

Forum for Urban Studies in South Asia

The first reading group meeting of the Forum was held in Thomson 404 at 3:30pm.

As an introduction to the session the following questions were discussed :

- a. What is a 'city'? : The answer to this apparently simple question, on reflection, turned out to be not so easy. Is a city defined by its size or population, and if so, what statistics make a human agglomeration a 'city'? Cities in South Asia, for example, are defined very differently than those in North America. It would seem then, that one major factor while considering a city is its location within a state, and it is the state that conjures up definitions of what a city is, and even what permissible limits a city may be within. This linkage of state power and urban definition is an interesting one to follow.
- b. How is space produced within a city, and what is the difference between *space* and *place*? : Once again, it would appear that 'space' and 'place' are concepts that are at the same time interchangeable, and yet very rigid in their disciplinary definitions. Do urban theorists and planners define and chalk out 'spaces', while it is people that make 'places' as functions of memory and association?
- c. Sunil Khilnani stresses that the European found South Asian cities to be in stark contrast to their native cities composed of plazas, squares, axes and other formal components of urban planning. Does this mean that South Asian cities are/were unplanned? Is planning a function of a strong state? What would be an equivalent vocabulary for South Asian city planning, at what scale and what would be the sources of research?
- d. Cultural fusion : Does the colonial city in Asia represent an imperial venture, indigeneous planning, or a cultural composite? Once again Sunil Khilnani alludes to this in his examples of New Delhi and Calcutta. The group also discussed extensively the history and study of Bombay, and its emerging social and class structures as reflected in urban form. Comparison and contrast with urban centers in North America, particularly in the Northwest, were made.