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# Urban Theo-topias: Religious Claims to Space and the Language of Administrative Rationality in the New City of Gurugram, India

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## Abstract

The city of Gurugram, the administrative headquarters of a district of the same name, is located in the state of Haryana. Gurugram adjoins the southern borders of Delhi and has been the site of intense urban development over the past two decades. Rapid urbanisation has attracted a variety of workers from different parts of the country. Unlike Hindus, however, the majority of the Muslim migrants to the city tend to be poor and unskilled. In recent times, there has been a great deal of public debate and conflict over Muslims offering namaaz (prayer) at different public places – such as streets and parks – in the

city. Both official and private pronouncements regarding public namaaz is couched in the language of urban administrative rationality: viz., the 'proper' uses of public land and religious practice as a possible source of permanent illegal occupation of public land. This article explores the manner in which specific discourses of planning and administration in Gurugram – despite their 'neutral' vocabulary – become aligned to political and cultural agendas of urban 'theo-topias', viz., the processes of producing religion-specific spaces. It also outlines relationships between class, religious identity, the state and private capital that produce new ideas of 'the people'.

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## Focus, applied concept and method

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### Introduction

Processes of urbanisation – forms of governance, transport, residence, leisure and commerce, for example – have particular effects upon the social life of cities. Religion as a form of social life also takes on specific forms in its urban incarnation. This article explores urban religious ecologies in India in order to situate religious practices and practitioners within the broader social, political and economic networks that both influence as well as are influenced by the realm of the 'sacred'. In this way, through exploring relationships between the multiple systems – religious and the a-religious – that constitute urban life, the article also addresses the theme of 'urban heterarchies'. In particular, it explores the shifting grounds of power – and the refashioning of religious and civic identities – that act upon, as well as are formed by, urban processes.

The Indian context of urbanisation is particularly important as, '[t]he urban population growth of 91 million between [the] 2001 and 2011 [censuses] is for the first time higher than the absolute rural growth' (Pradhan 2017: 64). This is a most striking change over the

years when the first census was carried out in 1872. The focus of the article is on the National Capital Region (NCR) that consists of Delhi and parts of the surrounding states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana. The National Capital Region, with a population of around 25 million, is experiencing intense urbanisation and is an economically vibrant region that attracts migrants from around the country.

As a great deal of scholarship on urban studies indicates, the mainstay of scholars working on the city has been the nature of inequality, collective action, politics and violence (see Patel and Deb 2006, for example). Even those volumes dedicated to uncovering the city's cultural life have tended to ignore religion, focusing on literary and intellectual culture (Patel and Thorner 1996) or cinema (Mazumdar 2007). Studies that take into account the palpability of the sacred are perforce those that focus on religious cities or pilgrimages (Eck 1982; Parry 1994; Sax 1990).

This key focus of the article is on the ways in which new forms of urbanism are the grounds for changing meanings regarding religious identity, class, relationships between the state and private capital, the nature of the state itself and ideas of the 'ordinary' citizen. My focus is on the city of Gurugram (earlier known as Gurgaon) which is the administrative headquarter of the district of the same name in Haryana.<sup>[1]</sup> The district consists of two quite distinct localities: newer parts consisting of gated residential enclaves, shopping malls and commercial precincts that have been privately developed since the early 1980s by large real estate companies – such as Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) and Ansals – and older, government planned areas. Given the dominance of the DLF corporation (founded in 1947), those parts of Gurugram planned and developed by it are frequently referred to as DLF City.

This article focuses on two localities, DLF City and another developed by Ansals. This focus derives from specific recent events that concern conflicts over the uses of public spaces for *namaaz*, or Muslim prayer. 'New' Gurugram has seen the influx of new populations and economic activities in what was primarily an agricultural hinterland. Frequently referred to as the 'Millennium City', Gurugram is now famous for its gated residential communities, a privately owned metro rail system (built by the DLF corporation) and offices of Fortune 500 companies (Brosius 2010; Srivastava 2015; Oldenburg 2019).

The article explores the ways in which discourses, organisation and regulation of religious practice intersect with the multiple processes of urbanisation of very recent origin. This discussion is not primarily about religious beliefs that just happen to be practiced in an urban context. Rather, it is concerned with the ways in which the urban processes are the grounds upon and through which such beliefs come to be formulated, reformulated, produced and practiced. In this way, the article points to the connection between the nature of the city – its politics, spaces, administrative procedures and contestations – and its impact on the idea of the sacred. What is the nature of the sacred that emerges from the crucible of the urban?

I seek to explore the rise of new religious sensibility and the public visibility of religious idioms as an aspect of (or contiguous to) multiple processes of capitalism rather than as a reaction to (or 'retreat' from) the latter (see for example, van Wessell 2004 on the resort to 'tradition' in India, and Rudnyckij 2018 on 'Islamic finance'). The discussion hews to the position that 'religious moralities have been deployed in new ways *in* the market' (Osella

and Rudnycky 2013: 10; emphasis added) as ‘a flexible means’ of engaging with ‘market logics’ (Osella and Rudnycky 2013: 20) that have a great deal to tell us about contemporary relations of power and identity.

However, while drawing upon scholarship that investigates the life of religion in cities, this discussion has a very specific focus. It explores ‘the ways in which socio-spatial imaginaries’ at a site of new and intense urbanism in India are informed through *specific* ‘religious practices and symbolic productions of communities’ (Hancock and Srinivas 2008: 619). These, the article argues, produce urban spaces that, notwithstanding their location within ‘secular’ processes – the trans-national capitalism that has produced Gurugram – are deeply implicated in the making of *majoritarian* religious identities in India. Through these arguments, I am interested in exploring the overlaps between the apparently religious and the a-religious that also tell us something about the ways in which the urban (as opposed to the rural) cannot simply be seen as a space for secularised sensibilities. Finally, the discussion explores the ways in which majoritarian processes and relationships between the state, private capital and non-state actors – such as middle-class resident’s association – combine to produce ideas regarding forms of citizenship most suitable to new urbanism.

The analytical part of the article is organised around three vignettes concerning publicly performed religious activities in DLF City. These will serve as entry points to the broader discussion concerning relations between city-making and the making of religious life. Acts of ‘everyday religion’, as Chaudhury (2021) points out, contribute to ‘*place-making*, or the continuous claiming or appropriation of city spaces through material signs and tokens’ (Chaudhury 2021: 4, emphasis in the original).

Finally, in this context, a brief note regarding the distinction between ‘city’ and ‘urbanity’. If we understand ‘city’ as shorthand for a number of technical and administrative processes – populations densities, sources of employment, governance mechanisms, for example – that characterise certain localities and ‘urban’ as a particular kind of disposition, then this article is about the relationship between the two. Cities may or may not produce ‘the mental life of the metropolis’ (Simmel 1971: 325) but they are invariable sites of tension between them. An exploration of this tension – ‘do cities produce urbanism?’ – is an implicit aim in the discussion that follows.

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## State of the art

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## The Anthropology of Space and Place

This discussion proceeds from an *anthropological* understanding of spatiality as the cultural and social product of human action upon the physical environment. The ‘spatial dimensions of cultural beliefs and practices have always held interest for anthropologists’ and the ‘notion that all behavior is located and constructed in space’ (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 1) is fundamental to theorisations within the discipline. Anthropological understanding of space differs markedly from, say, geographical conceptions. Hence, irrespective of its historical trajectory (colonial, anti-colonial, post-colonial),

anthropology's unremitting focus on what humans do in and to their environment has contributed towards avoiding 'an essentialist view' (Hubbard et al. 2005: 13) that frequently characterised perspectives from geography. Within the latter, 'space is effectively reduced to the essence of geometry, is adopted so that dimensions and contents of space are unquestionably understood as being natural and given' (Hubbard et al. 2005: 13).

There are multiple, though not always explicit, traditions of theorising space in anthropological writings.<sup>[2]</sup> Anthropology's historical roots lie in studying the 'small scale', most usually family life, neighbourhoods, religious and life-cycle processes and village activities. However, in much of this analysis, there is also discussion about the larger spaces within which the smaller ones are nestled. Hence, within such discussion, there are concurrent strands that position the 'local' within wider spatial registers. These are also imagined as registers of sociality. The following excerpt from MN Srinivas's *The Remembered Village* (1976) nicely captures anthropology's spatial preoccupations as well as the emphasis on its 'always already' social nature.

An important social process in Mysore, if not in South India as a whole, is the urbanisation of Brahmins. This process has yet to be studied, and its many consequences and implications understood. It has gone on for a hundred years or so, and as with several other processes, its tempo has continued to accelerate since World War I. As a traditionally literary caste, whose members were frequently economically better off than many others, Brahmins were among the first to become aware of the opportunities opened up to those proficient in English. The new schools and colleges were located in the cities and those who wanted education had to migrate to them from their villages. Urbanisation gradually spread to the other rural castes. I may add that this picture of urbanisation is somewhat oversimplified inasmuch as, traditionally, cities in Mysore included a number of non-Brahmin trading, artisan and servicing castes. Besides, the development of Bangalore, the biggest city in the State, involved the immigration of a number of Hindu castes, Muslims, Christians and others from neighbouring linguistic areas, in particular, Tamil Nadu. But it is not necessary for me here to consider urbanisation in all its complexity, and my statement that Brahmins were among the first to urbanise and that many other rural castes followed them later, remains broadly true (Srinivas 1976: 5).

Srinivas phrase, 'the urbanisation of Brahmins', succinctly captures the dominant tendency in thinking about space/place in anthropology. First, it points to both spaces (the city) and identities as mutually constitutive. And second, it reaches beyond the anthropological small-scale to link it to new spaces that encompass it; villages and cities are intertwined and each space carries the marks of those who occupy it.

The social life of domestic spaces has been another particular area of anthropological concern. The ways in which the spaces are experienced through human sensory processes has been an important concern of writings on intimate spaces such as households. This is well captured, for example in anthropologist TN Madan's conception of 'moral spaces'.

The sentiments of love, sharing, and solidarity that characterize interpersonal relations in a well integrated household are, in the Pandit's estimation, the highest ideals of human conduct, the acme of morality. The house is loved and valued because of the sanctity and the sentiments associated with it and not merely because of its material value. It is regarded as a moral space par excellence. (Madan 2011: 9)

When analysing locations of habitation and traversal, anthropologists also recognise that 'moral maps' are intertwined with 'mental maps' of territories and that there is no territory that is objectively 'out there'. In a discussion of how language produces images of landscapes among the Wagiman indigenous people of northern Australia, Harvey points out that 'Wagiman discussions of the landscape are most straightforwardly analysed by positing that Wagiman speakers have mental maps of Wagiman country' (Harvey 2022: 306). In other contexts, mental maps of space also act as representations of social arrangements. Speaking of the Dayak longhouses of Borneo, Christine Halliwell points out that,

For the Dayaks of Gerai, as for most Dayak groups, household autonomy is a central cultural value, and there is no doubt that to the Gerai (as elsewhere) certain features of longhouse structure are linked to this fact. Yet, examination of the spatial arrangements within the Gerai longhouse does not support a view of the Gerai household as an isolated and inward-turning entity. Rather, it indicates its embeddedness in the larger longhouse community of which it is a part. Emphasis on the apartment's orientation widthwise as part of a single longhouse structure should not be taken as a denial of its lengthwise identity as a separate unit within that structure. The apartment is both of these at the same time, just as its member household is both autonomous and yet highly dependent on the longhouse community of neighbours. (Halliwell 1992: 190)

Spaces become social through inextricable entanglements with the processes, lifecycles and identities of human existence. Perhaps the most salient everyday expressions of space lie in the symbolisms of the body. There is an extensive corpus of anthropological writings that has mined the idea that '[c]ultural groups often draw upon the human body as a template for social and human relations' and that 'spatial and temporal processes are encoded with body symbolism' (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 4).<sup>[3]</sup> Body symbolism, as anthropologists have also observed, stretches beyond what bodies do at any *one* place (or space). In some contexts, such as among the Ongee hunter and gatherer community of the Little Andaman, spaces are imagined through 'a language of movements' (Pandya 1990: 787). 'Movement', Pandya further notes, 'connects simple coordinates through a path of trajectory and, more important, ascribes to space positive or negative value' (Pandya 1990: 788). In this way, their 'spatial categories are not given per se, but rather emerge through the practice of movement' (Pandya 1990: 792).

More recently, movement engendered through the conjunction of processes that characterise urbanisation and globalisation have become a particular focus of anthropological interest in the social production of space. The life of cities in an age of intense mobility within and across national borders presents novel contexts of analysis, those that did not exist in the same way before the advent of the contemporary phase of globalisation (Appadurai 1990). Understanding the nature of new spaces and their

sensibilities requires concurrent attention to multiple registers of analysis – class, gender, subalternity, consumerism, the national and the trans-national, to name just a few. This has led to important methodological and disciplinary innovations.

Contemporary – industrial, consumerism, late-capitalist – imaginations of space call for new ways of mapping mental maps of new territories habitation, leisure and commerce. In China, for example, the rise of gated residential communities leads one observer to think of the ways in which ‘the moral ordering of urban spaces is a key component in shaping and structuring territoriality and social-spatial exclusion’ in Shanghai (Pow 2007: 541). And that,

By inscribing and mapping the moral-cultural logic onto urban spaces, residents of gated communities thus attempt to 'soften' and 'naturalise' exclusionary territorial landscape by reconstituting it as the pristine civilised spaces befitting Shanghai's 'cultivated' middle class. (Pow 2007: 541)

The contemporary era is characterised by ‘(trans-) national spaces of belonging’ (Pow 2011: 390) and spatiality is derritorialised.

Through the intensification of the ethnographic focus on a significant site of contemporary transnationalism – the city – the anthropological gaze has considerably shifted from its traditional ‘village’ focus. Ethnographers seek to make sense of the making of urban spaces through their entanglements with multiple human sensoria and identities. Urban spaces as embodied presence – in the literal, bodily, sense referred to above – continue to inform some of the most interesting anthropological analyses of cities. Madhura Lohokare (2017), for example, explores the conjunction of consumer cultures, masculinities, caste and the visual media to explore relationships between these and the production of spaces through specific objects in the western Indian city of Pune. The objects that mould the nature of spaces are, in this case, ‘flex boards’: hoardings used to advertise a variety of cultural and religious events as well acting as publicity materials for a variety of political figures. A significant aspect of the boards are the images they carry of subaltern – non-upper caste and non-middle class – men. And in this,

The flexes and the images of the young men that they carry, disrupt continually [the] hegemonic narratives of neoliberal citizenship. They do so by physically inserting themselves in the city’s public spaces: bodies which do not conform to the upper-caste, middle-class aesthetic and the latter’s modes of consumption. In doing so, the flex boards in the public spaces of the city also become subversive spaces where a class and caste specific gendered masculine self is imagined and performed. [...] However, the relationship between objects and spaces is not a straightforward one. And, [...] while claiming the city’s material (and social) spaces for representing themselves, men behind (and on) the flexes also end up masculinizing the city’s spaces acutely in discursive terms, rendering the latter unequally available to women, especially lower-caste/working-class women of the city. (Lohokare 2017: 87)

Senses of space are, then, just that: senses, deriving from a variety of contingent human processes, identities and objects. In as much as this article is an exploration of the irreducibly human nature of space, it takes its inspiration from anthropological writings that explore sensibilities of space as those of the human imagination.

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## Religion in the City

Notwithstanding broad pronouncements regarding the connection between modernity, urbanisation and secularisation (Chaudhury 2021), the persistence of religiosity within urban life has stimulated an important body of new scholarship. And, though the specific nature of modern urban religiosity has only recently begun to be taken seriously, this fills an important gap in our understanding of quotidian religiosities. Hence, Smriti Srinivas's (2001) analysis of the cultural practices such as the performance of the *Karaga* festival in Bangalore, dedicated to the Draupadi – a key female figure in the Hindu epic Mahabharat – urges us to understand the unfolding processes of globalisation in frames beyond its economistic dimensions. Narayanan (2015) in her study of Jaipur looks at how analytical concepts drawn from religion define local sense of place and identity and may fruitfully be employed in framing sustainable urbanisation. And, focusing on the sacred city of Puttaparthi in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, Tulasi Srinivas points out that,

There are two different strands to this built world—the material (the bricks and mortar buildings)—with its architecture, functional spaces, and aesthetics—and the symbolic—with its interpretative and affective components. (Srinivas 2010: 303)

And that,

As the material world grows and changes, the concrete place helps to shape the ontological objectives of the Sai devotees, and as the symbolic interpretation shifts, it helps to situate the place and give it significance, recasting the central axis between agency and *structure*. (Srinivas 2010: 303; original emphasis)

Across a wide range of cultural contexts, then, scholars are seeking to combine the study of religion and urbanism in order to understand those specific dimensions of city-life whose inflections produce the peculiarly urban dimensions of the sacred. Beyond South Asia, for example, Lim Khok Gee (2011) points out that '[while] Singapore's public housing estates are designed to be a secular modernist environment that discourages the emergence of religious or ethnic enclaves', the religious sect of 'Yiguan Dao is able to circumvent this problem through its territorial practices' whereby 'the establishment of a Buddha Hall in the home of ... a member transforms the house itself into a temple and a sacred place' (Khok Gee 2011: 12–13).

In China, forms of urban religiosity are related to new forms of aspirations among the youth. Hence, 'For the Western-oriented Chinese, Christianity is not something traditional, conservative, or restrictive. Rather, it is perceived as progressive, liberating, modern, and universal' (Yang 2005: 425). However, given the state's hostility to religion, particularly those perceived as proselytising and evangelical, new converts must find innovative ways of meeting their co-religionists. In this context, Yang reports that McDonald's restaurants in many large cities have become important meeting places that serve to escape state surveillance. Further,



McDonald's and Christianity share similar symbolic meanings to the educated young Chinese: modernity and cosmopolitanism. For the Chinese, eating at McDonald's is a sign of being in tune with modern culture and offers a sense of connecting with the outside, Western world. Similarly, believing in Christianity is accepting a universal religion that has been predominant in the modern West. Both McDonald's and Christianity offer a sense of individual freedom, civility, responsibility, and status for the yuppies in urban China. Moreover, both have become accessible during the process of China's market transition and global integration. (Yang 2005: 437)

Andrew Alan Johnson's (2012) research on 'urban Thai spirit cults' also illustrates why the topic of urban religiosities hold significant insights into not just the contemporary nature of religious belief, but also several other aspects of social and cultural life. Johnson investigates the life-worlds of workers in the urban informal economy whose 'fears concerning their own vulnerable position and the likelihood of utter collapse should a certain misfortune ... befall them were resolved briefly by placing such disaster within the purview of urban spirits of chance and accident' (Johnson 2012: 767). That is to say, the political economy of the city that produces economic and social marginality also gives rise to specific religious practices that, it is hoped, will alleviate the conditions of urban precarity. Hence, 'marginal individuals attempt to interact with the ultimate causes of their economic and social precariousness via... "naming" misfortune as something locatable and with which communication is possible' (Johnson 2012: 767).

In south Asia, the modern history of engagements between religion and city is a long and complex one. The *regulation* of religion, for example, was a particular preoccupation during the colonial period. This was part of the broader history of colonial discourse – primarily focused on relations between Hindus and Muslims – that both recorded as well as *constructed* (Thapar, Mukhia and Chandra 1977; Pandey 1994; Varghese 2016) differences and hostilities between different religious communities. These were of concern as they were seen to perpetually threaten processes of administration and governance. During the colonial period, the 'religious question' ranged across a number of contexts, producing ideas about belief, practice and identity that continue to play out in the contemporary period. These included debates regarding the 'authenticity' of Hindu traditions such as *Sati* (widow burning; Mani 1993); the creation of new spaces of processions and rituals that, in turn, produced religious publics and conflicts (Freitag 1989); and, notwithstanding its 'largely fictitious' provenance (Dalmia and von Stietencron 1995: 21), the incorporation of a monolithic Hindu identity within anti-colonial nationalism.

Another important context concerns the voluminous body of scholarly literature on 'religious fundamentalism' in India. It includes writings on colonial history (Pandey 1994), historiography and 'communalism' (Thapar, Mukhia and Chandra 1977), Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot 1996; Nandy, Trivedy and Mayaram 1995), gender and 'communalism' (Chakravarty 1998; Sarkar and Butalia 1995), religious violence (Brass 2003), and the media and the rise of 'Hindu' programming (Mitra 1993; Rajagopal 2001). However, more specifically, in relation to urban life, the management of relations between different religious communities was of concern all over South Asia. Michael Roberts (1990) writes of Sri Lanka during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that in the minds of colonial administrators, 'the multi-religious environment of towns' (Roberts 1990: 248) necessitated forms of regulation that were not seen to be necessary in rural environments.

In urban areas, for example, the colonial authorities granted licenses for public religious activities that involved musical accompaniment, with a clause that called for 'The cessation of music and drumming in front of other religious sites' as this was seen to generate 'confrontation or riotous disturbances' (Roberts 1990: 250). A significant consequence of attempts by the British to regulate religious interactions across urban spaces, Roberts suggests, was the heightened 'competition [between different religious communities] for symbolic space' (Roberts 1990: 277). This, in turn, *created* new forms of hostilities.

In the contemporary period, and in relation to urban studies in particular, it has been suggested that the 'neglect' of religion as 'an important aspect of the urban landscape demonstrates the radically secular perspective of urban theorists' (van der Veer 2015: 6; a similar point is made by Hancock and Srinivas 2008). The lack of attention to 'religious spatiality' in scholarship on cities, van der Veer (2015: 6) goes on to suggest, maybe due to the fact that, frequently, 'the Euro-American urban context' (6) is made to stand for a global one. Keeping these caveats in mind, this article explores the ways in which, at a new site of urbanisation in India, 'urban politics and governance are often about religious boundaries and processions' (van der Veer 2015: 11).

The 'secularist presumptions' that Hancock and Srinivas (2008: 620) suggest lie at the heart of the relative neglect of scholarly explorations of the religious life of cities were also significant aspects of nationalist politics in the Indian context. Within this context, cities were imagined as harbingers of a post-religious modernity where religion – a perennial threat to modernist imaginations of the nation-state – would become confined to the private sphere. The post-colonial metropolis as the site of an areligious modernity was a key theme in a number of contexts.

In his 1932 autobiography, Bipin Chandra Pal (1858–1932), a leading figure in the nationalist movement, was to specifically commend the role of urban institutions – such as dining arrangements for recently arrived rural students known as 'messes' – that, he suggested, were crucial in moderating 'Hindu orthodoxy' (Pal 1932/1973: 159) and preparing the way for modern subjectivity. This also echoed in the thoughts of the founders of the famous boarding school, the Doon School (established 1935), that was at heart of producing several generations of post-colonial elites. The school was consciously imagined as replicating an urban milieu where "Boys from all parts of the country, from all castes and religions mix together and lose their regional and religious identities" (quoted in Srivastava 1996: 408). The putative threat to the 'essentially' secular character of the city was frequently conveyed in alarmist tones, such as by the author of *The Bombay Citizenship Series* (1948) who noted that the villager migrants brought with them 'primitive mental condition' (Bulsara 1948: 19).

A mid-twentieth century experiment in urbanism provides another example of the modernist preoccupation with the city as a site of a-religious modernity or, at least, a space where religious activity could be sequestered from 'secular' concerns. I refer to the construction of 'steel towns' in India. We might usefully think of this activity as one informed by specific ideas about the making of the 'ideal' selfhood of post-colonial life.

From the late 1950s, the Indian state undertook construction of a number of industrial townships in different – usually economically underdeveloped – areas of the country that were intended to be 'exemplary national spaces of the new India' (Roy 2007: 134). The

townships of Rourkela (Orissa state), Bhilai (Madhya Pradesh), Durgapur (West Bengal) and Bokaro (Bihar) thus came into being. Located within the larger framework of centralised economic development (most significantly manifested through the Russian-inspired Five-Year Plans), the townships were the state's attempts at *post-colonial* modernity where the modern citizen would work and live in an environment that 'proclaimed the birth of the sovereign nation' (Roy 2007: 138). Hence, 'apart from innovations in urban design' (Roy 2007: 143), the thinking behind steel towns also addressed itself to the possibilities of engineering *new* 'forms of subjectivities, practices, and social relations' (Roy 2007: 143) that would distinguish these settlements from the 'backwardness' of their immediate localities, as well as the 'stasis' afflicting national life: they were to be the spatialised models of a new national culture. A significant aspect of the idea of steel cities concerned the idea that – just as Bipin Chandra Pal was to also suggest – spaces influence subjectivity. The spatiality of steel cities – with clear demarcations between spaces for education, commerce, industry, administration *and* religious practice – was meant to suggest that religious and non-religious lives must be kept separate and that it was this aspect that represented (or, *should* represent) ideal post-colonial life. In subsequent years, as Roy (2007) also points out, steel towns did not live up to the promise of the kind of modernity that they were expected to produce. Of greater relevance, however, is the unfolding narratives of citizenship, the state and religiosity that link steel cities to contemporary spatial transformations such as those in Gurugram.

To return to the main discussion of the article, I seek to explore the 'urban performative complex' (S. Srinivas 2001: 67) that is produced out of 'multi-centered network of sites of locational sacrality and the sacrality of urban sprawl that links spatial arenas, social constituencies and civic history'. This, as Srinivas further adds, produces 'metropolitan sacrality' (2001: 96). In 'Postliberalization Bangalore', for example, religious gurus 'whose projects are rooted in techniques of individualized selfhood... court new professionals and techno-centric elites' (S. Srinivas 2018: 17). And 'these new gurus attract the attention of real-estate developers constructing spaces for new lifestyles, dream homes, and emerging constituencies on the shifting peripheries of Bangalore' (S. Srinivas 2018: 17).

An analysis of Indian cities, notwithstanding the 'secularist' impulse within urban studies, is incomplete without an understanding of their religious spatiality. This relates to the ways in which religious practices and beliefs play out over specific spaces, are entangled in apparently civic processes and are both influenced by as well shape the making of urban lives and identities. An exploration of the 'sacred moral geography' of cities (T. Srinivas 2010: 325) requires, then, engagements with 'urban spirituality' (Gupta 2021 167) that takes account of the multiple registers of contemporary life. These include religious claims upon a variety of spaces, how the state might 'weigh these alternative claims to public space' (Gupta 2021 173) and the intricate ways in which the apparently secular processes of urban living, administration and governance become entwined and infused with sectarian attitudes (see also Gold 2015). Speaking of African cities, Dilger et al. point out that 'people's religiously mediated affective and emotional states cannot be thought of independently of the social relations, material infrastructure, and configurations of power that have structured urban life in and beyond Africa over the last decades' (Dilger et al. 2020: 4). The discussion of this article shares this perspective through seeking to locate quotidian engagements with religious phenomena beyond the realms of religion.

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## Historical and spatial exposition, agents

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### City and Religion: Three Vignettes from Gurugram

On April 20, 2018, a large number of Muslim men were offering *namaaz* – prayer – in a vacant plot of land in the so-called sector 53 in Gurugram. Residential areas are designated as ‘sectors’ in government planning documents and many still contain lands that are yet to be filled with buildings. *Namaaz* performed in an open space has been a common affair in many parts of Gurugram. However, on this occasion, as the worshippers offered Friday prayer, they were disrupted by members of a group known as the *Sanyukt Hindu Sangharsh Samiti* (SHSS, The United Hindus Campaign Committee). Soon after, the police registered a case against six men belonging to the organisation. On the following Monday, the SHSS Campaign Committee organised a demonstration, seeking to quash the case against its members and delivered a petition to the Chief Minister of Haryana state, demanding a ban on *namaaz* on public land in all parts of Gurugram. These, the petition noted, were pretexts to illegally occupy public land and convert it into Muslim places of worship. It further noted that the Muslim worshippers had shouted ‘anti-India’ and ‘pro-Pakistan’ slogans following the prayers.

A month later, when another group gathered for *namaaz* at a space near the Sahara shopping mall in DLF City, it was confronted by a significant police presence and asked to disband. The Sahara mall is located on the Mehrauli-Gurugram Road, a major thoroughfare that links Gurugram to Delhi. The mall is one of several on that stretch of the road and sits alongside gated residential communities, smaller independent shops and an old village – Chakkarpur – that has now become surrounded by the new urban developments. Many properties in Chakkarpur are owned by erstwhile farming and landholding families who have constructed a variety of tenement housing for migrant working-class populations. These have come to Gurugram from different parts of India and work in the locality as cleaners, maids, driver, shop assistants and in industrial and commercial establishments. There is an open space next to the mall on which a *namaaz* had been performed for the past four years. On 4 May, according to media reports, when worshippers gathered at the spot for prayer, they were confronted by a significant police presence:

As some men started to lay their plastic prayer mats on the ground in anticipation of the prayers, three cars packed with men pulled in at the spot. These were Hindu vigilantes who then attempted to storm the area, said Khan, a final-year polytechnic student who helps his older brother at his iron welding shop in Chakkarpur, Gurgaon. They were stopped by the police, said Khan, a migrant from Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh.

(No *namaaz* in public spaces: Muslims find it difficult to follow Khattar’s advice to pray in mosques (scroll.in, 7 May 2018 (<https://scroll.in/article/878081/pray-in-mosques-why-gurugrams-muslims-might-not-be-able-to-follow-the-haryana-cms-advice>), accessed 15 December 2020.)

Subsequently, the Haryana Chief Minister released a statement: 'I believe [he said] that Namaaz should indeed be offered – but in mosques, at Eidgah, and other designated places' (Scroll.in, 7 May 2018).

Muslim prayer is not, however, the only public religious activity that occurs in Gurugram. From July to August, many parts of North India are witness to the *Kanwariya* pilgrimage activity that relates to the worship of the god Shiva. Pilgrims travel from their hometowns and villages, collect water from the river Ganges and bring it back to their local Shiva temples. The water is carried in containers that are slung on shoulder contraptions that are known as *kanwars*. From being a relatively small-scale affair, over the past decade or so, the pilgrimage has grown to one that involves several million participants (Singh 2017). Also, increasingly, not all pilgrims walk the entire route – distances vary but stretch over hundreds of kilometres – and many combine walking with travel in small trucks.

Tented encampments are set up along the various pilgrimage routes. These serve as night shelters and offer food, sleeping and toilet facilities. The camps are sponsored by a variety of bodies such as market-traders organisations; village groups; urban residents welfare associations and private businesses. They are also sponsored by caste specific associations, including Dalit or lower-caste groups.

The camps (known as *shivirs* in Hindi) are usually on public land and there is state support in building boundary walls, hiring tents and beds and regular spraying of disinfectants. One camp – located on the borders of Delhi and Haryana – that was part of the fieldwork on which this article is based, was established 15 years ago.<sup>[4]</sup> When I visited this *shivir* in 2019, it was guarded by the para-military Border Security Force (BSF) as well as police personnel. The organisers mentioned that this was because of rumours of a 'terror threat'. The police play a significant role in the organisation of pilgrimage activity, including creating safe passageway for the pilgrims along busy roads and highways and directing traffic around the pilgrim routes.

My final vignette regarding public religiosity comes from the prominent gated community of Birmingham Gardens (name changed) in DLF City. The Residents Welfare Association (RWA) of Birmingham Gardens organises a wide variety of community events, of which celebrations of Hindu festivals such as Diwali and Holi figure prominently. The RWA also organises Christmas and consumer goods fairs, the latter sponsored by private companies displaying their products. Multiple worlds – religious, national and transnational – lie within the gates.

Janmashami – the festival that celebrates the birth of Krishna – is a particular prominent annual event at Birmingham Gardens. Through an arrangement brokered by the RWA, since 2008, it has been organised by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).<sup>[5]</sup> Typically, celebrations begin with a *bhajan* (prayer song) by a group of ISKCON devotees who sit on a large stage that faced several rows of chairs.<sup>[6]</sup> A powerful sound system ensures that the singing reaches all parts of the complex. To the right of the stage, there is a large screen and a laptop and video projector are used to project swirling colour images onto the screen. A group of women begin to dance in an empty space in front of the stage. It is an improvised performance that follows ISKCON 'street dance' pattern seen in many western cities. A cinema screen displays graphics of flying machines, flaming arrows, a twirling globe and a variety of psychedelic animation and the ceremony builds to

a crescendo. It concludes with an *arti* (lamp) ceremony and the cutting of a 'Krishna birthday cake', which is then offered as *prasad* (sanctified food). The screen now shows scenes from cities in the United States where white American *bhakts* (devotees) dance, sing and speak about their lives as 'Krishna bhakts'. The ceremony, lasting some three hours, brought together the Birmingham Gardens space with an American one. The 'West' was in Birmingham Gardens via a confident worldliness. The crowd eats cake and disperses.

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## Explanatory hypotheses, potential generalisations, possible relations to other factors

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### Administrative Rationality and Religiosity: Subaltern Class Formations

In this section, I utilise the vignettes presented above as contexts for analysing the urban life of religion. I proceed through exploring its location in the civic, political and administrative processes of the city.

From the 1980s onwards, as Gurugram began to attract private investment that established a variety of manufacturing, commercial and service industries, it also attracted a significant migrant workforce from different parts of the country. And, in addition to white collar professionals (whose presence has defined the city's identity in popular discourses regarding its 'newness'), there was also a very significant influx of a male migrant labour force that was semi or unskilled in nature. These found employment in factories, shops, and as tradespersons and street vendors. Of them, a significant proportion are Muslims. Gurugram's Muslim population (including the non-migrant part) is estimated to be around 300,000. There is a tiny, almost invisible, Muslim middle-class in the locality.

Gurugram has twenty-two mosques, including one whose construction remains incomplete due to a legal dispute. Of these, ten are considered 'official', that is, they have state sanction to operate as mosques. Out of the ten official mosques, eight are in older parts of Gurugram, that is, in villages that are far from where most of the new Muslim population – factory workers, for example – lives. In December 2018, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) 'sealed' an under-construction mosque declaring it illegal as it was within a 300-metres radius of the Air Force ammunition depot and hence in contravention of laws regarding proximity of private buildings to 'sensitive' government organisations. This means that the building cannot be used for worship (or for any other religious purposes). This mosque lies in the area that has a significant population of working-class Muslims.

During the *namaaz* controversy of 2018, two specific reasons were offered for why Muslims should not pray in public spaces and the mosque near a defence establishment needed to be demolished. First, it was said, public lands should not be 'misused' and that private activity upon them such as worship should not form the pretext for their eventual conversion from public to private property.<sup>[7]</sup> And second, that certain places functioning as mosques had flouted existent rules regarding construction on land that was a certain

distance from defence-linked (and hence 'restricted') establishments such as the Air-Force station in Gurugram. It is important to remember that the language of bans and sealing was entirely one that spoke of efficient administration and not religious claims. This differentiates it from, say, the case of the disputed site in the north Indian city of Ayodhya. In 1992, a 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque was demolished by Hindu extremists and the current ruling party (the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP) is constructing a temple on the site. The relation between space and religion in Ayodhya was formulated exclusively in terms of a religious argument about the 'authentic' Hindu nature of that space which had been destroyed by Muslim 'invaders' and required 'restoration' to its original status (see, for example, Nandy, Trivedy and Mayaram 1995). In the Gurugram case, on the other hand, the connection was expressed as one that had significant bearing on 'efficient' urban administration befitting a 'modern' city. This, it was suggested, required application of rules and regulation that reinforced ideas of the public and the private both in terms of space and of behaviour.

While Gurugram's Muslim population prays in the open because of insufficient number of mosques to accommodate the roughly 100,000 that offer *namaaz* every week, there is another important reason that has to do with the political economy of the city itself. This concerns the nature of work and time within Gurugram and takes us, in turn, to the heart of class formations in the new city.

Most Muslim workers in Gurugram are employed in commercial and industrial companies owned by Hindus. They live and work in urban areas where there are just two official mosques, the rest being in far-off village areas. A trip to any of the latter would mean taking leave during working hours for anything up to 2–3 hours. As one Muslim worker pointed out to a journalist, 'Which employer would allow his employees to take a three-hour break for the Friday Namaaz?'<sup>[8]</sup> Within a system of work and labour dictated by the temporalities of industrial and commercial production and governed by non-Muslims, the most feasible way to pray is to find spaces as near to places of work as possible.

However, to reiterate a significant aspect of the argument, exhortations to pray in private and to not build mosques near prohibited government facilities are entirely in the language of administrative rationality regarding urban governance by formal and impersonal administrative procedures. The *religious* relations of production that are fundamental to the economic ones that have produced urbanism in Gurugram are effaced through such language. The key effect of this is to press official regulatory mechanisms in the service of making of theo-topias. That is, an urban landscape that naturalises certain forms of religious practices as normal and others as abnormal.

This aspect, in turn, relates to the making of Hindu and Muslim *class* identities. As my Kanwariya example shows, the state has been actively involved in the organisation of worship for Hindu communities. Official concerns over the use of public lands by Muslims helps to produce a specific narrative regarding the *different* nature of class in Hindu and Muslim contexts. The Kanwariya pilgrims, mostly from poor backgrounds (Singh 2017), are of the same socio-economic background as the Muslim worshippers. However, notwithstanding the fact that large-scale camps for the Hindu pilgrims crop up every year with official permission on public lands, there is no social or legal censure. Hindu subalternity is, however, produced as quite distinct from the Muslim one. So, whereas the former is seen as capable of producing ordered and delimited religiosity in urban public

environments, the latter become characterised as, essentially, anti-urban and prone to subverting the nature of the urban itself through making claims illegal upon its public spaces.

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## Administrative Rationality and Religiosity: Elite Class Formations and RWAs

In addition to the context of subaltern class formations, there is an additional relationship between the discourse of administrative rationality and the regulation of religion. This is connected to the making of elite class identities in Gurugram.

Ashraf Hussain (name changed) is originally from the town of Bareilly in the state of Uttar Pradesh. According to the 2011 Indian census, Bareilly's Muslim population approximates to around 38% of the city's total count. Hussain now lives in Gurugram, where he is the chief executive of a company that deals in renting out serviced apartments. The company's key property is located next to a prominent private hospital and a great deal of its business is derived from rentals by family-members of patients admitted to the hospital as well as others that are in the area. Hussain was active as a representative of the Muslim community during the *namaaz* controversy. Given his educational background and middle-class status, he is a relatively rare example of a Muslim white-collar professional in Gurugram. He lives in a gated community and his two young daughters study at a prominent private school. Hence, his position as a spokesperson for the Muslim community was understandable.

Hussain became actively involved in negotiations with a variety of district officials on behalf of Gurugram's Muslim population in the wake of the first incident of disruption of a *namaaz* in April 2018. Following the incident, Hussain led a group that approached senior officials of the district administration in order to both explain the difficulties faced by Muslims in terms of securing appropriate venues for offering prayers as well as seek protection from future disruptions and violence. The officials Hussain's group contacted included the Commissioner of Police and the District Commissioner of Gurugram. Hussain was informed that the Gurugram administration had 'valid concerns regarding designated "green-belts" and public spaces' being used for *namaaz*.

Hussain's group was then asked to draw up a map of all the public areas that were being used for public *namaaz*. It identified 85 such places. The district officials asked for a reduction in their number. Given the numbers of Muslims with no other option but to pray in the open, the group reluctantly offered to reduce it to 50. I was informed that they would not be allowed more than 6. The group demurred. Subsequently, the Gurugram administration began a process of identifying those of the group who were more 'pliable' and open to the seductions of being invited for private meetings with powerful state officials. After protracted negotiations with the 'favoured' group, the administration agreed to 25 places where *namaaz* could be held under its aegis.

In addition to official objections regarding 'private' use of 'public' land, one of the most persistent arguments put forward by senior officials of the district was that, like Hindus, Muslims should also find places to pray within the confines of their homes. 'The most significant forms of *namaaz*', as Hussain was to tell me, 'require collective prayer and



cannot be done in private or individually. These include [he continued] those on *Eid ul Fitr*, *Eid ul Adha* and the *Jumma* [Friday] *namaaz*'. In this instance, then, the language of administrative rationality – about the 'proper' use of public spaces and impact of Muslim prayer upon urban ecology – reproduces a *Hindu* perspective through the vocabulary of administrative rationality. The idea of the 'publicness' as a characteristic of a *diverse* urban sphere emerges, in this manner, from a very specific religious world view that, in turn, seeks to define it: if Hindus can pray in private, why not Muslims?

As pointed out above, one of the 'official' mosques has been in a state of semi-completion for a considerable period of time. This building, Hussain mentioned, nevertheless continues to be used as a place of prayer. However due to the lack of space, *namaaz* in the building takes place in five different shifts. The land for the mosque was, in fact, allocated by the state-run Haryana Urban Development Corporation (HUDA) to the local *Waqf* board, a religious body established under official regulations that undertakes maintenance and care of Islamic religious property. Soon after construction began, however, one of India's largest real estate companies (the Ansals group) registered a legal case stating that a mosque ought not to be allowed in a 'residential' area, an argument that has never been made in relation to Hindu temples. As a result of the litigation, construction of the mosque has remained incomplete. Given the numbers that use the incomplete edifice, Hussain noted, 'it is a disaster waiting to happen'.

This brings us to an important aspect regarding class and its non-subaltern dimensions in Gurugram. Given the largely private nature of urban development in the locality since the 1980s, real estate behemoths such as Ansals and DLF have considerable say in the manner in which urbanism unfolds in the locality. The state's administrative writ and the interests of private capital (in the shape of real estate companies) frequently overlap (see, for example, Searle 2017; Sud 2016). The subtext of the argument put forward by Ansals is that the company believes that the value of its properties – those it has already sold and others to be developed for sale in the future – will be adversely affected because of a mosque in the area. The majority of its clientele is Hindu and middle-class and Ansals feared that a mosque – unlike the ISKCON-run Janmashami celebrations at Birmingham Garden – would make the area unattractive for current and future residents. Hence, despite the fact that the land has been officially allocated by the state, the latter appears unwilling to enforce its own writ through confronting the elite (Hindu) buyer. This too reinforces the on-going process of the making of theo-topias in 'new' Gurugram.

During one of our meetings, Ashraf Hussain noted that for the past 9 years he had been organising *namaaz* during the month of Ramadan within the compound of one of his serviced-apartment premises.

Over 10 days [he told me], three chapters each of the Quran would be read. As many people can't afford the time when just one chapter is read each day to complete the whole *namaaz*, this was a way in which the work pattern of Muslim professionals was able to be accommodated with the demands of proper worship. However, even though this was a personal space, I once saw and heard a police constable standing outside the property and talking to one of his superiors. He was saying: 'a number of Muslims have gathered here and as the elections are coming, so I thought I should report this'.

It is important to contrast this with the Janmashami episode at Birmingham Gardens. Janmashami celebrations at Birmingham Gardens signify the making of an urban context of 'religious cosmopolitanism'. The celebrations link the space of this specific gated community to the various worlds of 'global' Hinduism and, more specifically, its incorporation into aspects of North American spiritual life. This combines particularly well with notions of new Indian urbanism and the religiosity *appropriate* to it. This form of urban religiosity is neither the subject of an administrative gaze and nor is it a matter of cultural surveillance. Rather, it speaks through both official and un-official articulations of the nature of new urbanism, city-planning, the relationship between public and private spaces and the identity of those who uphold the 'proper' distinction between private and public activity. A 'global' city – Gurugram – deserves a middle-class that practices 'cosmopolitan' religiosity, one that is connected to western lifeways and spiritual practice.

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## Conclusion: Public, Private, the 'People' and the Illegibility of the State

The state, as a great deal of scholarship has pointed out (see, for example, Abrams 1988; Fuller and Harriss 2000; Hansen and Stepputat 2001) must express a 'stateness' and be a legible – visible, palpable and distinct – presence in everyday life and enforce its writ. However, I would like to suggest that in the present case regarding the relationship between urbanism and religiosity, it is the *illegibility* of the state that is fundamental to both its presence and authority. Scholars of India have argued that the relationship between the people and the state has been fundamental to providing insights into post-colonial Indian subjectivity (Fuller and Bénéï 2000; Gupta 1998). In this section, I suggest that we should also focus on those ways where the state leaves no clear trace regarding its relationship to the 'people'. And that this allows us to both question the view that it is 'a single, cohesive apparatus' (Gupta 2012: 33) and to understand the manner in which it relates differently to different sections of the population. Its illegibility allows for the reinvention of a personalised rather than a formal state and is a significant manner in which urban religiosity acts as its grounds.

Ashraf Hussain frequently told me that throughout the *namaaz* controversy, one of the most frustrating aspects of dealing with the state officials was the impossibility of securing any legal or official documents that could be used to secure a regular place of worship or refer to decisions regarding allocation of space for prayer. While there were frequent orders to reduce the numbers of places that were to be used for public *namaaz*, none of them were ever issued in written form. Notwithstanding the fact that all such 'orders' were issued either by the Police Commissioner or the District Commissioner, there was never any written proof of what had been either issued as a diktat or agreed upon. 'Everything', Hussain mentioned,

... is oral. So, when at different times we approached the police and said that we had started prayers at an agreed place but are now being obstructed by some locals, the police would say 'we may have given permission at that point to use such and such space, but it was never in writing'.

The coming together of the state and religious practice in the context of new urbanism in Gurugram is, then, significantly mediated through *practices of illegibility*. If, on the one hand, we understand religious belief as affect and ineffable emotion, then, through associating with it, the state itself becomes affective and beyond legibility. However, and this is the key point, in the current context, the state can *choose* to do its business through either legible administrative means (how public spaces ought to be utilised) or the means of illegibility (when the issue of the ‘appropriate’ use of public spaces is not settled through any formal and recordable means). This further enables the state to define different kinds of people and publics: those with whom formal communication is warranted and those whose concerns are addressed informally. New urbanism is also – through the register of religion – the practice of producing formal and informal people; in its negotiations with the state, Hussain’s group rarely received formal notifications.

If we understand religious belief as private affects that have public dimensions – ‘What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?’ as Henri Lefebvre was to ask (Lefebvre 1994: 44) – then the discussion above allows us to think about the relationship between religion and urbanism as the grounds for changing ideas of ‘private’ and ‘public’. In the context of this article, the state and private capital combine to produce meaning of these terms.

Ideas of ‘private’ and ‘public’ in Gurugram are fundamentally connected to changing ideas of ‘the people’ and the ‘ordinary person’. The making of the new ‘ordinary’ person has been a significant aspect of urban developments in India over the past few decades. So, for example, middle-class residents’ associations frequently invoke ideas of “civil disobedience”, “satyagraha” and “revolution” [that serve] to consolidate a notion of “ordinary people” fighting for their rights’ (Srivastava 2019: 429). This version of “ordinariness” [contrasts with that] in the heyday of the Nehruvian five-year plan state’ (Srivastava 2019: 429) where it concerned the urban and the rural poor of all backgrounds. At the current time, however, the ordinary person is, increasingly, identified with a Hindu middle-class citizen, one who has been historically ‘taken for granted’ and overlooked, with ‘undue’ favours granted to, say, religious minorities and Dalits (those of lower castes for whom there are constitutional guarantees with regards to jobs and places at educational institutions). That is to say, the processes described in this article are also those implicated in the on-going redefinition of the idea of ordinariness.

The idea of the ‘new’ ordinary citizen plays a role in moulding public debate and perceptions over religiosity. The ordinary person is the one with an ‘acceptable’ religiosity which aligns with the ‘norms’ of civic urbanity, the most significant of which is the private-public distinction. I will conclude with an example regarding the relationship between the new ordinary person and ideas of publicness. Of late, the street has emerged as an important site of assertions of middle-class identity in Gurugram. From being a space that was marked by chaos and the ‘lower classes’, it has increasingly become one where multiple dramas of middle-classness are played out. The event known as ‘Raahgiri’ is a case in point. Based on similar ‘open streets’ events that are held around the world, the first Raahgiri was held 2013. It is promoted as a ‘citizen’s initiative’ to ‘take back the streets’ and emerged through a collaboration between two local Non-Government Organisations (one involved in environmental issues and the other working with the poor), a bicycle-riding group, a company that provides ‘corporate wellness’ programmes and a global consultancy company that focuses on sustainable cities. The Gurugram city administration is also involved.

Every Sunday, a stretch of roads is cordoned off to allow for a variety of activities. Children, men and women from different residential localities in DLF City take part in biking, yoga classes, aerobics, Pilates, Zumba and skateboarding. The activities are mostly sponsored by companies such as Nike, Lotto, Adidas as well as major media corporations. In addition to those taking part, there is also another set of bodies that is also present at Raahgiri. It lines the footpaths along these streets of activity. *This* crowd that watches consists of domestic workers, rickshaw-pullers, private security guards and a variety of people who otherwise sell peanuts or make a living from other informal businesses.

Raahgiri is one of the several ways in which the idea of 'ordinariness' is being re-made through a new association of the street with middle-classness. The appropriation of the street – cleansed of 'social' and material filth through private sponsorship – is part of a middle-class statement regarding the nature of the public that belongs in public places. As in the case of religion and ordinariness, the Raahgiri ordinariness takes place through a joint effort between private capital and the state.

Older forms of urban modernity in India were primarily produced through relationships between different forms of state-led activities, such as in the case of steel cities discussed above. Contemporary manifestations of urbanisation have a dramatically different form and a changed relationship between the state, private capital and middle-class citizens. In the case of Gurugram, religion is an important aspect of this changing relationship. Here, it is the middle-class Hindu citizen that is increasingly identified as the 'ordinary' person who, it is increasingly suggested, has been forced to bear an unfair burden of the consequences of the state's historic 'appeasement' of the poor and religious minorities. It is this citizen who is seen as having the capacity to produce a *new* ordinary public culture and the culture of public spaces appropriate to contemporary urban modernity. This is the grounds for the making of Hindu theo-topias in Gurugram.

## Footnotes

1

Gurgaon became Gurugram in 2016. The name change is frequently seen as part of the 'Hinduisation' agenda of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) which, at the time of writing (2023) holds government both at the national level as well as in Haryana. Gurgaon translates as 'the village of the Guru' and refers to the locality's mythological association with Guru Dronacharya, a major character in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. However, while 'gaon' has colloquial connotations, 'gram' derives from the Sanskrit, a language that has been harnessed to the cause of 'Hindutva', or the contemporary politics of the Hindu right-wing.

2

I do not, here, wish to make a distinction – common in geographical writings – between 'space' and 'place'. This follows from the idea that 'spaces' are always 'places' and that there is no distinction between the physical and the social/cultural.

3

The edited volume by Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003) provided an excellent indication of anthropological engagements with spatiality as human processes and makes it unnecessary to provide an additional list.

4

This fieldwork was carried out in conjunction with Manisha Sethi (Jamia Miilia Islamia, Delhi) and Tanweer Fazal (Hyderabad Central University, Hyderabad).

5

ISKCON was founded in New York in the mid-1960s by the spiritual teacher A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Bromley and Shinn 1989; Berg and Kniss 2008). Starting from its earlier western origins, it has gained increasingly popularity in India, particularly in middle-class contexts.

6

This description is based on a recent attendance.

7

This is a common occurrence and not limited to any one particular religious community. Courts are frequently called upon to clear such 'encroachments'. See for example *Encroachment Of Public Land In The Garb Of A Place For Worship Ought To Be Discouraged, Says Delhi High Court (livelaw.in)* (<https://www.livelaw.in/news-updates/delhi-high-court-encroachment-public-land-place-of-worship-temple-dda-167544>), accessed 8 August 2022.

8

*No namaaz in public spaces: Muslims find it difficult to follow Khattar's advice to pray in mosques (scroll.in)* (<https://scroll.in/article/878081/pray-in-mosques-why-gurugrams-muslims-might-not-be-able-to-follow-the-haryana-cms-advice>), accessed 15 September 2021.

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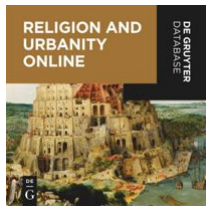
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