UNIT 37 MODERNITY AND THE CITY IN COLONIAL INDIA*

Structure
37.1 Introduction
37.2 The City as the Space of the Modern
37.3 Technologies of the Modern
37.4 Indian Engagements with Modernity
37.5 New Associational Practices
37.6 Summary
37.7 Exercises
37.8 References

37.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-nineteenth century, cities have been naturally associated with modernity. Indeed, the main prisms through which the making of the ‘modern’ has been viewed – whether it is industrial capitalism, bureaucratic rationality or ‘governmentality’ – have frequently focused on the city as a primary site.

It is a matter of considerable debate among historians as to whether colonialism was instrumental in introducing ‘modernity’ to the Indian subcontinent, as colonial authorities themselves often claimed. Was Indian society imprisoned in ‘tradition’ until the beginning of colonial rule? The term ‘modernity’ may be said to refer not only to some material changes, i.e. industrial or print capitalism, or systems of sewage and sanitation, but also to new institutional spaces, such as museums, public libraries, and voluntary associations, as well as to new sensibilities, of individualism and bureaucratic rationality. The cities were among the earliest spaces within which these changes and transformations were made most visible and this Unit considers the colonial city from the perspective of whether or why it merits the term ‘modern’. To begin with, let us consider the ways in which cities and modernity are usually linked.

37.2 THE CITY AS THE SPACE OF THE MODERN

For some 19th century observers like Friedrich Engels and Alexis de Tocqueville, the ‘shock cities’ of Britain’s first industrial revolution symbolised the emergence of a modern economic order geared to the capitalist market and its attendant social consequences: the separation of the home and the workplace, the segregation of classes and the abysmal living conditions of the poor.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there emerged other kinds of association between modernity and the city. The spectacular capital cities of Western Europe such as London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Stockholm and New York in the USA – stood forth as symbols of urban modernity. Many of these cities were reconstructed (e.g. ‘Paris’, with urban space recreated ‘as a visual spectacle, opening up the monumental vista while simultaneously rendering the city a site of consumption, of window-shopping, promenading and surveillance.’ (Gunn, 2006: 123)

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Urban modernity was, however, not merely reflected in the built form of the city or its governance. The city also became a site for novel forms of urban interaction and sociability made possible by the emergence and consolidation of a new domain mediating between state and society: what is broadly referred to as the ‘public sphere’. Equally, the unprecedented density of people, technologies, commodities, institutions and information within cities generated new encounters and experiments, both individual and collective, that were distinctively ‘modern’. And, as the nineteenth-century French romantic poet Charles Baudelaire was quick to grasp, many of the fundamental aspirations and anxieties associated with modernity were most intensely experienced in the city.

These forms and ideals of urban modernity came to be adopted in many parts of the globe during the age of ‘imperial globalization’ presided over by Europeans. Cities across the colonial world took their spatial, technological and social cues from the imperial West. However, as a growing body of scholarship has begun to show, they also developed in ways that were not prefigured by the experience of the metropolitan contexts.

This chapter focuses principally on four premier cities of colonial India – Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras – as sites of ‘urban modernity’ in the period from the end of the Great Uprising/Rebellion to the end of the First World War (1918) and considers two key issues. First, it shows how the technologies and institutional forms associated with modernity transformed the fabric of material life in these cities. Second, this Unit assesses the ways in which Indians shaped the processes of modernity as they unfolded within the urban context.

### 37.3 TECHNOLOGIES OF THE MODERN

In the decades following the cataclysmic events of 1857, urban-dwellers in the major cities of colonial India could perceive all around them the visible signs and symbols of ‘modernity’. The most obvious and spectacular manifestation of this was in the built form of their cities. In the aftermath of 1857, colonial urban planning and policies showed ‘a more focused concern with defence, sanitation, order and above all the display of the new imperial power’. (Khilnani, 1997: 116) Like many metropolises across the globe, the built environment of Indian cities was rapidly altered in keeping with these imperatives. The fate of Mughal Delhi after the suppression of the 1857 uprising was particularly poignant. Here, as Narayani Gupta writes:

> At one sweep the face of the city, so lovingly built by Shahjahan, was transformed. What the Government decided was necessary for its security led to some of the loveliest buildings of the city being destroyed – Kucha Bulaqi Begum, the Haveli Nawab Wazir, the Akbarabadi Masjid, the palaces of the Nawabs of Jhajjar, Ballabhgarh, Farrucknagar and Bahadurgarh….In the excess of patriotic fervour that prevailed in the early 1860s, the Lahore and Delhi Gates of the Red Fort were renamed Victoria and Alexandra Gate. (Gupta, 1998: 27-8)

Further changes to the urban built form of colonial cities occurred at the end of the century following the outbreak of a major plague epidemic, which gradually engulfed the subcontinent. The panic aroused by the dreaded disease prompted the colonial state to create ‘Improvement Trusts’ in order to carry out an ambitious programme of civic renewal and urban development. (Kidambi, 2007: 71-113) These bodies tore down ‘slums’ in the Indian quarters, widened existing streets, built new arterial roads and developed the commercial infrastructure of cities. They also played an important part in the creation of new urban spaces devoted to shopping and entertainment. For instance, on Bombay’s Hornby Road, one of the city’s principal thoroughfares, the Improvement Trust built unified commercial arcades where visitors could sample the latest goods and fashions imported from Europe. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 39)
Alongside these changes came new technologies that transformed the material quality of urban life. Some developments – most notably, the coming of the railways and steamships – were essential to the growth of many cities even as they enlarged geographical horizons by opening up new possibilities for mobility. The railways, for example, linked port cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras to vast new hinterlands and made them key nodes in an evolving global network of maritime trade and transport. The first train journey in the subcontinent was flagged off from Bombay on 16 April 1853 by Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, and terminated 21 miles away in Thana. Within decades the Great Indian Peninsula Railway and the Bombay, Baroda and Central India (BB & CI Railway) had connected the city to the cotton-growing tracts of central India and Gujarat. By the end of the century, the railways were bringing commodities and migrants from all over the subcontinent to Bombay, thereby contributing both to the commercial life of the city and its increasingly cosmopolitan culture.

The railway companies also became important players in the urban property market, acquiring vast swathes of land for their complex operations. Moreover, they also built monumental stations ‘that would match the railway, civic, and administrative grandeur associated with them’. (Richards and MacKenzie, 1986: 70) These railway stations – like Bombay’s Victoria Terminus – became symbols of colonial modernity, with their ornate architecture, bustling stalls and the rapid movement of people and goods.
Equally significant was the role of the new steamships which expanded and speeded up the links between the major port cities of the subcontinent and the lands across the seas. The arrival of steamships in Indian waters not only dramatically reduced travelling times but also transformed the rhythms of sea voyages, as it now became possible for shipping vessels to operate independently of weather conditions. Moreover, it also
consolidated migrant flows and networks that connected Indian port cities to West Asia and East and South Africa, on the one hand, and to Southeast Asia, on the other. Like the railways, steamships too affected the built environment of these port cities, as new docks, wharves, warehouses and depots were built to handle the growing volume of cargo and passenger traffic that now passed through them.

The tramway represented another important mode of transport within cities. Horse-drawn trams first made their appearance in Bombay and Calcutta in the early 1870s. These gave way by the end of the century to electric tramways, with Madras becoming the first city in India to introduce the innovation (1895). As Stephen Hughes has pointed out, ‘By connecting up its constituent parts with a common and habitual movement of people, the tram helped to articulate the city as one publicly shared place like never before.’ (Hughes, 2006: 41) At the same time, these years also saw the appearance of privatised and elite modes of modern transport such as the motor car. In Bombay, car ownership increased five-fold between 1914 and 1924, with well over ten thousand vehicles in the city by the latter date, with important consequences for the way in which urban residents could now negotiate the street. (Hazareesingh, 2007: 64-70)

It was not only the technologies of mobility that symbolised urban modernity. In the late nineteenth century, cities like Bombay and Calcutta also became important industrial centres. Bombay’s Parsi businessmen established the city’s first cotton mills in the mid-nineteenth century, while Scottish entrepreneurs laid the foundations of Calcutta’s emergence as the bastion of the Indian jute industry.

Writing in 1863, Govind Narayan Madgaonkar, author of the first Marathi history of Bombay, described the sense of wonder that a visitor experienced on stepping into a cotton mill:

The astonishment that one felt on seeing the mill cannot be put into words. Where does one start? The structure was about four hundred hands long and about as broad. It is full of machines and wheels which are whirring incessantly. Men are not required to power these wheels, they rotate automatically. At one place, the cotton is carded and cleaned and all the dirt is removed. In another place, this cotton is converted into fine fibrils which are then spun into thick or thin threads in yet another place…If one thinks about it, these machines in Mumbai can produce in one day what a man needs fifty years to do. It is suggested that our readers ponder about the power of these machines. (Ranganathan, 2008: 209, 211)

Over the course of the following decades, these mills came to dominate the skyline of cities like Bombay and Calcutta. At the heart of the new industrial capitalist order that they inaugurated was a new regime of ‘clock time’, with its emphasis on regularity, uniformity and punctuality. As Sumit Sarkar has noted, ‘Through uniform office-routine, so different from the seasonal rhythms of the village, clock-time established its domination over life in the colonial metropolis: the flow of people into and away from the office-district…so crowded in the daytime but deserted at night.’ (Sumit Sarkar 1990: 105) Symbolic of this shift in the conceptions of time was the ubiquitous presence in cities across colonial India of the ‘clock tower’. 
It was in the colonial city, too, that modern technologies of communication, which enlarged social horizons and made possible new imaginings of the self, both individual and collective, were to have the greatest impact. Here, a key development was the rise of the printing press, which transformed urban public culture over the course of the nineteenth century. Though the printed book first made its appearance in India as early as the sixteenth century, it was only from the late eighteenth century onwards that printing presses began to proliferate in the subcontinent. An unlikely pioneer in this regard was James Augustus Hicky (1739-1802), who set up a printing press in Calcutta in 1780. Hicky, ‘a man with a colourful if ill-starred life’, embarked on the venture to pay off his numerous debts. The weekly newspaper that he brought out – The Bengal Gazette or
Calcutta General Advertiser – did not survive very long, but his example was quickly followed by others and very soon printing presses across urban India were churning out a steady stream of publications. (Sarkar, 1990: 128-9) Indeed, barely a decade after Hicky had set up his printing press, one European editor of a Calcutta-based journal was moved to remark:

In splendour London now eclipses Rome…and in similar respects, Calcutta rivals the head of empire. But in no respect can she appear so eminently so, as in her publications….If in Europe, the number of publications gives the ground to ratiocinate the learning and refinement of particular cities, we may place Calcutta in rank about Vienna, Copenhagen, Petersburg, Madrid, Venice, Turin, Naples or even Rome. (Sarkar, 1990: 128)

5. Rajabai Clock Tower, Bombay

Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rajabai-Tower.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rajabai-Tower.jpg)
By the end of the nineteenth century, the major colonial cities had a vibrant print culture, catering to a linguistically diverse and ever-growing Indian readership. The newspaper, in particular, became a familiar part of the urban landscape and served to construct the city as an object of public discourse. Moreover, it also democratised (in theory, if not in practice) access to ‘news’ in a way that was wholly unprecedented. Equally significant were the numerous periodicals and pamphlets that competed with each other in generating ideas, debates and opinions on issues ranging from the momentous to the mundane. But simultaneously, as Anindita Ghosh has pointed out, ‘The printing press unleashed a huge production of petty pamphlet literature – consisting of mythologies, fables, popular religious texts, farces, almanacs, sensational novels and the like – whose content was quite contrary to the dominant acceptable forms.’ (Ghosh, 2006: 107) Cumulatively, this torrent of publications was crucial to the making of a heterogenous public culture that was integral to the experience of urban modernity.

The emergence of new educational institutions within the urban context amplified the power of print in enlarging social horizons. In particular, once the debate about the future of India’s educational system was settled in favour of the ‘Anglicists’ as a consequence of the ‘Macaulay Minute’ of 1835, there developed a plethora of educational institutions in which the new Western knowledge was imparted. Major metropolises like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras stood at the apex of a reorganised educational system and possessed the most prestigious colleges for the study of the arts, medicine and law.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, urban public culture also began to register the effects of new forms of mass entertainment, most notably in the form of the cinema. Film production and exhibition had commenced in Bombay with the Lumiere screenings in 1896, just a year after they had been shown for the first time in Paris. Even though it did not displace theatre as the most popular mode of urban entertainment, the cinema came to symbolise ‘modernity’ because of its reliance on electric and mechanical technologies of movement as well as new structures of commodification. Cinema halls, in particular, were places where city-dwellers came to experience the thrills and pleasures of the modern. The most famous cinema halls were constructed on a grand scale, often in the ‘baroque’ style, and located in the heart of the urban central business district: the Fort area in Bombay, for instance, or Mount Road in Madras. But the significance of the cinema hall also lay in the fact that, like the new modes of public transportation, it too ‘opened up and institutionalised new kinds of public space, which allowed for greater mixing at close proximity among those of different castes, classes, and religious communities that would otherwise not normally interact.’ (Hughes, 2006: 40)

37.4 INDIAN ENGAGEMENTS WITH MODERNITY

The previous section highlighted some of the key features of urban modernity in colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But what was distinctive about India’s experience of urban modernity under colonial conditions and to what extent did Indians shape its trajectories? Furthermore, how did Indians respond to the profound, if unsettling, transformations unleashed by colonial modernity?

Historians have differed in their answer to these questions. In one view, the history of colonial India was framed as a transition from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’ (which was itself construed as a force that was diffused outwards from its origins in Western Europe).
From this perspective, scholars regarded modernity positively but saw the colonial state itself as incapable of carrying it through to its logical conclusion. Further, their accounts primarily focused on the response of educated Indians to the ‘modernizing’ forces emanating from the West. (See, for instance, the essays in Leach and Mukherjee, 1970)

A later generation of historians, largely influenced by the writings of Edward Said and Michel Foucault, took a more negative view of ‘modernity’ and saw it as an all-powerful discourse that imprisoned Indian intellectuals within its ‘totalising’ framework. Significantly, colonial dominance was seen to be most clearly reflected in the city and it was argued that their ‘perceived lack of agency’ within its confines meant that educated, middle-class Indians were unable to feel ‘at home’ within the city. It was for this reason too, some writers suggested, that the modern city was marginal to nationalist thought in India. (Chatterjee, 2004; see also, Prakash, 2002)

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to query these perspectives. To begin with, they have become skeptical of the view that modernity in the colonial context simply replicated developments that had occurred elsewhere. For instance, historians have shown how the social formation of the urban working classes in colonial India followed a distinctive logic that was not anticipated by the historical experience of the West. Notably, the Indian working classes continued to retain close links with the villages from which they had migrated to the city. This did not mean, however, that they were insufficiently ‘urban’ or that they lacked a ‘commitment’ to the industrial setting. On the contrary, it was precisely because they needed their urban jobs to sustain their village small holdings that these rural migrants were deeply attached to the city. At the same time, their village base served as an insurance against the vagaries of the urban labour market. Further, their rural connections were often crucial in helping migrants find work, credit and housing in the city. Thus, industrial capitalism in colonial India consolidated rural-urban ties, rather than dissolving them. (Chandavarkar, 1994)

Likewise, some historians have argued that the urban public sphere in the colonial context should not be seen ‘simply as a variation of the Western model’. Contrary to the Habermasian formulation, Neeladri Bhattacharya has recently noted, the public sphere in colonial India was neither ‘homogeneous’ nor a ‘unitary space’; instead, it was ‘deeply segmented’. Nor did debate and discussion within the Indian public sphere ‘necessarily end in consensus’. (Bhattacharya, 2005: 153-55) On the contrary, it frequently reaffirmed differences and produced intractable conflicts. Furthermore, within the urban public sphere in colonial India the languages of reason (and modernity) and custom (and tradition) became mutually imbricated. As Bhattacharya argues: ‘While reason was articulated through the language of tradition and discovered within tradition, tradition was perceived and appropriated through the framework of modern reason.’ (Ibid: 154)

Historians have also begun to point to the different ways in which ‘colonial modernity’ in the urban context was not simply a creation of the colonizers; it was actively shaped by different sections of Indian society. For instance, scholarly explorations of colonial architecture and urban development have highlighted the Indian contribution to the public spaces of these cities. Wealthy Indian merchants, keen to express their support for colonial ideals of ‘improvement’ and ‘progress’, contributed generously to the public architecture of the great Presidency capitals. In colonial Bombay, the munificence of leading Parsi businessmen in Bombay made possible many of the city’s major public buildings and monuments. Similarly, Delhi’s loyalist Hindu and Muslim businessmen made substantial financial contributions to the public buildings that were erected in that city in the two decades after 1857. (Gupta, 1998: 83-86)
But it was not simply rich Indians who helped to fashion the public spaces of colonial cities. A recent study has shown how the Parsi architect and engineer Khan Bahadur Muncherji Cowasji Murzban (1839-1917) was a crucial figure in the evolution of Bombay’s built environment. His contribution was two-fold. On the one hand, as an engineer in the Public Works Department Murzban was involved in the construction of some of Bombay’s most spectacular public buildings. On the other hand, inspired by traditions of British private philanthropy, Murzban also designed and built hospitals and housing settlements for the members of his own community. (Chopra, 2011: 73-116)

The public life of the colonial city was also shaped by a diverse range of individuals, classes and communities. We have already noted the role of wealthy Indian philanthropists in creating the public spaces of colonial cities. But by the end of the nineteenth century, it was the emergent Indian middle classes of the great Presidency capitals who began to exert a decisive influence on urban public life.

Print culture and Western education in particular not only fostered new kinds of social interaction and sociability among members of the internally diverse middle classes but also made possible their growing dominance within the urban public sphere. This took several forms. For instance, in every major colonial city there emerged newspapers that represented the views of the emergent Indian middle class on a range of civic matters. These newspapers paid close attention to the doings of their municipal authorities. They were especially quick to seize upon, and criticize, the privileges claimed by members of the British ruling elite with regard to the distribution of resources within the city.

Nationalist newspapers, in particular, tended to highlight such inequities in arguing vociferously for a greater say in the conduct of civic affairs. For instance, the Bombay Chronicle, founded in 1913 by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), became a vocal critic of the colonial administration during the First World War and focused on a range of pressing material issues that confronted the city’s residents. As Sandip Hazareesingh has shown, the paper ‘assumed the role of an active citizen seeking knowledge about, and answers to, the grave problems of urban life.’ (Hazareesingh, 2007: 177)

37.5 NEW ASSOCIATIONAL PRACTICES

Members of the educated Indian middle class also took the lead in forming a variety of voluntary associations that concerned themselves with the material issues of the urban civic arena. They established and ran schools, universities, libraries, hospices, co-operative credit societies and conducted relief work during calamities such as floods and famines. Furthermore, they drew upon both Western ideas of service and associational philanthropy as well as longstanding Indian traditions of seva (service) and dana (charity) in propagating ideals and practices of active citizenship, patriotic endeavour and ‘constructive nationalism’. (Watt, 2005) At the same time, these associations were also ‘a rhetorical platform for launching challenges to existing policies and making claims to resources and rewards controlled by the government.’ (Haynes, 1992: 155)

One of the most prominent voluntary associations in early-twentieth century India was the Social Service League. Established in March 1911 by prominent members of Bombay’s liberal Indian intelligentsia, the League sought to collect ‘social facts’ and discuss ‘social theories and social problems with a view to forming public opinion on questions of social service.’ By the end of the First World War, the League had become an important player in the civic arena, especially in matters pertaining to the lives of Bombay’s working classes. In particular, it campaigned for mass education, sanitary awareness and ‘social purity’; tried to raise public awareness about the importance and value of social service; and conducted relief work among the urban poor during
emergencies such as the influenza pandemic of 1918. Furthermore, the League became a vocal advocate of reforms in the sphere of local self-government and called for greater state investment in welfare activities that would bring about civic equity. (Kidambi, 2007: 203-34)

But the urban middle classes also engaged in forms of sociability that were less formal and structured than the kinds of associational activity discussed above. In late-nineteenth century Calcutta, for example, the new print culture—often centred on a periodical—opened up a social space for the more relaxed and informal middle-class ‘adda’, which soon became an integral part of the city’s _bhadralok_ culture. (Sarkar, 1997: 174-5; Chakrabarty, 2007: 180-213)

Equally, as Sumit Sarkar has noted, the social and civic activism of the Indian middle class also frequently ‘alternated with moods of self-critical satire, introspection and passivity.’ In particular, ‘A sense of moving forward in tune with the times was intermixed with evocations of Kali-yuga gloom.’ (Sarkar, 1990: 104) Sarkar argues that it was this tendency that accounts for the growing fascination of the late-nineteenth century Calcutta _bhadralok_ for the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the Dakshineshwar mystic.

In recent years, historians have also highlighted the role of the working classes in the making of urban public culture. Notably, they have documented how the world of print far from being the preserve of Anglophone Indian elites was shaped by the activities and aspirations of plebeian writers and readers. For instance, the ‘cheap and often shoddy books’ produced in the Bat-tala area in north Calcutta were testament ‘to a flourishing world of urban folk culture’ in that city. (Sarkar, 1990: 133-4; Ghosh, 2006: 107-51) Similarly, as A.R. Venkatachalapathy has shown, Madras had its Gujili Bazaar where booksellers sold ‘chapbooks, ballads, and a whole range of popular reading material…characterised by their poor quality of production (and) catering to the common folk.’ Gujili Bazaar thus ‘became the metaphor for a distinct kind of “low” culture, the “other” of respectable and honourable living as well as, by extension, publishing.’ (Venkatachalapathy, 2012: 138-9)

The plebeian classes also left their mark on urban public culture in other ways. A ubiquitous feature of working-class life in the city was the presence of numerous _akharas_ (wrestling clubs), whose activities ranged from cultivating the physical prowess of their working-class adherents to providing the necessary muscle power for rival parties during the periodic episodes of violence that swept up colonial cities. From the late nineteenth century onwards sections of the urban working classes also began to engage in ‘modern’ forms of associational activity, ranging from educational ventures to self-help societies. This trend intensified in the tumultuous years immediately after the end of the First World War, a period that saw a profusion of trade unions, charitable societies, reformist associations and volunteer corps among the urban poor. (Gooptu, 2001: 185-320)

Recent accounts have also begun to offer a more nuanced appraisal of the Indian responses to the changes associated with urban modernity. In particular, they have shown how these responses are not easily captured by analytical frameworks that counterpose ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’.

At one level, the technological innovations and institutional practices of modernity played a key role in the reimagining of ‘community’ and ‘tradition’ in colonial India. For instance, from the late nineteenth century onwards numerous castes and communities formed associations to make claims on the colonial state for recognition and resources. They also ‘published caste newspapers and histories, expanding the community audiences that would be receptive to critical reflections on community affairs.’ (Bhattacharya, 2005: 141)
As Sudipta Kaviraj has noted, the caste and community associations that developed in cities like Calcutta, Madras or Bombay ‘aspired to a certain kind of universal membership.’ Thus, ‘the Kayastha Sabha, a highly successful caste association, would not have relaxed its efforts at recruitment until the last Kayastha had joined its ranks; but by its very principles of membership, it could not be open to anyone else.’ In other words, such associations used ‘a strange complex of the opposite principles of universality of access and a particularity of membership.’ (Kaviraj, 2001: 311) Hence, in colonial India ‘the modern public was not one, singular and unitary, constituted of individuals who came together as anonymous beings whose social moorings were irrelevant, as equivalent citizens – an equivalence that reproduced in the public sphere the idea of universal man.’ (Bhattacharya, 2005: 141)

At another level, historians have also challenged the influential Weberian proposition that modernity is inevitably accompanied by ‘disenchantment’. As Michael Saler points out, ‘This view, in its broadest terms, maintains that wonders and marvels have been demystified by science, spirituality has been supplanted by secularism, spontaneity has been replaced by bureaucratization and the imagination has been subordinated by instrumental reason.’ (Saler, 2006: 692) By contrast, recent historical perspectives have emphasised the ways in which the material culture of modernity itself came to be invested with ‘enchanted’ meanings. ‘Enchantment’ – admittedly an ‘ambiguous term’ – refers in this context to the persistent sense of wonder and rapture in the face of the marvellous and the mysterious. (Ibid: 702)

In an interesting study of one such ‘economy of enchantment’ that developed among the Muslims of colonial Bombay in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nile Green suggests that ‘the conditions of industrial modernity did not necessarily lead to few “Reformist”, “uniform” or “globalized” religious forms any more than they favoured processes of rationalisation and disenchantment.’ (Green, 2011: 23) On the contrary, among the city’s diverse Muslim communities there flourished a ‘Customary Islam’, based on a variety of shrines, cults and miracle workers. As a result, ‘the growth of Bombay was not only coeval with train stations and factories but also with sites of the anti-scientific power associated with relics, rituals and holy men.’ (Ibid: 53) ‘For many of its Muslims, especially among the labouring classes,’ Green argues, ‘Bombay’s industrialisation was inseparable from the enchantment of its mills, stations and dockyards by the providers of religious services that ranged from supernatural medicines to social support networks and licit entertainments.’ (Ibid: 236)

### 37.6 SUMMARY

This Unit has tried to show how the fabric of urban life in colonial cities was transformed from the mid-nineteenth century by the rise of a global economic system based on industrial capitalism and its attendant technologies of power. Consequently, there developed in these cities a dense concentration of factories, commercial firms, western-educated local intelligentsias, ethnically diverse migrant communities and a vibrant public culture buoyed by a thriving print and associational culture as well as new forms of mass consumption and entertainment. But the experience of urban modernity that these cities generated, and the ways in which their Indian inhabitants responded to them, was neither a pale imitation of a Western original nor a radical manifestation of irreducible difference. Instead, urban modernity in the colonial context was simultaneously inscribed with the marks of similarity and difference both in relation to the antinomies of Western ‘modernity’ and Indian ‘tradition’.
37.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the markers of ‘modernity’ that are usually associated with the city.

2) In what ways did the colonial Indian cities embody the visible signs and symbols of modernity?

3) How did the concept of urban planning change during the colonial period?

4) What was distinctive about India’s experience of urban modernity under colonial rule? To what extent did Indians shape its trajectories?

5) Was ‘tradition’ usually swept away by the forces leashed by colonial modernity? Illustrate with at least two examples.

37.8 REFERENCES


