



Claiming the City

...As a matter of fact, the emergence of mass democracies in the advanced industrial countries of the West in the 20th century has produced a new distinction between the domain of theory built around the idea of the citizen and the domain of policy inhabited not by citizens but by populations. Unlike the concept of the citizen, the concept of population is wholly descriptive and empirical: it does not carry a normative burden. Populations are identifiable, classifiable and describable by empirical or behavioral criteria and are amenable to statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Unlike the concept of citizen which carries the ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state, the concept of population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their 'policies' - economic policy, administrative policy, law and even political mobilisation. Indeed, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, a major characteristic of the contemporary regime of power is a certain 'governmentalisation of the state'. This regime secures legitimacy not by the participation of citizens in matters of state but by claiming to provide for the well being of the population. Its mode of reasoning is not deliberative openness but rather an instrumental notion of costs and benefits. Its apparatus is not the republican assembly but an elaborate network of surveillance through which information is collected on every aspect of the life of the population that is to be looked after. It is not surprising that in the course of the present century, ideas of participatory citizenship that were so much a part of the Enlightenment notion of politics have fast retreated before the triumphant advance of governmental technologies that have promised to deliver more well-being to more people at less cost. Indeed, one might say that the actual political history of capital has long spilled over the normative confines of liberal political theory to go out and conquer the world through its governmental technologies.

In countries of Asia and Africa, where the career of the modern state has been foreshortened, ideas of republican citizenship have sometimes accompanied the politics of national liberation. But without exception, they have been overtaken by the developmental state which has promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reform. With varying degrees of success, and in some case of disastrous failure, the post-colonial states have deployed the latest governmental technologies to promote the well being of their populations, often prompted and aided by international and non-governmental organizations. In adopting these technical strategies of modernization and development, communities have often entered the field of knowledge about populations- as convenient descriptive categories for classifying groups of people into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic or electoral policy. In many cases, classificatory criteria used by colonial governmental regimes have continued into the post-colonial era, shaping the forms of both political demands and developmental policy. Thus, caste and religion in India, ethnic groups in South-east Asia and tribes in Africa have remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy. So much so that a huge ethnographic survey recently undertaken by a government agency in India has actually identified and described a total of exactly 4,635 communities that are supposed to comprise the population of that country.

I am convinced that the attempt by modern governmental technologies to classify populations into determinate and enumerable communities is a telling sign of the poverty of modern social theory. It is a commonplace in the descriptive ethnography of the non-Western world to find that the community is contextually defined, that its boundaries are fuzzy, that a particular community identification does not exhaust the various layers of the selfhood of a person, that it makes little sense to ask a community member how many of them there are in the world. And yet, it is this contextuality and fuzziness that legal-administrative classifications and statistical techniques of enumeration must erase in order to make populations amenable to governmental policy. What is lost in the process is the richness of meaning and the strategic flexibility afforded by the cultural repertoire of a people to handle social differences. This is the loss that writers such as Ashis Nandy bemoan. As I have said before, contemporary technologies of government regard communities as so much demographic material, to be manipulated instrumentally. They are not objects of philosophical and moral inquiry. In theory, to put it, if I may, in a nutshell - capital and community are antithetical...

Partha Chatterjee, "Community in the East"
Economic and Political Weekly, February 7, 1998





“...The Indian city has re-emerged in public consciousness not as a new home from within the boundaries of which one has the privilege of surveying the ruins of one's other abandoned homes. It has re-emerged as the location of a homelessness forever trying to reconcile non-communitarian individualism and associated forms of freedom with communitarian responsibilities, freely or involuntarily born. Apparently, the city of the mind does not fear homelessness; it even celebrates homelessness. However, that merely camouflages the fear of a homelessness, which can be cured only by a home outside home. Literature and serious cinema handle this issue as an inner conflict that defines a crisis of personal identity. Popular cinema sees it as a playful oscillation between the private and the public, the familial and the neighbourly, the rustic and the urban. The mother who is not a real mother but is more than one, the friend who becomes a brother and dies to prove the point, the self-destructive urchin in love with a millionaire's daughter – in popular cinema, these are not merely anxiety-binding technologies of the self. They supply a cartography of a home away from home in a culture where homelessness, despair and the psychology of the outsider are all relatively new states of mind...”

Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City*



Tees Hazari

(tr. *That of the Thirty Thousand*)

Driving past the Inter State Bus Terminus one winter afternoon, Amirchand the old auto driver turned to me and said, "In the time which I can remember, this was a huge park where we all played, and rested ... And now we are passing Tees Hazari. Did you know that 30,000 people were killed here once?"

A friend of mine had only recently bemoaned to me the loss of 30,000 mango trees from Tees Hazari.

Today Tees Hazari contains the District Courts. Maybe 30,000 supplicate everyday.