Crowds, congestion, conviviality: the enduring life of the old city

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CHAPTER 11

Crowds, Congestion, Conviviality: The Enduring Life of the Old City

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When I began fieldwork in Old Delhi, I was frequently disoriented. A number of visitor's guides to the area had been published, describing, for example, the Meena Bazaar. They detailed historical monuments in the vicinity, but were unhelpful in explaining much else. Though this part of Delhi was many years old, its present uses differed markedly from those at its genesis. The Meena Bazaar's seventeenth-century material surroundings, for example, were obscured by centuries of demolition and improvisation.

Moreover, it was not the kind of place that easily lent itself to mapping. Like many Delhi residents, I frequently consulted a map book produced by the Eicher company, which broke down the city into manageable parts. But in its pages covering the old city, the gaze from above – the promise of clean lines and ordered spaces – was betrayed by the street, where everything blurred. Still I didn't lose hope: guidebooks and maps are, after all, for tourists and residents.

Surely, trained in anthropology and armed with an inventory of native culture, I could do better. Yet here I confronted another hurdle. Anthropologists of India, whether based in rural villages or urban settings, tend to focus on a particular community. But Delhi's old city, exemplified by a space like the Meena Bazaar, was not defined by a caste, class or religious group. It was clearly a plural space, lacking a distilled set of rituals, or an all-encompassing culture.

I started trying to make sense of the area, as proper scholars do, by delineating the bazaar's physical boundaries and official status. On its eastern end, bordering a major road, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Marg, street hawkers sold counterfeit Dolce and

A Companion to the Anthropology of India, edited by Isabelle Clark-Decès

Gabbana belts and bright girls' frocks. On its western end, adjacent to the steps of a major mosque, the Jama Masjid, other peddlers proffered Urdu pamphlets and towels. One obvious fact quickly presented itself: the bazaar's limits were not conclusively bracketed. Hawkers spilled onto the Jama Masjid's steps, even congregating at its entrance. At the other end, petty entrepreneurs unofficially elongated the market, curling out onto the main road. In between, running north and south, there were stalls selling DVDs, used auto parts and blankets.

The lack of definition as to the bazaar's physical limits extended to the legal status of those making a living there. Meena Bazaar acquired its name from some low-slung brick stalls, east of the Jama Masjid, where tenants had official leases. Most of the area's commerce, however, occurred through the illicit subdivision of these stalls, as well as the sidewalk's occupation by *patri-walon*, or pavement hawkers. These people, invariably men, cemented their claim over the Meena Bazaar through tacit agreements with officials and influential locals. Some of these entrepreneurs possessed legal documentation, while others did not. When asked by the police or ethnographers in the area, hawkers dutifully presented various *parchis*, or official slips. It was just that this paperwork was often counterfeit.

It would have been feasible, still, to mentally domesticate the Meena Bazaar if it served one kind of function: as a place of dubious or more respectable kinds of commerce. But the longer I was there, the clearer it became that the area was also a testing ground for leisure and politics. On its eastern end, adjacent to sellers of forest medicine and aphrodisiacs (*jari-booti*, *sande ka tel*), was a wrestling ground. Every Sunday, from competing *akharas* or wrestling gymnasiums in the area, young men locked arms and sought to tumble one another to the ground, before a large crowd.

Nearby, also on the weekend, *kabooter-wallahs*, or pigeon-fanciers, gathered. They inspected caged birds and traded advice and insults with neighbors whose *kabooters* they raced on nearby rooftops. Teenagers often played cricket on one side, with improvised wickets and bats. The ball occasionally landed in the middle of the hawkers and crowds. Next to them, masseurs (*malish-wallahs*) clustered on a dusty expanse, vigorously rubbing half-naked men splayed on jute mats.

In the middle of the bazaar was a grassy expanse framing the tomb of a nationalist leader, Maulana Azad. On a regular basis, political leaders utilized his grave as a place to gather the party faithful, and air official grievances and accomplishments. These events were supplemented by large demonstrations that occurred against the backdrop of the mosque. Led or sanctioned by the leader of the Jama Masjid, the Shahi Imam, these protests sometimes included burning effigies, and were followed by a procession through neighboring areas. These political spectacles could articulate local complaints about the Delhi Police's treatment of Muslims, or speak to global events, such as Israel's occupation of Palestine.

I could at this point have concluded that the Meena Bazaar was a place defined by the Muslim community. There was certainly demographic and material evidence to support this hypothesis. Bordering the Meena Bazaar on its southern periphery were dense alleyways and cramped buildings, winding unpredictably and ending abruptly. These residential neighborhoods, termed *mohallas*, were indeed predominantly Muslim. In the immediate vicinity of the bazaar were a number of *dargahs*, or tombs of Sufi saints. Bordering the Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Marg, for example, adjacent to dozens of stalls selling coats and birds, was the Dargah Kalimullah, a popular Old Delhi shrine.

Yet these shrines were not simply patronized by Muslims. Hindus, Jains and Sikhs were known to flock to them, praying to the interred saints for a child, relief from black magic, or simply a job. At night within the Meena Bazaar, after the hawkers and stall owners left, hundreds of casual laborers rested on the open ground. Mostly Hindu, these migrant workers were among the tens of thousands who worked nearby in Old Delhi's wholesale bazaars. The Meena Bazaar was also a place for members of different communities to wander and rest during the day. Proletarian Hindus, from far-off villages and towns, were to be found strolling amidst the bazaar's hawkers, alongside families from Delhi's other Muslim-dominated areas, such as Seelampur and Jamia Nagar.

How, then, was I to make sense of the Meena Bazaar, and by extension, Old Delhi? The official definitions and academic theories one would ordinarily use to decipher this kind of urban sociality seemed, at first glance, inadequate. Repeatedly, I discovered that Delhi's old city contained activity with imprecise boundaries and little official sanction. Pavement to be used for walking was used for leisure and commerce; hawkers proliferated despite court rulings and police orders. Moreover, people used Old Delhi for all kinds of activities: for political rabble-rousing and their weekly sport, to collectively articulate their anger as well as to browse for children's clothing. A park, bazaar, or mosque's function often gave way to varied, unpredictable uses. And finally, there was no sociological community or singular culture that defined this space. The area's makeup defied historical continuity or neatly bounded identities. Muslims tracing their ancestry to the time of Old Delhi's precolonial rulers, the Mughals, lived amidst Hindu migrant laborers, who could remain in India's capital for several months or longer. Punjabi refugee traders who arrived in Delhi in the 1940s shared bazaars with Muslim merchants from Uttar Pradesh, who had settled in the old city in the 1980s.

Part of the answer to the anthropological riddle that was Old Delhi lay in undoing my assumptions about how "Indian culture" or the "Indian city" worked. My fieldwork began as a study of male migrant workers working in the old city's wholesale bazaars and day-labor sites. But I found it difficult to restrain my fieldwork just to these laborers. Their lives – what films they watched, whom they took loans from, how they worked – were deeply intertwined with others, such as traders, brokers, and policemen. I followed the connections between these people, who were both radically different from, and also dearly dependent on, one another. In this way, I came to understand Delhi's old city, within the larger megalopolis, as embodying a unique demographic and cultural space. The old city was the haunt for the vernacular, unskilled urban underclass; it was also the repository for "authentic" food and popular culture.

Later, learning about similar precolonial urban formations in India – in places as varied as Bhopal, Ahmedabad and Lucknow – I was struck at their similarity to Old Delhi. In particular, three kinds of iconic spaces found in Old Delhi were also manifest elsewhere: the street, the bazaar, and the wrestling akhara. They provide useful anchor points for this chapter, which argues for the resonance of the old city in India's urban past and future. I will delve into my own ethnographic research on these sites later, drawing on related anthropological studies elsewhere. Beforehand, I will discuss the historical evolution of Old Delhi, and more broadly, the Indian old city.

The Historical Emergence of the Old City

In many ways, the absence of a conceptual vocabulary useful for deciphering Delhi's old city was not surprising. When the British arrived in earnest in Delhi during the eighteenth century, this area was not even assigned to the past. It was simply Shahjahanabad, after Shah Jahan, who built a new capital for his Mughal empire in the seventeenth century. Like dense medieval cities elsewhere, from Paris to Damascus, this was a walled city, fortified against regional competitors. The British, like colonizers elsewhere, at first fell for the oriental splendor of the natives. Delhi was assigned a charm and gravitas similar to courtly cities such as Lucknow (Gupta 1981; Oldenburg 2001).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the British Empire had consolidated its rule over India's many kingdoms and principalities. The Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, like his predecessors, occupied the Lal Qila, or Red Fort, adjacent to the Meena Bazaar. But by the mid-1800s, he was merely one of innumerable native figureheads, beholden to British interests. Colonial administrators of this era were unlike the early profiteers of the East India Company, who had donned native costume and mingled with locals. This self-consciously modern ruling class was highly influenced by nineteenth-century European thinking on race, hygiene and governance.

The influence on Indian city-space was crystallized after a native rebellion against British rule in 1857. This was ruthlessly put down via a shock and awe campaign, especially in north Indian cities. Delhi's walls were punctured and entire neighborhoods were demolished, before the eviction of purportedly subversive natives (Gupta 1981). An ethos of management, separation and control between colonial and native elites and the popular masses became increasingly hegemonic in Indian cities.

British administrators and Indian businessmen definitively moved out of medieval urban areas. The latter were increasingly termed the "black town," native quarters, or old city, where the mass of Indians lived. Thereafter, and arguably until the present day, places like Shahjahanabad became negatively defined, in terms of what they lacked. Shahjahanabad thus became Old Delhi. Like other precolonial spaces, its winding alleyways and congested bazaars were counterposed to the "white town" or new city (Prashad 2003). The British amplified the construction of these residential enclaves after the 1857 rebellion. Modern city-life was embodied in the Civil Lines, neighborhoods carbon-copied across India. In the black town, there was no singular vantage point by which the city could be apprehended; social groups mixed wildly; and domestic chores were transacted on the street.

By contrast, in the Civil Lines, officials and the native bourgeoisie lived in neat bungalows on a grid layout. This organization was preordained on an abstract map, and defined against the old city's opacity. Strict rules were detailed as to who was let in, what activities they could carry out, and what they might wear (Legg 2007). Indians could not wear native dress in such city zones, and the few allowed to reside there adopted anodyne Western customs. Social life moved away from the street, into regulated private enclosures, none so prominent and ritualistic as the private club. This was the haunt of civil and military officers in many Indian cities, replete with genteel tennis courts, parade grounds and gaming rooms.

The demarcation from Delhi's old city was made more concrete with the construction of New Delhi. Designed as the British Raj's new imperial capital, it was officially

consecrated in 1911. The new city was another space defined by control and segregation – the Civil Lines writ large. At the heart of India's new capital, the secretariat and parliament were a metaphor for urban governance. Monumental and imposing, they were designed to awe the native into submission (Hosagrahar 2005).

Because city space was increasingly articulated in the language of planning, places like Old Delhi were relegated to the sociology of stereotype and rumor. The black towns where the vast majority of Indians still lived were simply seen as unhygienic, opaque and dangerous. Municipal governance was largely oriented toward the military cantonment areas and the Civil Lines. Infrastructure improvements bypassed the native quarters, leading to further decrepitude and confirming the bias against it. The prevailing mood is summarized in a mid-twentieth century guide to Delhi designed by the American Red Cross (1942) for Western visitors. In it, the new city's axial roadways and wide boulevards are clearly indicated and labeled. In contrast, the entire area of Shahjahanabad is simply blotted out with diagonal lines, and labeled "OUT OF BOUNDS."

After 1947 came the period of Indian independence. But the return to native sovereignty was not manifested by reinhabiting the old city. Places like Old Delhi remained, for municipal officers and urban planners, invariably trained in the Western style, places of disease, criminality and sectarian tension. Fear and lack of interest still excised such areas from civic consciousness, such that in modern maps of Lucknow, the old city was simply left blank (Hjortshoj 1979:33).

Yet Indian elites, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister, were melancholic about the old city's decline. This was a sentimental discourse about the old city's charms that somewhat qualified its decrepitude. In other Indian old cities, a similar narrative surrounded former black towns. Lucknow, for example, endured rapid demographic transformations and decay from the mid-nineteenth century. Yet the city's middle class and intelligentsia latched onto the precolonial city as the repository of indigenous values and culture (Oldenburg 2001).

Such sentimentality consigned places such as Old Delhi to history, over which the city's inheritors were zealous guardians. To go to the old city from the new city was, in the prevailing narrative, to step back in time. The black town in this way lent depth and authenticity to the new city's residents. But it fit imperfectly into the ruling class's script of the modern city. Old Delhi's temporal rhythms, popular culture, and proletarian composition, for example, maintained the city's walls in symbolic if not material terms.

Outside of them, India's vision for the urban future was realized elsewhere, in the construction of modernist cities. These included purpose-built industrial townships such as the "steel towns" of Bhilai, Rourkela, Bokaro and Durgapur, and provincial capitals such as Bhubaneshwar, Gandhinagar and Chandigarh (Roy 2007). These cities, planned by Indian and Western architects after the 1950s, were paeans to the promise of a universal modernity. Orderly and hygienic urban space was supposed to incubate a generation of self-disciplined citizens.

Notably, this new urban resident was to be secular, free from the shackles of caste or religion. In the minds of many Indian planners, a deracinated city-dweller was ideal because mass culture had been shown to clash with urban living. For native technocrats, culture was all too often revealed to be "obscurantist" and "backward." Timeless identities and age-old grudges were commonly articulated in the black town,

where religious institutions and the plebeian masses were to be found. It was, for example, in the old city that spectacular episodes of sectarian violence in north India had occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Pandey 1992).

Because urban modernism so enthusiastically planned, inscribed and mapped, it is often tempting to see these intentions as reality. But if grandiose blueprints were shared by all of these cities' architects, so was the inevitable reckoning. Modernist cities in India were beset from the beginning by failures and deficiencies. Rather than circumventing quasi-colonial hierarchies, Chandigarh's city plan, overseen by Swiss architect Le Corbusier, hardwired them into the very location and size of residents' houses (Kalia 1999). Instead of bypassing caste identities, Bhilai's steel town reified them by making them a condition of work and residence (Parry 1999). Designed as a secular utopia, Rourkela's industrial township became associated with outbreaks of Hindu–Muslim violence (Roy 2007:150–155). The reengineering of Indian city-space in terms of secular citizenship or universal modernity seemed to fail, stymied by an antimodern excess called culture.

It may come as little surprise – given anthropology's association with colonial dictates – that culture in its pure and undisturbed sense was sited in the Indian village. Colonial officials, doubling as ethnologists, needed to make sense of the village so as to master crop production and revenue extraction. Well into the twentieth century, anthropologists saw the rural village as the default site of sociality in the region. In the work of some of India's foremost anthropologists, such as Verrier Elwin and M. N. Srinivas, politics, religion and kinship unfolded in their natural setting – pastoral climes all. For them, the village setting was not incidental but at the heart of conclusions about social life. Srinivas, for example, argued that the village played as decisive a role as the family or religion in the making of Indian personhood (1952). For most of his career, Elwin endeavored to defend rural tribals from the corrupting influences of technology and modernization (Guha 1999).

We can see that the old city was bypassed by the official fixation on new modernist cities, and the anthropological predisposition toward the village. When India's black towns did enter the scholarly or official consciousness, it was as a kind of awkward residue or charming remainder. And in this respect, comparison between such popular urban spaces, unlike villages or modernist cities, was rarely made.

On the one hand, the black town no longer embodied, as cities universally do, the vanguard or cosmopolitan. Each subsequent expansion of Indian urbanity was planned as a final riposte to the precolonial city. From the nineteenth century, the imagination of urban India moved from the old city to the colonial cantonment and Civil Lines. From there it gravitated to twentieth century modernist cities such as Chandigarh and New Delhi. As urban India's economy has transformed through globalization, status and worldliness is increasingly embodied by privately built cities such as Gurgaon, on New Delhi's periphery.

For all of their differences, these cities oscillate between monumental spaces for spectacle – the parade ground, public memorial, and shopping mall – and closely monitored interiors – the private club, information technology cubicle, the middle-class drawing room – for interaction (Mazumdar 2008). As a result, the modernist city, seen as a universal form, is often analytically interchangeable with others of its kind. Shopping malls or gated enclaves in Hyderabad and Kolkata may be compared; outsourcing firms in Chennai and call centers in Chandigarh can be placed into the

same frame. The modernist city could be comprehensively and comparatively theorized because it was devoid of local color.

On the other hand, villages were like one another because they lugged enormous cultural baggage. For most of the twentieth century, anthropologists working in one of India's millions of villages could make it representative of wider caste dynamics and religious identity. But popular practices among the urban masses, unfolding in former black towns, exhibited both a paucity and a surfeit of culture. From a conventional perspective, the old city was neither universal enough to be a proper urban space, nor representative enough of Indian culture. Thus the Indian old city was largely ignored by anthropologists, with a few exceptions (Lynch 1969; Khare 1984; Kumar 1988).

Given all of this, we might imagine that the Indian old cities of Meerut and Bijapur disintegrated; or that the black towns of Aligarh and Aurangabad are empty relics. Often, it is rather the opposite. For anthropological purposes, the Indian black town is important in two respects. To begin with, it is the product of historical patterns that endure in certain craft industries, consumption practices, and ethnic configurations. Such enduring economies – often found in the conjunction of local castes attached to particular industries – propel economic traffic in the larger urban area, and maintain patronage of the old city's religious monuments and cultural *melas*, or festivals. Across north India especially, the old city remains an important node for wholesale trade, pilgrimage and popular self-understanding. The black town in this way often plays a decisive part in differentiating the larger city against its myriad competitors. It is often in such spaces that "the 'fact' of a Banarasi, a Mirzapuri, a Lakhnawi, a Hyderabadi" is realized, in "folklore literature, daily colloquialisms, styles of dress, food habits, leisure activities" (Kumar 1991:198).

Yet the black town is not an island unto itself. A second reason why precolonial city spaces, bypassed by official energies and the middle class, are important is that they are conduits for widely circulating practices. Indeed, the challenge for an anthropological understanding of any Indian black town is that it is simultaneously particular and representative of a wider urban modernity. In some sense, however specific their genealogy – Agra, Jaipur and Amritsar, for example, having developed under medieval Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh patronage – old cities are often more similar to each other than to the new cities now hemming them in. As I will explain later, this has something to do with the circulation of labor, commodities, and leisure through popular urban areas.

To apprehend such things, to begin to evolve a conceptual language for the Indian old city, we must avoid seeing the black town at a conceptual remove. Arguably, other disciplines reenact the urban planner's gaze by looking at the city from above, as if it perfectly corresponded to the master plan or Google map. In this way, geographers, historians and architectural scholars examining Old Delhi have perhaps unwittingly confirmed colonial disdain for the black town. Such scholarship has told us less about what is happening in such spaces, and much more about its representation as a space of decay, danger, and deviance (Hosagrahar 2005; Legg 2007).

If we are to avoid conceiving of the Indian old city as impenetrable – the black town as a black box – we make use of the anthropological toolkit, and therefore stay close to the ground. In a place like Delhi's old city, this is appropriate. The air-conditioned coffee shop may be the iconic haunt of India's aspirational classes – a place where one watches oneself being seen by others, at a remove (see McGuire, Chapter 6 in this volume), but one will search in vain for such places in the black town. There, public

culture is transacted right on the street, in *chai* stalls and *paan* stands, and there is hardly any possibility for discreet retreat. Contra the new city's segregated layout, the black town's bazaars are heterogeneous and porous, demanding a different kind of urban temperament. And if nightclubs and multiplexes are the twenty-first century sites of leisure, other spaces, such as that of the wrestling akhara, still remain well-worn rites of passage for men in the old city.

These quotidian spaces often associated with the black town – the street, the bazaar and the akhara – are useful points of departure in attempting to make sense, as I tried to do, of the Meena Bazaar. In the following sections, I will detail some of the people and practices found in these spaces in Old Delhi. Each of these spaces has longstanding roots in urban India, yet has, in different ways, been seen as dangerous, inefficient or obsolete. Drawing from my ethnography in this area, and supplemented by anthropological research into similar practices and places, I will argue for the enduring life of the old city in contemporary India.

The Street

Old Delhi's street, as I discovered, is not a restrained space. Eating, haggling, defecating, policing, hawking, campaigning, and prostituting: there is hardly a financial deal, political statement or bodily activity that did not occur right on the street. On Chandni Chowk, the area's main commercial thoroughfare, my path was frequently interrupted by a political rally. Local parties would set up a tent and dais on this street, in front of a municipal office, the town hall. Where vehicles ordinarily skirmished, hundreds of the faithful sat, awaiting speeches (and perhaps more fervently, the food served afterwards). On Gali Mata Wali, men rolled carts loaded with kerosene burners, chickpeas and potatoes. With thick smoke blowing over hungry passersby, they doled out some of the area's culinary favorites, such as *tikkis*, fried vegetable discs containing potatoes and peas, served with a tamarind sauce or ketchup. As the sun set and the old city was washed over by inky darkness, Urdu Road, bordering the Meena Bazaar, became dotted with prostitutes. This was no red light area; just a regular street, used to drive and hawk and beg during the day, where single women with bright makeup and bold stares stood at night.

On such streets, no enduring division could be made between public and private activities (Appadurai 1987:17). Arguments conducted on the mobile phone mingled with devotional songs spilling out of temples. Men had their ears cleaned and stubble trimmed over the sidewalk drain, alongside commuters waiting for the next municipal bus. Over the course of my fieldwork in Delhi's old city, it was impossible to predict when a presence would endure or disappear. I periodically returned, for example, to a few tea stalls squatting on the street, prime venues for gossip and rest. More than one such stall, overseen by men by virtue of their dogged return to the same spot over years, suddenly vanished. I heard shopkeepers in the old city and residents narrate how tiny religious idols, placed next to an electricity transformer, evolved into a tiny shrine, and then, years later, a hulking temple. The same fluidity applied to the legitimacy of a street person or structure. Bicycle rickshaws, outlawed by the Delhi courts time and again, nevertheless proliferated in the old city. Several landlords and businessmen I met were guilty of "encroachment," the official term for unofficial

infrastructure. Their hotels, now three stories instead or two, and their shops jutting past their perimeter and eating into the sidewalk were, nevertheless, here to stay. The owners would, when faced with official pressure, "regularize" them, by paying a fee and obeisance to officialdom.

The Indian city's street, it should be clear, is not the same symbolic ground on which the storied flâneur of nineteenth-century Paris roamed. There, as described in Charles Baudelaire's iconic fiction, the man about town roamed, studiously avoiding a predetermined route or final destination (Benjamin 1983). There was, in Paris and other Western cities, a clear distinction between the pedestrian sidewalk and the arcade where goods were on display. For Delhi's officials, too, the pedestrian pavement, clear and clearly demarcated from the vehicular road, residential colony and commercial space, was an abstract ideal. This was part of the modernist dream, of urban life's orderly division of labor.

Yet the street in Delhi's old city was enacted differently. Ending abruptly, colonized by entrepreneurs, uneven and broken, its unpredictable route was traced by Old Delhi's residents through crowds, vehicles, stray animals and much more. And yet despite the appearance of chaos to the outsider, the longer I spent there the more I saw that there was a kind of internal logic. As in many Indian black towns, this most undifferentiated of urban spaces was precisely allocated and occupied: to a cigarette seller here, to a public phone vendor there, and to the enterprising and strong-armed everywhere.

In these ways, the old city's street was not a place where, as with the Parisian flâneur, the pedestrian could mentally retreat from the crowd, gazing undisturbed at the arcade. The European daydreamer, both lost in and aloof from the crowd, gave way to the self-conscious and ever vigilant Indian. In my experience, Old Delhi's street was the venue for endless negotiation; likewise, for the workers and residents I knew there, the street was the terrain for gossip, deals and threats. The Indian street, for ethnographer and resident alike, involved involuntary intimacy and exchange, a total immersion of seeing and doing in which one could not, like the Parisian flâneur, forget oneself.

Old Delhi's streets were perhaps the most democratic in the entire city, open to all comers: educated and impoverished, engineers and junkies. This is not an unimportant point. New Delhi was defined by gates and *chowkidars* (night watchmen), where police posts and concrete walls frosted with broken glass separated out different kinds of people. In contrast, if there is a singular feature that connects India's myriad black towns, it is their startling heterogeneity. In this respect, my disorientation as an outside ethnographer trying to decipher Old Delhi's Meena Bazaar was not far removed from the mutual unintelligibility of its residents. Similarly, in Old Lucknow's streets, "people do not conform to any single social system, tradition, or standard of public conduct through which their diverse identities can be mutually understood" (Hjortshoj 1979:35).

Perhaps counterintuitively, it was the active lack of interest that myriad kinds of people showed to one another on the street that offered, especially for the urban proletariat, some entertainment and a resting place, a conduit of news and opportunity. Consider the case of Rahul. A *mistri* or construction laborer, who assisted a mason, I met him at Haus Qazi Chowk, close to the Meena Bazaar, along with dozens of fellow migrant laborers, their tools and paintbrushes arranged before them. As the old

city came to life, cows, rickshaws and cars circumnavigated this roundabout, where several wholesale bazaars – selling paper, iron, kites and tools – converged. The men, almost all of them migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, were usually between their early twenties and late forties. As day-laborers, they were entirely at the mercy of contractors, who inconsistently offered painting, plumbing or masonry work. The men began their vigil early in the morning, by 7 a.m. By 1 p.m., whatever work that was to arrive had come. On many days, the numbers of men remaining at Haus Qazi Chowk testified to the lack of work, at least of the consistent kind.

When I met him, Rahul was a young man in his early twenties, not yet sufficiently skilled at his work to become an *ustad* or *guru*, a master who would train others. Like the other young men at his day-labor site, or *mandi*, by midday, if no work was to be had, he started roaming Old Delhi's streets. He usually had very little money in his pockets; his aim was hardly ever to buy something or fulfill a task. As with his fellow migrants, whatever pleasure there was to be had was in *timepass*, referring to the state in which someone could be doing something better or productive. A middling 1980s Bollywood film, recycled in one of the nearby cinemas, that such men watched to bide the afternoon, was *timepass*. In a similarly unenthusiastic way, squatting with friends in Haus Qazi Chowk listening to a meandering story was also *timepass*.

But *timepass* did not simply refer to an activity done in downtime. I also heard it termed the condition of an entire class of underemployed and frustrated men. Shopkeepers and policemen at Haus Qazi Chowk, for example, dismissively termed migrants like Rahul *sadak-chaap admi*, street-formed guys, or *pavement-log*, pavement people. Moderately educated or skilled, but lacking job opportunities in goernment service or the private sector, hundreds of thousands of men like Rahul were to be found in the streets of Indian cities. Loitering at traffic intersections, clustered around *chai* stalls, they are among many considered to be " 'wanderers,' 'useless men' or people engaged only in '*timepass*' " (Jeffrey et al. 2008:169; see also Jeffrey, Chapter 3 above). Among their numbers are the countless drivers, cleaners, and peons who physically overwhelm the city but in its cultural consciousness are absent from it.

I heard Rahul sometimes refer to his life and those of his friends in the same pejorative vocabulary hurled at them by their social betters. Describing himself as illiterate and careless, this could be done with irreverence – as if he didn't care – but also bleak self-assessment. Usually in debt, hobbled by illness and insecurity, Rahul's fellow workers also talked of their doomed fate and wasted lives. Here *timepass* was not simply a few transitory hours or months, but a default state of being (see Craig, chapter 3 in this volume).

But this does not mean that Rahul retreated from the streets. For him, the street was the only guaranteed place to rest one's head, while away the time, and find an opportunity. The Indian street in this respect has long been overwhelmingly male and popular, an exception to the strict "spatial etiquette" of the city's other public spaces (Srivastava 2007:185). Referring to nineteenth-century Banares, in Uttar Pradesh, one author notes that "recreation for lower-class males frequently consisted of simply 'roaming' the streets of the *mohalla*" (Freitag 1989:123). Historically in Lucknow's old city, "the street itself was a destination and an event," a place to gossip, mingle, and barter (Oldenburg 2001:viii).

It is also in the black town's streets that a wider public culture has long circulated. In the 1960s, in Agra's old city, the radio was the primary conduit for news, as well as the "nationalized cult of the popular movie song" (Lynch 1969:168). In the 1980s

and 1990s, the television set, attached to the tea stall or a shopkeeper's shelf, became the venue around which the masses huddled, to compulsively watch television serials (Rajagopal 2001). During my time in Old Delhi, the primary medium for communication and entertainment had shifted to the mobile phone. Even men of humble means such as Rahul had, or shared, a mobile phone, on which they rang distant relatives, downloaded ringtones, and listened to cricket matches. The acoustic cacophony of the old city's street was thus given an added dimension by this conduit to elsewhere. Visually, the old city's street was similarly overwhelming. Sensational murder stories and Hindi newspapers could be found in front of sidewalk vendors, and ads for English classes and sexologists plastered urinals and walls, reaffirming the street's male character (Srivastava 2007).

Though the street's association with the "floating population" or popular masses is pervasive, it is not absolute. Scholars have, by way of contrast, tracked the middle-class *addas* of Kolkata, congregations of friendly gossip, often conducted on the street itself (Chakrabarty 2000). And the street's iconography – with billboards for the affluent and storefronts for the middle class – presumes a stratified population (Appadurai 1987:19). Nevertheless, as the black town's underclass ethos has seeped into other parts of the city – through slums on public land, for example – elites have generally retreated into their drawing rooms (Mazumdar 2008).

Thus I was not surprised that Delhi's municipal authorities, when performing their role as the guardians of law and order, often turned to the old city's street to demonstrate their vigilance. Very Important Persons, or VIPs, constitute an important political caste in modern Delhi, and when they toured the old city, Rahul and his ilk were cleared beforehand by the police; prior to national holidays and election polls, they were shunted into shelters; after shopkeepers complained about pavement encroachment, the laborers were forced to retreat to nearby parks.

These prosaic street clearances that I saw echoed an official obsession in post-Independence India, made most visible during the Emergency from 1975 to 1977. At that time, Indira Gandhi, the prime minister, suspended democracy, and bureaucrats effected the "beautification" of Delhi's streets, through the removal of slums and pavement dwellers, and the planting of trees (Tarlo 2003). The Indian street has in this way been a repeated target of official rationalization, but it is hardly the only such space. In the next section, I will describe the bazaar, another space that both quintessentially defines the Indian old city, and has long been targeted for elimination.

The Bazaar

I first met Hamid, a father of two, at his "fancy" jeans stall, in the Meena Bazaar. He had a small enclosure, amidst others selling clothes and music cassettes, and further away, blankets and coats. Hamid's situation was rather typical in the area. Like many other traders and hawkers in Delhi's old city, he procured his commodities through personal networks. In Hamid's case, goods were obtained from two cousins who had clothing workshops in east Delhi. When he was a young child in the 1970s, his father had another stall, one among hundreds clustered haphazardly around the entrance of the Jama Masjid. During the Emergency in November 1975, his father lost his stall

and his wares to the underside of a bulldozer. This was done in the name of the same beautification imperatives that cleared Old Delhi's streets of its underclass.

At the Jama Masjid, after riot police battled with traders and had cleared offending structures, the city's plan was to build six-story residential and commercial buildings surrounding the large mosque (Krafft 1993:103). The following year, Delhi's municipal authorities sought to placate the Meena Bazaar's aggrieved traders by building 370 shops to the east of the mosque. By the 1980s, Hamid's father sensed an opportunity to make more money in east Delhi, where other Muslims from the old city had been shifted after the 1960s. A thriving subcontracting industry had blossomed there, and Hamid's father handed over his Meena Bazaar stall to a friend, in return for a nominal fee. Things continued like this until the late 1990s, when Hamid's father became ill and his business fortunes declined. He sought to end the agreement over his stall in the Meena Bazaar, but his partner refused to vacate the premises. After much bickering, Hamid's father and the squatter came to an agreement to share the premises. At the time of my fieldwork, Hamid sold jeans a half-meter away from two men who sold scarves and towels, having unofficially partitioned the space between them.

But the issue of disputed ownership over the bazaar had not disappeared. From the 1990s, the Delhi government revived its concerns over precisely the kinds of illegal encroachment that Hamid's family had been implicated in. The official buzzword was no longer "beautification"; blueprints instead heralded "heritage conservation" of the Jama Masjid area. The twenty-first century plan is a descendant of the one aborted in the mid-1970s, though slightly more grandiose. A modern, glitzy shopping mall is planned for where the Meena Bazaar stands, complete with an underground parking lot. Once again, the Meena Bazaar traders – at least the ones with legal entitlement – are to be moved, this time to a new, sanitized location kilometers away. As a result of the thicket of documentation traded between Hamid's family and their stall's occupier over the years, each possessing different proofs of their entitlement in the Meena Bazaar, there was much jockeying over who would obtain the new commercial plot.

Why was the Meena Bazaar, in the twenty-first century, still the object of official reform? Like all of Old Delhi's bazaars, it seemed to embody two sets of problems. At one level, these bazaars seemed even in their physical form to embody illegality and unruliness. Furthermore, the people managing these spaces were seen as insular, and their commercial practices dubious. The bazaar economy was, in the view of policymakers, an embarrassing halfway house between primitive accumulation and proper modernity. During my time there, Old Delhi's bazaars, in the wider urban consciousness, were associated with *milawat*, or adulteration, *nakhli*, or counterfeit objects, and *heri-pheri*, or fraudulent behavior. At the Khari Baoli spice bazaar, local policemen told me about the adulteration of purportedly pure spices with lead, and of dairy products with caustic soda. In the old city's Lajpat Rai electronics bazaar, stolen goods were recycled, fake brands assembled, and counterfeit compact discs hawked (Sundaram 2010:93–94). For these reasons, in the official discourse of economic efficiency, civic transparency, and public safety, these bazaars were emblems of Indian backwardness. The 1970s plan to displace the Meena Bazaar in favor of high-rise buildings, and the twenty-first century plan to build a shopping mall there, were premised on a notion of universal modernity.

Yet the bazaar, in many ways, is neither geographically specific to India, nor an intermediary phase of development. The bazaars found in Old Delhi – catering to

the demand for tractor parts or Viagra, to those seeking wedding cards as well as bathroom tiles – function according to a logic found in bazaars, souks, kasbahs and street markets in other parts of the world. Such spaces are defined by legal malleability, such as the canny ability of street hawkers to be both highly visible and, at moments of official scrutiny, suddenly vanish. Such markets are selectively porous; they depend on geographically dispersed actors who can access different source products and end consumers, yet trading, brokering and laboring are often done through intimate networks. Indeed, attempts to rationalize such spaces often fail, whether in India or elsewhere, because purchasers, transporters, and marketeers are deeply interdependent in terms of kinship relations. Paradoxically, the very enmity between Hamid's family and his neighbor in the Meena Bazaar conspired to frustrate the municipality's attempt to build a mall. I witnessed numerous small-scale protests in the bazaar, where traders and hawkers, who ordinarily sparred over stall or street space to sell their wares, vented their frustration collectively. Many of these market players were related and had distant cousins or uncles in common, for example. The consequence of this organic solidarity – paradoxically balanced by contentious self-interest – within the Meena Bazaar was that, just as it had decades earlier, official redevelopment during my time in Old Delhi became mired in interminable delays.

That so many of the features of the Indian urban bazaar are to be found in settings elsewhere is to be expected. After all, the genealogy of the contemporary bazaar can be traced to the precolonial *qasbahs*, *mandis* and *ganjs* that connected Indian cities to commercial centers outside the subcontinent (Vidal 2000). North Indian cities such as Bareilly and Mirzapur had longstanding bazaars linking the Indian subcontinent and destinations elsewhere in Asia (Bayly 1998). In this sense, India's post-1991 engagement with global markets, after decades of state socialism, is not a novel historic development but rather a reengagement with world commerce, then as now transacted in cities.

Terms such as informality, frequently used to encapsulate both bazaars and street hawking, elide the different historical conditions and political dispensations under which they emerge. The bazaars of most of India's black towns are neither illegitimate remainders of the formal market, nor comprehensive replicas of previous eras. For example, Old Delhi was, even during the Mughal era, an important commercial center, with speciality markets for brass, iron, fireworks, and grain (Peck 2005:181). Yet most of its contemporary bazaars are situated in former residential areas. These bazaars were built by Punjabi refugees who flooded the area after Partition divided India and Pakistan in 1947. In some cases, as in the Lajpat Rai electronics market, traders who had lost their businesses in Pakistan petitioned the government to convert areas, in that case a park, into commercial zones. Other old city markets, such as the Katra Neel textile bazaar, Tilak Bazaar chemical bazaar, and the Kashmiri Gate auto parts bazaar, have a more recent history. Each of these bazaars has hundreds of traders operating out of precolonial residential areas. Often, the grand *havelis*, or mansions, of noble families were converted for processing, storing and displaying goods. As a result, the bazaar landscape – in both historical and material terms – of Delhi's old city is uneven and fragmented.

In these ways, Old Delhi's bazaars are not intermediate stages heading inexorably toward capitalist forms. Marxist and neoclassical theories posit that premodern, semi-feudal, and inefficient forms of commerce give way to more rational, efficient, and formal ones. Yet what is striking about the bazaar is that it has coexisted easily with

different economic and political dispositions. After 1947, the Indian state, beholden to socialist five-year plans and import-substitution policies, emphasized the indigenous copy and manufacture of consumer goods. Despite the state's symbolic emphasis on large, state-owned "public sector units," much of Indian socialism's material output depended on endless chains of small-scale outsourcing, often in cramped urban areas such as Delhi's old city. Especially after the 1970s, Old Delhi's bazaars became dominated by small-scale workshops and processing units, making everything from jeans to gardening tools.

From the early 1990s, India charted a different economic course, liberalizing imports and encouraging foreign investment. The information technology park, intellectual labor, and invisible transactions conducted over the fiber-optic cable became glorified. Bypassed was the socialist emphasis on the factory, physical labor and material quotas. On the consumption side, shopping malls became coveted, not the colony market of the planned city, and certainly not the black town's bazaar. Yet once more the seeming irrelevance of the bazaar was overstated. Many people, both those of prospering classes who can afford its goods, as well as the aspiring who cannot, flock to the mall; yet few buy anything there. Escalators, outsized billboards, and multiple levels constitute a space where one watches and is watched at a judicious remove. The shopping mall in the new city remains an institution that one engages in on the surface, where people go to hang out, browse, but also exit empty-handed (Mehra 2009:155). When I asked Hamid, in the Meena Bazaar, if his business was not suffering due to the explosion of mall options, he told me that people go to the shopping mall to eat and browse, not to buy things. This was especially true of his clientele, such as college students and lower middle-class government employees, for whom buying "fixed price" jeans at a mall would have been prohibitively expensive.

An intriguing aspect of the debate around the Meena Bazaar's future was that, though it contained a range of different Muslim and Hindu actors, it was seen by municipal authorities as a Muslim *ilaka*, or area. This exemplified another constitutive tension of the bazaar: its cosmopolitan admixture, alongside a symbolic overidentification with particular ethnic or religious groups. Trade in specific areas, around particular commodities, tends in Old Delhi to be consolidated around kinship ties. Certain bazaars have longstanding Jain cliques, while in others, such as the old city's grain market, Hindu merchant castes from Punjab and Haryana play a decisive role (Vidal 2000). By contrast, in Kolkata, it is the Marwari caste, originating in Rajasthan, which often dominates trade in bazaars, and in Mumbai, Gujarati trading castes.

For the modern nation-state, the association of the bazaar with one community has frequently been seen at cross-purposes with the abstract ideal of the free market. The hegemony of Gujarati, Marwari or Punjabi traders has been thought of as encouraging price-fixing, hoarding and smuggling. The bazaar traders' collective self-interest was seen to hinder national interest. In the nineteenth century, for example, British colonial authorities looked with suspicion at the Marwari traders in Kolkata's bazaars. Marwaris were thought to have parasitical intentions vis-à-vis the larger population, their bazaars being places of opaque dealings and illicit offshoots, such as gambling (Birla 2009:171). This colonial sentiment is echoed in the contemporary desire of municipal authorities to rationalize seemingly opaque and dangerous bazaars.

The irony may be that the bazaar is far more porous than its parochial mythology suggests. The calendar and print bazaar around Old Delhi's Chandni Chowk and Nai

Sarak is less defined by its dilapidated physical setting than by "a web of relationships extending beyond and between individual sites" across India (Jain 2007:78). Nearby, in the Katra Neel textile bazaar, 60,000 workers act as a conduit for more than 10 percent of the entire country's cloth trade (Krafft 1993:107).

Bazaars, then, can be said to be open to, and indeed dependent on myriad kinds of workers, brokers, and traders. But this is not to say that everyone has the disposition to thrive in the bazaar. A tolerance for manifold bodies in a finite space and a quick-witted disposition are mandatory. The bazaar's participants learn to master "the crowds, the helter-skelter, and the constant buzz of joking conversation … which finds its prime exemplification in the market" (Geertz 1960:49). Despite the fact that Hamid sold clothes from a tiny stall, he supported his ailing father and immediate family through significant retail sales. Asked about how he generated such traffic despite his poky surroundings, Hamid elaborated to me on how a good trader reads people and anticipates their needs. He knew that people came to Old Delhi's bazaars for their *mahaul*, their mood or atmosphere. In colony markets elsewhere in Delhi, and especially at the new shopping malls, commerce was comparatively impersonal, with indifferent vendors, and an emphasis on the transaction. In Old Delhi's bazaars, in contrast, touts attached to particular stalls or shops aggressively eyed passersby, offering them – plaintively, insistently – things which they might not need. In these bazaars, it was incumbent on both trader and customer to shroud commerce with barter, wheedle, and gossip. Hamid himself was a master at this art, joking with customers and flattering them into buying.

We have discussed the black town thus far as it contrasts, in scholarly writing, with both the village and the modernist city. However, the old city's bazaar is not, for those within, simply an intermediary between the rural hinterland and more developed metropolis. Especially for migrant workers and lower middle-class brokers, the bazaar is not a partial urban segment, but rather the city itself. So might argue Anis, a man in his mid-forties, who shuttled twice a month from his home in Moradabad to Delhi, where I met him. Anis was from a city in Uttar Pradesh, whose claim to fame was its brassware industry. Historically, much of Moradabad's brass production and distribution was done by Muslims, and Anis eked out a living procuring brassware at home. He had over the past decade carved out a profitable niche supplying higher end brassware to merchants in Chawri Bazaar, a large market to the west of Jama Masjid. This bazaar is mere minutes' walking distance from the Meena Bazaar, but configured differently. Chawri Bazaar, in a long street that once was the haunt of courtesans and eunuchs, is the center of a profitable wholesale paper and wedding cards market; a smaller proportion of traders specialize in brassware. The market for these goods is regional, and the traders themselves predominantly Hindu.

For Anis, who rarely ventured out of Old Delhi when making his visits from Uttar Pradesh, the capital's bazaar felt both familiar and somewhat different from those of the old town in Moradabad. Things moved more quickly in the capital, he claimed, and people were not as patient. At home, he was identified according to his neighborhood, the schools he sent his children to, and the model of car he drove. It was in Delhi that he realized that he was actually something else: a person from Moradabad, a UP-*wallah*. In Delhi's old city, the micro-politics of his home city mattered little. In the bazaar, he met loaders from Rajasthan, brokers from Madhya Pradesh, and shopkeepers from the Punjab. And from this truly national space, he carried news and

ideas back to Uttar Pradesh. On his visits to the capital, Anis scrutinized the styles of brassware sold in the Chawri Bazaar, of utilitarian or decorative kinds, to be used in kitchens or temples. These hints prodded him into demanding certain changes from artisans and producers in Moradabad, so he could stay ahead of changing fashions. The urban bazaar was, for Anis, a source of inspiration and information, a place that foreshadowed new developments back home. There was little contradiction for him in being attentive to the latest styles and techniques, sometimes informed by global trends, and the constant negotiation of his business networks, many of which involved his relatives. As in the old city's other bazaars, an orientation toward the world and the maintenance of kinship ties were not in conflict (Jain 2007:175).

It is in this respect that for intermediaries like Anis, the old city's bazaar was not a halfway house between the village and the modern city but, simply, the city writ large. An anthropologist examining the footwear bazaars of Agra in the 1960s, where low-caste Jatavs were employed in the leather industry, similarly found that "the market is a center of communication both within the city, and between the city and hinterland villages … Jatavs who meet friends there in a tea, sweets, or wine shop, and often pass a few minutes gossiping on the street" (Lynch 1969:44). In this way, the two spaces we have explored thus far, the street and the bazaar, indistinguishably merge material profit, social conviviality, and fleeting leisure. We now look at a final distinguishing aspect of the Indian old city, the akhara, an urban site more explicitly defined by leisure.

The Akhara

A *dangal* or wrestling tournament echoes, at first glance, the street or bazaar. Vendors offer snacks and quotidian items such as combs and handkerchiefs, and men squat on the ground gossiping. And like the street, meant for movement, or the bazaar, intended for selling, the old city's dangal exceeds its original design. The dangal often takes place in simple settings: a square dirt pit, ringed by men seated in plastic chairs or on the ground. As the match is about to start, all other activity ceases. A series of matches fought between two men of various ages and weight classes will begin. The wrestlers, often dressed simply in their *langot*, or underwear, will lock arms. Using their ingenuity and sheer strength, they seek to topple their opponent to the ground.

I met Nadeem, a former *pehlawan*, or wrestler, at the Sunday dangal in Old Delhi's Meena Bazaar. Then in his mid-fifties, he lived in Chitli Qabar, a mohalla adjacent to the Meena Bazaar, and owned a small hotel and restaurant. He was often to be found in the mornings in the kitchen of his restaurant, a small establishment with a few uneven tables and plastic chairs. On the wall opposite the kitchen was a framed photo of him from his wrestling heyday, in the 1980s. His chest buff and shinny, with a shock of black hair, Nadeem the wrestler was clearly a confident young man. His self-assurance was rewarded; twice, he won the Mr Delhi Competition. Like many former wrestlers, he bore tell-tale physical signs. Used as a young man to a high fat and protein diet, Nadeem had gained significant weight in his middle age, and his left ear had imploded into a cauliflower shape from too many blows to his head. Riding his scooter through the cramped alleyways, his girth threatened the easy passage of other vehicles, but somehow no one toppled over. A well-respected figure in his locality, Nadeem sent his two sons to a local akhara or gymnasium in Matia Mahal. A small enclosure hidden

behind a snack shop, this wrestling club was simply decorated, with a dirt pit, some old dumbbells, and a truck tire attached with a rope to a tree. Despite being in the middle of a congested area, the akhara was surprisingly quiet, a respite from the racket outside. An anthropologist in Varanasi's old city recounted this soothing feature of the akhara, standing in "contrast with the thick, dense smells and harsh sounds of urban life that waft and resonate in the back galis" (or alleys) (Alter 1992:30).

The Matia Mahal akhara was one of roughly a dozen in Delhi's old city. I started going to these gymnasiums because some of the traders and residents in the area were former wrestlers, and as patrons, they were involved in the gymnasiums. Moreover, migrant laborers working in Old Delhi's wholesale bazaars frequently attended the Sunday dangals. Some of the akharas were within Hindu enclaves, such as Sita Ram Bazaar, and others, like the one attended by Nadeem's sons, were in Muslim mohalas. The akharas were never homogeneous, though each was predominately either Hindu or Muslim in composition.

Despite the regular matches held publicly in the Meena Bazaar, and the numerous wrestling clubs scattered across Old Delhi, almost all the wrestlers I met felt that it was a declining activity. Nadeem offered, in the course of several meetings, some explanation. Communities no longer, as in the past, pooled resources to buy the expensive nuts and dairy products required for wrestlers to become robust. Government subsidies for training were dwindling, the jobs offered former wrestlers through a "sports quota" increasingly scarce. And young men in the vicinity were increasingly attracted to more "modern" forms of fitness and leisure, especially body-building. This, Nadeem complained, has resulted in men whose bodies became hollow (*khokhla*) and minds purely motivated by narcissism and selfishness, in terms of showing off to others (*dusron ko dhekane ke liye*). True *pehlawans* practiced their sport, he maintained, for the glory of the community, and to build *desh ka naam*, or the name of the nation. Being relatively impoverished and lacking employment, the old city's wrestlers were known to work as local toughs (*goondas*), turning out tenants for landlords and intimidating crowds for political candidates. These were common complaints among wrestlers in north India, of the sport's decline and neglect (Kumar 1988; Alter 1992).

Yet despite this narrative of entropy, the akhara continued to be a defining feature of public life in Old Delhi. Traders from nearby bazaars, who lived in huge mansions in south Delhi and sported the latest mobile phones, were at outward glance far removed from such popular pastimes. But some continued longstanding practices within the bazaars of sponsoring akharas, and they showed up to dangals to garland match winners and present trophies. These acts of patronage and recharging social capital constituted one of the ways in which wrestling was part of the wider urban world, inextricably connected with the prosperity of the bazaar. Conversely, for the migrant laborers from elsewhere, wrestling was part of the popular circulation of ideas about manhood, sexuality, and self-discipline, or in other words, the male ethos of the street. In Old Delhi's "footpath pornography," or cheap, sensationalist literature sold on the street, advertisements for products that promised a wrestler's physique were plentiful (Srivastava 2007).

This leisure economy could be sustained because it echoed, for these men, their knowledge of akharas elsewhere, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Indeed, Indian wrestling has generally been associated with the peasantry and proletariat: lower-class Hindus, "backward" castes such as Jats, and Muslims. Akharas are thus urban spaces where

notions of masculine strength and purity circulate. In particular, wrestlers are seen to embody self-restraint – among the more sublime ethical values that Nadeem believes that his sport imparts – and excess (Alter 2002). They are commonly seen to embody the virtues of self-restraint and bodily control, most markedly in celebration of the wrester's celibacy. Beyond their physical strength, wrestlers benefited during the pre-colonial period from courtly patronage, and, in the modern period, have been associated with influential if unscrupulous politicians. Wrestlers' bodily surplus and political connections allowed them to be deployed in cities such as Mumbai, where the local Hindu-nationalist political party, the Shiv Sena, used akharas to mobilize its plebeian young cadres (Hansen 1996).

It may be this many-layered fascination with the wrestler that propelled hundreds of men to throng the dangals at the Meena Bazaar on Sundays. For these men, attending such matches was a primary form of communal leisure. On the grass adjacent to the main road, men who would otherwise be loading and transporting wholesale goods sat gossiping and eating roasted peanuts sold by vendors. In this way, to participate in or watch wrestling was to take part in a longstanding economy of enjoyment in the old town, defined by *shauk*, or passion and taste (Kumar 1988). Nadeem, as a respected wrestler in the locality, knew the committee comprised of the elder statesmen of Old Delhi's wrestling akharas, who organized matches in the Meena Bazaar. Though he lamented wrestling's decline, he was among the hundreds who attended matches and appreciated that it was a venue for disseminating notions of hard work (*mehnat*) and masculinity (*mardanagi*).

I found that this was also true among younger residents of Delhi's old city. Nadeem's elder son, an ambitious and English-savvy 17-year-old named Mahmood, saw no contradiction between the akhara he attended, and the other seemingly nontraditional activities he carried out: attending a body-building gym, taking a software course at a technical college, and working as a bouncer at a Delhi nightclub. Aware of the range of entertainment and leisure options at his disposal in the megalopolis, he nevertheless stuck with his akhara training. Sure, he told me, he was teased by some of his classmates for wrestling, and when he showed emotion they joked about the wrestler's hot temper. But one could not become a man sitting behind a computer, he told me. A place for honest exercise, to build a balanced moral temper, and to enjoy camaraderie: there were many compelling reasons why the akhara, despite predictions of its imminent extinction, even by its adherents, would be likely to have an enduring life in the old city.

Conclusion

I began with a typical space within the Indian old city, Delhi's Meena Bazaar. I have sought to develop in this chapter an analytical language by which we could anthropologically make sense of such urban enclaves. Three spaces have been explored here: the street, the bazaar, and the wrestling gymnasium, or akhara. In varied ways, these spaces, though longstanding in the popular areas of myriad Indian cities, have been assumed to be imperfectly realized, deficiently formed, or soon to disappear. The street, a proletarian space which has been the primary site of public culture for the urban masses since the nineteenth century, has been repeatedly cleaned up by officials; scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the shiny interiors and grand facades of the

modernist city. Yet we have seen how the street is still a vibrant and important space for people such as the day-laborers of Delhi's old city. The Indian bazaar has long been likewise viewed as dangerous and opaque, soon to make way for properly regulated zones and truly modern commercial spaces. Yet Old Delhi's bazaars remain powerful centers for regional trade. Their complex patterns of brokers and agents have not been displaced by the promise of the transparent market. Finally, we have looked at the wrestling akhara, a commonly found feature of the Indian black town. Though, like the street's and bazaar's protagonists, the akhara's wrestlers may claim to be neglected or marginalized, it remains a constituent aspect of the urban leisure economy.

Of course, the street, bazaar and akhara are not only to be found within India's many precolonial black towns. Nor are these the only defining features of the old city; we could as easily have examined the street performers, religious institutions, and cultural *melas* or festivals, also concentrated in such areas. Rather, by examining certain parts of Old Delhi, I have sought to focus on some of the constitutive aspects of urban modernity found in the black towns of India. Though they inform the routines and aspirations of the majority of Indian city dwellers, they are often neglected in scholarly literature that privileges village life, the middle class and modernist spaces. An understanding of the street, bazaar and akhara, in my view, provides an anthropological entry point into a range of processes – from migration to fashion, masculinity to mass entertainment – that are seamlessly about contemporary Indian culture as well as the historically rooted Indian city.

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