

# Dogs, Humans and other Creatures: On the Streets of Delhi, India's Capital\*

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## Abstract

One usually has in mind when one visualizes a city, that it would be modern, urban and devoid of any traditional elements, although street fairs are common in most part of the world. But visitors to the capital city of India are surprised to see a city that teems with life not only human, but of all kinds on the streets. Unlike in the most parts of the world, the city does not have organized and disciplined practices on its roads, but any kind of 'activity' for any kind of purpose, religious, social and cultural may transform the streets at any time, with no planning and no rationality and yet be accepted by all concerned as 'normal'. One cannot but refer back to age old cosmologies and world-views to explain how a seemingly modern city fitted out with practically every modern technology can still remain so rooted in traditions and manifest an almost complete lack of discipline, predictability and order. There is a need to redefine what exactly we mean by urban and if any substantive definition cutting across regional/cultural differences is possible.

**Keywords:** Domestic and public space, belongingness, rural-urban divide, urbanism

## Cães, humanos e outras criaturas: nas ruas de Delhi, capital da Índia

### Resumo

Quando pensamos em uma cidade, frequentemente a concebemos como moderna, desprovida de elementos tradicionais, apesar de feiras nas ruas serem comuns em grande parte do mundo. Contudo, os visitantes da capital da Índia se surpreendem ao ver uma cidade repleta de vida, não somente humana, mas de todos os tipos em suas ruas. Diferentemente da maior parte do mundo, esta cidade não organizou nem normatizou as práticas que ocorrem em suas ruas, qualquer tipo de 'atividade' com quaisquer tipos de propósito, seja religioso, social ou cultural é capaz de transformar suas ruas a qualquer hora, sem nenhum planejamento ou racionalidade e mesmo assim ser aceitável por todos, considerada como 'normal'. Só podemos nos remeter a antigas cosmologias e visões de mundo para explicar como aparentemente uma cidade moderna equipada com praticamente toda tecnologia moderna ainda permanece tão enraizada em tradições manifestando ausência de disciplina, previsibilidade e ordem. Torna-se necessário, portanto, redefinir o que significa urbano verificando se alguma definição substantiva capaz de incorporar diferenças regionais/culturais se torna possível.

**Palavras-chave:** espaço público e privado, pertencimento, divisão rural-urbano, urbanismo.

While I was driving a friend from the USA from the airport to my home; she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! There is a dog on the road". I told her she would be seeing plenty of them, on the road and everywhere else and sure enough within a day she had seen what are known in India as 'street dogs' occupying every nook and corner of Delhi, sleeping on the pavements, playing in parks, hanging around all road side vendors and even keeping vigil along with the policemen on duty. But then visitors to Delhi see many more non-humans occupying public

space than just dogs, there are of course cats, then monkeys, who are excitedly photographed playing pranks by the tourists, then the occasional elephant and camel strolling by are also viewed as equally exotic by those not used to the city. Bullock carts and horse driven carriers rub shoulders with Mercedes, Toyotas and a host of foreign and Indian cars. Delhi has a spanking modern underground rail service, low floor air conditioned buses and other modern public transports along with cycle rickshaws, three wheeled vehicles that are equally attractive to the

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unsuspecting foreigner not knowing the kind of bumps that one can get in them.

But this is not all; suddenly one may find that people have put up tables and chairs almost in the middle of the road to offer free cool drinks and often some snacks to passersby or the pavements have been converted into temporary shelters for passing pilgrims, no matter what consequence it has for the already congested traffic. Fast cars slow down to let a bullock cart pass, or public buses move slowly behind a human drawn cycle rickshaw. People will suddenly dig a hole into a perfectly good pavement or road to put up a tent to host a wedding and sometimes even a busy road may thus be blocked but people simply take a different route unquestioningly. And one need not ask what happens during what is known as the 'festive' season; when any road, park or public area may be blocked to put up tents to carry on various ritual functions; with again the public accepting all inconvenience as a matter of course and no one would dream of disrupting or objecting to such 'holy' functions. Add to this marriage procession, ritual processions and even political demonstrations and the city roads are as chaotic as one may imagine anything to be and yet in this city, people attend offices, carry out all the work that the formal institutions in any urban area of the world carry on. There are universities, hospitals, courts and offices of multinational companies and every trapping of a neoliberal economy and most modern technologies. There are flyovers, bridges, tunnels and swank buildings in addition to the medieval market places, narrow winding alleys and the magnificent ruins that are the remnants of past history.

Look harder and one will find more things happening. On a hot summer day when the temperatures hover above 40 degrees Celsius, passersby can find big pitchers of cool water by the way side; there are earthen bowls and large dishes of water kept for the thirsty dogs, birds and other animals, practically all over the city. These are not done by any formal institutions but just any one will put out a vessel and take care to fill it with cool water and even provide some food for the birds and other animals. Every morning one finds people carrying car loads of food to put in public places where the stray dogs

and other animals can eat them. Another bunch of people come with armful of bananas and fruits to feed the monkeys; some other go around with sugar and wheat flour to feed the ants and small insects. People take kitchen leftovers to feed the cows and buffaloes resting majestically on the busy roads, diverting traffic with nonchalance. This is not to say that each and every person on the road is full of compassion and virtue but there are enough in this busy city to keep alive thousands of animals on the roads and to respect the life of even the smallest creatures. The other commonly found virtue is respect for every one's life style. People may hurl abuses and grumble for having to take a longer route to avoid a ritual function being held right in the middle of the road, but no one questions the legitimacy of such transgression of what may be called as urban civil codes.

In a city newspaper, *The Statesman*, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2003, an interesting article appeared on the second page, it was about how the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), a civic body that takes care of sanitary and engineering requirements of the city, have hiked the payment to be made to monkey catchers as "there are few people who are willing to tackle the animals which are seen as an incarnation of Lord Hanuman". Earlier there was a practice to use the Langur (Hanuman Langur) to scare away the large populations of Rhesus monkeys that people the city<sup>1</sup> but the animal rights activists (People For Animals, PFA) got this practice banned citing cruelty to both the Langurs and the other monkeys. In India, cruelty to animals is a cognizable offense under the Sections 428/429 IPC and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of the year 1960. Thus there is an interesting amalgamation of both tradition and modernity in the approach to animals in the metropolis. On one side are those who are influenced by age old religious sentiments and on the other are those who are influenced by global perspectives of animal rights and activism for animal protection based on more universal and secular values. Both kinds of people and large variants on them are found in the city.

## WHO LIVES IN DELHI?

Delhi is not a city that was planned in recent times; it is what Sjoberg (1955) would call, a “Pre-Industrial city” that has over time grown into a modern city, the capital of a country that although still Third World is rapidly trying to take its place among the economically progressive countries of the world. As a brief introduction, Delhi has two parts, one is what is often referred to as the Walled city of Delhi, the part that was built by the Moghul Emperor Shah Jehan, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and which in the tradition of the cities of those times, was fortified with a wall that had seven gates, of which about five still survive in various conditions of ruin. New Delhi, that houses the Parliament and the residence of the President and Prime Minister of India, has all the official buildings and political establishments, somewhat like Washington D.C. and was planned by the architect, Lutyen and is also known as Lutyen’s Delhi; majestic with its wide tree covered sidewalks and spacious bungalows and high security zones where bullock carts and horse drawn carriages, rickshaws and sundry other vehicles are not allowed but street dogs have their way around the palatial bungalows of India’s V.V. I.Ps<sup>2</sup> and hordes of monkeys are known to take away important files from right under the nose of the vigilant security in important government offices. However although very different in appearance there is not much significant cultural difference between the two parts as the so-called ‘English speaking elite’ ( Beteille 1986) are found in both areas as are the migrants and the people of the working class. The University of Delhi is situated in the old city while other universities that came up much later in the new city. The most distinctive part of the old city is the walled city remnant of the original Delhi of Shah-Jehan, with its landmark markets and compact structure of narrow lanes and by-lanes, some left overs of the Muslim culture near the majestic Jama Masjid. But the old part also has its aristocratic residential areas in the large and beautiful bungalows at civil lines and adjoining areas where the city’s original elite lived. Even today some may view the inhabitants of the new city as heterogeneous lot of ‘newly rich’ people while the old world charm is surviving in old Delhi.

The original inhabitants of this city live mostly

concentrated not in new but in the old part of the city, but as of today they are far outnumbered by the people who have migrated to the city, from the time the British shifted their capital here from Calcutta. During the colonial period, those who came to the city were government officials and skilled and literate people from various parts of the country to work in offices, hospitals and banks and other institutions. Later there was a strong wave of migration when the country was divided and parts of it created Pakistan<sup>3</sup>, and refugees from Punjab filled the streets. In one generation most of them had prospered and now form the middle classes and business elite of Delhi. Donner (2008:10) had quoted Manas Ray( 2002) as commenting that the Bengali modernity had been engendered in the ‘refugee’ colonies; same can be said of Delhi also where the new settlements became the upwardly mobile neighborhoods of the now fashionable South Delhi, areas that were considered uninhabitable by the original Delhi population. The refugees who came from erstwhile Punjab and east Bengal were a hardworking and enterprising group of people who were also not limited by the weight of traditions that they had left behind. As Delhi spread it encompassed many villages and many of them still retain some of their old characteristics, including animal husbandry and some agriculture as well. Thus rural houses with mud walls co-exist with multistoried buildings and buffaloes graze near the streets where fast cars zoom past. Women make cow dungs and wear the traditional rural dress as fashion designers set up shop in the vicinity. In fact many areas of Delhi are still referred to as ‘gaon’ meaning village as these villages became part of the city.

With economic liberalization in the early nineties, the city saw unprecedented growth and large numbers of migrants, now mostly from the lower strata of society moved in here in search of a living as multinational companies and business establishments proliferated. They also came to work in the large and alluring informal sector of the city’s economy comprising of rickshaw pullers, street vendors and small-scale entrepreneurs, numerous eateries of various sizes, shop assistants, factory workers, tailors, sweepers, service providers and domestic

workers. As the city underwent more and more infrastructural up gradation, like building of fly-over, bridges, roads and buildings, large numbers of labor came in from the less developed parts of the country, often being the people who have been displaced by the process of urbanization itself; like building of dams, submergence and destruction of forest and farm lands, taking over of agricultural land for making industries and reduction of pastureland and disappearance of many kinds of traditional livelihoods.

The more densely populated the city is becoming, the more varied in terms of culture and class are the people who now occupy it often in slums and marginal locations of the city; sleeping under bridges and on the sidewalks. Such developments are not unusual for cities in the developing parts of the world but the multitude of people, both the original residents and the migrants were reorganized within the city, not as faceless modern 'individuals' but in accordance with their caste, religion and cultural identities, and some of these instead of getting lost actually got reinforced in the city; that changed itself to gear up to the values that preexist the advent of industrialization and modernity. Thus Simmel (1950), one of the earliest scholars to do brilliant analysis of the urbanizing west, had described 'intellectualism' as a way of adaptation of the people to the modern, atomistic life of the city where individualism rather than emotional relationships prevailed. In order to get over the lack of emotional bonding he assumed that people began to rely more on their brains and intellects, becoming more creative and original.

But in Delhi, almost the opposite happened. People who feared the anonymity of the city, being either uprooted from their original environments or simply losing their earlier sense of bearing as the city grew around them, adapted not by withdrawing 'inside' but trying to forge new kinds of links outside and in trying to adapt, recreated and often reinvented some kinds of 'traditions' that would create new communities within the city. In the process of urbanization, such mythic traditions became the urban folklore providing anchorage and stability to a population in danger of losing its sanity.

The Punjabis for example who originally came from a region dominated by the Muslims and

Sufis and not having a dominant Brahmanical culture<sup>4</sup> and who did not perform many Hindu rituals, have now become the most ritualistic of all the communities. The migrants from different parts of India brought with them various region specific rituals; the Bengalis brought Durga puja<sup>5</sup>, the Maharashtrians Ganesh festivals<sup>6</sup>, the people from Bihar brought Chhat puja<sup>7</sup> and the Punjabis spread the cult of Vaishno Devi<sup>8</sup> to everyone and soon many of these were adapted by the local people as all were after all Hindu festivals. It must be mentioned here that Hinduism is also amalgamation of various regional cults that were being followed by people located in different regions of India as separate and regional rituals. However urbanization has amalgamated these different forms of worship so that a more integrated form of religion is followed in the urban areas as compared to rural and marginal areas. Delhi especially has been seeing a great deal of admixture as being the capital city it draws people from all over the country. Moreover the Central State (the Government of India) , whose representatives are located here, take care to nurture all the diversities so that Delhi is seen as a reflection of the unity of Indian traditions. Having grown up in the city of Delhi, I have seen the introduction of one cult after another in the last several decades of my own existence and the history of the city. As the offices and residential areas have mushroomed all over the city, so has the places of worship and numerous idols rub shoulders with the onrush of traffic on the main city roads. The cosmopolitan culture of the politically most important city in India has by its very inclusiveness of the diversity of the country, emerged as one of the most spiritually condensed cities in India, where every regional form of worship and performance of rituals has established itself. Thus a form of multiculturalism that is often associated with being urban has established itself but this kind of multiculturalism has more to do with the reinvention of traditions than of modernity.

## THE URBAN CULTURE

The earlier theorists about the urban areas like Louis Wirth (1938) and Lewis Mumford (1938) based their descriptions of the urban



on the newly industrializing cities of the West; and some of their definitional criteria were of rationalism, individualism, atomism and secularism. However as contemporary studies of the urban spread across the world indicate, the nature of the urban varies widely across the world. Pardo (1996) for example emphasizes that for Southern Italians in Naples, entrepreneurship and urbanism includes concepts of the material and non-material inextricably linked with each other and the goals of life are not merely individualistically instrumental but spiritual and relational in that the 'significant others' play a key role both alive and dead. Urban identities are not always fragmented but often build up around existing identities at time reinforcing them, Thus Bayley (1999 :217-218) has shown as commerce and trade increased in the newly industrializing cities in colonial India, the urban trader -'Banias' adapted to a ritualistic, non-violent lifestyle of social honour and endorsement that would also establish them as households that could be entered into for trade relationships as well as of matrimony. Even as the wealth of the city people increased they began to invest more in keeping up a retinue of service providers of the traditional caste based kind and in giving money for charities that supported many animals like cows and birds. The beautiful Jain temple in the heart of Old Delhi is famous for its bird hospital that was created by donations from wealthy merchants. The number of service castes who provide services to the upper castes like laundering of clothes, scavenging, cutting hair etc. are also found in much larger numbers in the cities than in the rural areas. At the same time, even several generations of living in Delhi, does not make most people sever their ties to their native lands, either other cities or villages. Even people serving the government are allowed leave as well as travel allowances to visit what is termed as 'home states'. Thus for all important events in one's life, like marriage, birth of children and other family and life cycle rituals, people tend to keep going back to where they originally came from. Every Indian has an identity of 'belonging' somewhere and no matter how much they travel for work, they tend to go back to their original places mostly after retirement. Thus as Chandravarkar (2009: 64)

points out for most workers from rural areas to the cities, it was important to hold onto their land or connections in the village for both reasons of security as well as for status. Thus at no period of time urbanization for most Indians meant a total detachment from rural or small town life.

Thus as the Indian cities developed the culture of social prestige and honor played up more and more the classical notions of family, kinship, religion and most importantly of 'dharma' the ancient codes of conduct that enjoins people to follow broadly two levels of appropriate action. At one level these are deemed essential for all living creatures; like non-violence, compassion, and respect for all life etc. and at the other level the specific 'dharma' pertaining who one is; like a man or a woman, the bearer of a particular caste and occupational identity and so on. This aspect too broad and complicated to enter into a discussion here but it is suffice to say that 'dharma' is not fixed but an inherently interpretable concept and can be used in various forms according to the context of time and space.

Since the Hindus believe in transmigration of the soul there is no essential difference perceived between a human and a non-human life and the Hindu adaption of vegetarianism is one manifestation of this principle. But vegetarian or not respect for life is inherent to the Hindu concept of 'dharma'. But at the same time there is a parallel notion of fatalism and also disregard for the present. For example I happened to mention to an American friend, how the security in public places in Delhi is very lax as compared to those in America. She told me that in the USA, people are responsible for their own actions and therefore very careful. On the contrary, in India people believe that what is destined to happen will happen and nothing one can do will prevent it. Thus in the public transport system, the security guards will be chatting and looking the other way even as people go through the scanners at the entrances.

Thus there is nothing intrinsically urban about urban culture in Delhi. The scale of the city, its population and its technology alone sets it apart from the rural areas. But when it comes to the people, there is nothing particularly significant that can be pointed to as 'distinctly urban'. There might be a thin layer of the truly cosmopolitan,

in terms of people who are global in their culture, who are secular and individualistic, but even these people are mostly under strong influence of family and the ritual dimensions of life.

Now comes the paradox; urban life in India, especially in Delhi is no less violent than in fact may a little more than many other urban cities across the world. In a city that is routinely rocked by crimes of violence, rapes and murders, molestations and domestic rage; the spiritual dimensions of life are also seen to be on an upward graph. It is my contention that perhaps these two aspects are not opposed but mutually intertwined. The ritualism, the love for animals and the charity overtly demonstrated by the people of this city may be a coping mechanism that they have devised to counter the tensions, the roughness and the loneliness of life in the big city.

### COMPASSION, CHARITY AND THE WILDERNESS OF THE CITY

When I was doing fieldwork in a Himalayan village the people there compared the city to a dangerous jungle ( CHANNA, 2010) , a place where a person would get lost. Yet the nature of Delhi is such that many people who live here are not really in any way equipped to face the 'modernity' of the city as individuals. We have already given a brief description of the kind of people who inhabit the city; many of them were residents of the city when it was still a simple, pre-industrial city with its closed neighborhoods guided by caste and community norms. Many have migrated in recent times from small towns and villages and feel 'lost'; even those who belong to the higher class of educated and well off people may not be quite comfortable with the 'city' culture .especially with individualism. Many have found themselves inadvertently becoming a part of the city, although they are still located in the ancestral villages and follow a more or less rural life style. Thus in this city, even without migrating a lot of people have been transported so to say to another culture. This conversion of rural people into urban ones without migrating or relocating is also a peculiar phenomenon seen in many Third world countries where many of them try to make sense of their bewilderment

by retreating more and more into some kind of practices that would root them into a sense of security.

Many young people are drawn into crime and find that they are transgressing the law. Now this point of relationship between the state and the people is also an interesting one that has been taken up at length by Pardo (1996, 2000) who has shown that the popular conceptualization of right and wrong, good and bad may not at all coincide with the legal definitions of these terms. For example it is not at all legal to put of tents in the middle of a busy road, block the traffic and perform a ritual. Yet for the performers, it remains an act of piety and even the authorities and the police tend to look the other way. The feeding of monkeys has led to such an increase in their population in the city, that at times they become a menace, yet there is very little the authorities can do about it. The monkey is sacred in Hindu cosmology, it is representative of the god Hanuman that removes all obstacles and relieves stress in life. Thus under the stressful conditions of modern life, the popularity of Hanuman as primarily an urban deity cannot be overlooked. There are very few places in the rural areas where Hanuman is a primary deity, but in Delhi, he takes pride of place in having many important shrines, many of them in New Delhi. Thus the monkeys are pampered and although at times causing some distress, are worshipfully protected and allowed a free rein to do what they want.

There are many negative characters that are attributed to human agencies; especially the state including the police. Since people on the streets have little faith in the governance and in the law enforcing agents, they likewise have little respect for the law and its norms. Being a law-abiding citizen is seen not as any kind of virtue but a necessity primarily under coercion. But the supernatural agent in lieu of the human power holders are seen as the real protectors and by whose benevolence people survive even under the harshest conditions of existence. The non-humans are often seen as benevolent, innocent of any crimes and compassion towards whom results in good *karma*.

The extraordinary level of corruption in public life, the negative image of all people

in power such as ministers and other public servants, pushes the people more and more towards rituals and the supra-mundane spheres for both distressing and for security and a sense of well-being. Urbanization and an alien form of development that has become the model for the government ever since India was decolonized and became an independent country has caused much hardship to the ordinary people and with the new economy bringing in neoliberal values, the state is gaining a more and more exploitative image.

In the era before liberalization, many of the facilities and services available were subsidized and state controlled, like water, electricity, railways and even banks. There were subsidies on petrol, diesel, gas, fertilizers and a host of other essential items that kept prices in check although the service provided was of a poor quality. The markets were largely restricted to home produces goods and multinational companies like Coca-Cola, MacDonalD's and Levis were not found in Indian markets. With the penetration of a global economy, a large variety of goods have flooded the markets and new technologies like computers and mobile phones have become ubiquitous. While the desire for goods has reached the remotest corners of the country, the means to obtain them are not there. Whatever has been the growth of the Indian economy, it has benefitted only a few people at the very top. Thus while some people became very rich and now sport lavish lifestyles, a majority remain very poor and deprived. The gaps are far more evident in the urban areas where the elite live than in the rural regions although economic stratification exists there as well. But since rural areas are not market dominated and do not have the glitter of the city, the feeling of relative deprivation is less there than in the urban areas.

Thus the urban poor are more marginalized and have greater feelings of frustration as they are surrounded by opulence. But in India the poor have more patience and perseverance as traditionally most of them come from the lower castes as well, and centuries of oppression has provided them with cultural mans of protection and self-preservation. It is the middle classes, the upwardly mobile people often in the younger age group who suffer more from frustration and

stress as they are driven by ambition and great desire for lavish lifestyles but often unable to attain their goals by fair means. Many of them thus either take shelter in exaggerated ritual activities or indulge in unlawful activities or both.

The rich too are not too complacent. The kind of English educated elite that Beteille (1996) had talked about are equally harassed in the city and not all of them have developed an urbane sophisticated culture. Even those who have lived in the city for many years are sheltered in their homes from cosmopolitanism through a process of 'compartmentalization' that is a character of Indian urban life as noted earlier by Singer (1968:445). The Indians mostly tend to keep the domestic and the public life separate from each other so that religiosity, kinship and family values predominate in the private life of people who may appear to be 'modern' in public.

However animal love is a value that is also coming in as a part of globalization. Rural people in India like very where else also kept pets and had love for animals to which in South Asia the notion of non-violence was added as a prescription for right values and daily practices. But the kind of sophisticated love that urban people have for their pets is largely a value borrowed from the West and now nurtured by a large animal products industry and veterinary services. But in city this love spills over onto the streets onto unattached animals and while this may be seen as a general change in attitudes towards animals as 'companions'. It does derive from sources other than this 'urban' influence.

The animals perhaps are providing to many people, cutting across class, the kind of solace that human agents cannot provide. With innumerable crimes of all kinds being committed routinely, the people in general do not have much faith in 'humanity'; yet there is always a need to find some kind of psychological comfort. When relationships too are floundering, when marriages are breaking up, when many people are forced to live alone, as migrants or as members of broken homes; the animals appear as some kind of sponges to absorb the ills of urban life. At the same time they double up as 'merit' providers, vehicles for the discharge of 'dharma'. A person gets a 'feel good' feeling having put up a vessel

of cool water to quench the thirst of animals and birds or feels that he or she has earned some merit by feeding the monkeys. At the same time they find a cheap and affordable way of earning merit by nurturing a life.

## CONCLUSION

Thus urban life remains a paradox more than a well-defined culture or way of life. As the nature of cities differ from each other so does the nature of urbanism. Modernity itself eludes any specific definition being subject to experience and context. As described by Parry (2012), cities differ from each other in terms of how they were founded, their history of settlements and what historical events shaped and affected them over time. Delhi is not typical of other cities in India, say Bombay( Mumbai) as described by Chandravarkar ( 2009) or Calcutta as described by Donner( 2008). In my work on the Dhobis ( a service caste of low social rank) in the Old city of Delhi in the seventies ( Channa 1985) and my subsequent follow up work on them, I have found that it is the cityscape more than the people that have changed. My observations and experience as a city dweller tells me that it is the external appearance, the architecture, infrastructure and other trappings of urbanization and modernity that apparently transform the city from the outside, but the core, the minds and hearts of the people remain rooted in their family, village and community traditions. The 'individualism' professed by the scholars of early western cities is culturally specific and not universally applicable. Thus immense caution needs to be observed to define what is 'urban'

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#### Notas

1 The Langur is a larger breed of monkey that scares the smaller rhesus variety who run away even if one Langur is brought near their colonies.

2 V.V.I.P. is acronym for Very, Very Important Persons, used as an official term for people of very high political status and those who require heavy security but also used sarcastically for people who think too much of themselves

3 In the year 1947 when India was liberated from British rule, the country was divided into two countries on the basis of religion. Some of the regions in the west of the subcontinent and some in the east were together separated to make the Islamic country of Pakistan while India continues as a secular state. Later east Pakistan broke off from its parent county on the basis of language to form the present day Bangladesh, in 1971.

4 For example Ibbetson, in his colonial chronicle of the Punjab region " saw the Punjab as a highly distinctive environment in which the aspiring theorist of caste had to explain the distinctively 'non-caste like' features of much of its rural population" ( Bayley 1999:139)

5 Durga Puja, is the worship of the Mother Goddess Durga for nine days in autumn by the Bengalis as a community worship. The idols of the goddess are installed and then immersed in the river after the worship period is over.

6 The people of the western part of India known as Maharashtra have similar community worship of the elephant headed god, Ganesa, whose idols are also immersed in water after the period of worship is over. This was introduced in this region as a nationalist Hindu form of identity mechanism by the Nationalist leader Vallabh Bhai Patel during the colonial period in the early nineteenth century.

7 Chhat puja is the worship of the sun done by the people of Bihar region for which elaborate arrangements are made on the banks of the river.

8 Vaishno Devi is another form of the mother goddess situated in the high Himalayan caves above the region of the Punjab, popular in the North-West part of the country.

