interests are staked along narratives of traditions and development, rights and duties, the present and the possible.

Areas of focus for paper proposals may include:

Public Space: How have urban spaces understood or used as ‘public’ (e.g. neighborhood parks, local bazaars, environmental zones) been subject to contestations by citizen groups, government agencies, corporate stakeholders? What are the implications of posing an abstract separation of people and spaces in planning and development discourses on public space?

Cultural Consumption and Display: How might the dynamics of urban display practices and spaces (e.g. museums, monuments, markets, street theatre and festivals) offer new perspectives on contemporary urbanization? How is the material display of the past connected to present claims and future stakes?

Urban Publics: How are urban publics being re-framed in specific ways by contemporary urbanization? How are these publics conceived in both different and related ways than the past? What are the shifts in discourses of government (central and/or non-central) in relation to the public as citizens, consumers, and clients?

We invite abstracts from graduate students in a range of disciplines including, but not limited to architecture, urban planning, art history, comparative literature, history, anthropology, sociology,

geography, political science, economics, public health, public policy, business, and law. Research may focus on any region of India and presenters are encouraged to submit work using traditional and/or innovative research methods including archival research, spatial analysis, surveys and oral histories, or interpretive methods.

The conference will consist of two panels on Friday, September 25th and a round-table discussion with all the participants on Saturday, September 26th. Paper presentations will be limited to 20 minutes. Final decisions on the titles for each panel will be determined on the basis of papers selected for presentation. We encourage the use of visual aids.

Limited travel awards will be available to graduate students whose papers have been selected for presentation.

Please submit a 500-word Abstract along with 100-word Biographical Statement/s by **April 13, 2009** to: trehanconference@umich.edu. Biographical Statement/s should be followed by the Abstract—formatted in the following order: **Title of Paper, Name of the Presenter/s, Academic/other Affiliation, 500-word Abstract, Keywords.**

Refer questions or concerns regarding the conference to: trehanconference@umich.edu. For additional information on the Trehan India Initiative Theme Year, please visit: <http://www.umtrehaninitiative.net>