







## Chapter 8

# Mimesis, Montage and Mapping: A Spatial Analysis of Gangtok's Cityscape in the Select Works of Satyajit Ray and Prajwal Parajuly

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### Abstract

The concept of spatiality in India is continually evolving with transitions in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres, shaping our perspectives on spatiality. India is now beginning to be recognised not only as a principally rural and agrarian country but is also attracting notice for its urban spaces and urbanity, including its innate intricacies. The Indian scholarship in this direction is proliferating in commendable ways. Apart from the critical enquiries, several writers have produced brilliant literary works about Indian cities, like Khuswant Singh, Amitav Ghosh and Mamang Dai, to name only a few. However, an extensive literature review reveals that a minimal eclectic analysis is seen about the smaller urban places in India, such as Sikkim's capital city, Gangtok. Our study stems from this huge research gap because the process of urbanisation is happening ubiquitously in India, and hence, scholarly probes cannot be limited to the comprehension of the established Indian metropolises alone. Through an interpretive analysis of Satyajit Ray's detective fiction *Trouble in Gangtok* (1971) and the documentary film titled *Sikkim* (1971), and Prajwal Parajuly's novel *Land Where I Flee* (2014), the present research attempts to understand the urban nuances of Gangtok within the broad framework of spatial studies to highlight the existence of unique Indian urbanity.

**Keywords:** Spatial turn, Urbanity, Gangtok, Satyajit Ray, Prajwal Parajuly

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## 8.1 Introduction

The statement that spatial conglomeration in India has undergone enormous change is irrefutable, as its visible and tangible signs are so prominent and ubiquitous. The recent surge in scholarly discourse on Indian spatiality is highly suggestive of the various ramifications that require probing from multidimensional perspectives. Prominent changes in urban spaces in India have gradually taken hold, giving rise to the development of smart cities, and the categorisation of Indian cities and towns into tiers has become the new norm. With conscious spatial-change programmes being implemented in our country, the features of both urbanisation and urbanity have been undergoing radical transformations. These two terms are often used interchangeably and sometimes indiscriminately, which leads to a vague and complex understanding of the changing spatiality. Therefore, it would be prudent to apprehend the two intersecting terms to understand the nuances of spatial changes, which is the prime focus of this study. While urbanisation represents the process, urbanity configures the historical, political, social and cultural trends which eventually develop within the process. Urbanisation encompasses the physical and material ramifications, growth, advancements, advantages, and achievements. Urbanity, on the other hand, connotes the patterns of human behaviour and their negotiation of the changing and variable spatiality around them, marking a sharp distinction from rural and rurality. Both the process and its impact on human behavioural and emotional patterns in the Indian scenario have attracted scholars from interdisciplinary fields, as well as writers who have placed their plots in India's urban spaces and have also created an immortal imaginary urban space like R. K. Narayan's Malgudi (*Malgudi Days*, 1943). India is now beginning to be recognised not only as a principally rural and agrarian country but also for its urban spaces and urbanity, with its innate intricacies involved in it. Undoubtedly, the Indian metropolises, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Bengaluru, have most often attracted great writers' attention as interesting, intriguing and complex sites, and renowned authors like Khuswant Singh (*Delhi A Novel*, 1990), Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day*, 1980), Amitav Ghosh (*Shadow Lines*, 1988), Jeet Thayil (*Narcopolis*, 2012), Arvind Adiga (*The White Tiger*, 2008), Anjum Hassan (*Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*, 2009; *History's Angel*, 2023), Mamang Dai (*Stupid Cupid*, 2009), among several other noteworthy writers writing in the English language, have done adequate literary justice in bringing to life the aforementioned cities in their works of fiction. However, it must also be acknowledged that we have a renowned writer like Ruskin Bond who has brought to the limelight the sleepy towns and cities like Mussoorie and Dehradun in his excellent literary works.

If one delves deeply into the study of Indian urban literature, one can discover a treasure trove worthy of interdisciplinary scholarship. The growing number of literary texts centred on urbanism and urbanity has the potential to create a canon within Indian writing in English, to which brilliant writers from Northeast India have added sparkle through their unique representations of urban spaces and urbanity in the Northeast. Easterine Kire, Janice Pariat, Mitra Phukan, Aruni Kashyap, Bijoya Sawian, Ankush Saikia, Jayant Nobis, Nilanjan Choudhury, Dhruva Hazarika, Jahnvi Barua, Siddhartha Deb, Anjum Hasan, and Prajwal Parajuly are among the diverse group of contributors to urban fiction in English from Northeast India. This growing representation illustrates the prolific growth and development of urban spaces in India's Northeast, comprising

eight states. Each of these eight states bears the legacy of a unique historical, social, cultural and political lineage, which is gradually being comprehended and accepted in academic discourses. This is a welcome change in perceptions, which can eventually reduce the misnomer of homogeneity hitherto associated with the eight states. Although in terms of population growth and area, the urban spaces in the Northeast states may not be comparable to those in the larger states of our country, the growth and development that is happening in physical and material terms, weaving its intricate pattern in combination with human emotions and human interventions, is indeed very fascinating. The popular towns and cities of the Northeast region, such as Shillong, Darjeeling, Kohima and Gangtok, have attracted attention since colonial times either as a haven for the administrators of the British Raj or as a stage for resistance and contestation. In the process, these places have acquired multiple nuances and layered manifestations of urbanity unique to themselves. Our research interest in decoding the urbanity of a city led us to the study of two interesting texts and a film; *Sikkim* (1971), *Trouble in Gangtok* (1971) by Satyajit Ray and *Land Where I Flee* (2014) by Prajwal Parajuly, which can be taken as points of reference for forty-three years of the history of urbanism and urbanity in Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim, which became the twenty-second state of the Indian Republic in 1975.

Our main objective in undertaking this study is to contest the exclusion of the urbanisation process occurring elsewhere, beyond the well-regarded metropolises of India. We aim to reinstate the claim that the growth of non-metropolitan urban spaces, with their appendage of urbanity, is worthy of scholarly inquiry. The methodology is an interpretive, qualitative analysis of the chosen texts, aided by a phenomenological approach within the broad framework of spatial studies.

## 8.2 Review of literature

Undoubtedly, such a study demands an extensive literature survey to identify the research gap and to position our findings through the reading of the chosen primary texts, including the English translation of Satyajit Ray's detective novel *Trouble in Gangtok*, originally written in Bengali in 1970. His documentary film, titled *Sikkim* (1971), was commissioned by the last king of Sikkim, Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal, and is paired with Prajwal Parajuly's novel, *Land Where I Flee* (2014). Notably, these texts provide a traceable link to Gangtok's urban-scape and urbanity, spanning four decades and three years. Ray's documentary on Sikkim had been banned from public viewing since 1975, the year of Sikkim's merger with India, and the ban was finally lifted in 2010 (*Sikkim* (film), 1971). Satyajit Ray's stature as a filmmaker and writer has earned him acclaim and attracted several critiques of his works. The controversial documentary on Sikkim has not only been reviewed but also critiqued with interest by critics (Suchismita Das 2014; Sujata Dutta Dey & Rajni Singh, 2024). Das traces the hidden political history through the objections posed by the Royals who commissioned the film's making, the ban imposed on it for thirty-nine years, the lost and found reels of the film, its restoration, the lifting of the ban, and its aftermath. Sujata Dutta-Dey and Rajni Singh have done a comparative study of the film by bringing in the concepts of Eco-cinema and ethnonationalism. Muzahid Sharif, in his Master's Dissertation (2018), points out Ray's shift from a personality-centric documentary film to a place-centric documentary film in his treatment of *Sikkim* (film) (1971). With reference to our chosen text, *Trouble in Gangtok* (1970/2019), we have found two interesting articles written in recent times; one regarding the

Bengali perceptions of the 'Hippie gaze' by Pratiti Ketoki (2022) and an analysis of Ray's indigenising technique employed in the detective genre by Chandreie Mukherjee (2021). Prajwal Parajuly's *Land Where I Flee* (2014) is a tantalising postcolonial and postmodern fiction set in Gangtok city, and the novel, for all its characters and postmodern pastiches, has earned notable acclaim among critics (Lahiri 2017, Rai 2018, Pradhan 2022), and several reviews (Narayan 2013; O'Callaghan 2014; Kniggendorf 2017) have also established Parajuly as a notable contemporary writer. These articles and reviews help to illustrate psychological conflict, friction in relationships, diasporic entanglements, and the study of the 'queer' character in the novel.

The city of Gangtok, the focus of this study, has directed us to several important scholarly works that have clarified our understanding of the subject. These works can be categorised into those that address the political history of Sikkim, with a focus on Gangtok, the capital (Sinha 1975; Tran 2012; N.Ram 1974; Rose 1969), and those that focus on geospatial and environmental studies (Tamang, 2016; Karan 1989; Bhasin et al., 1984; Maharana et al., 2000; Sharma & Pandey 2022; Pierse 2017; Paul, 2013; Chandran 2008; Thambidurai P & Ramesh M.V., 2017; Mandal and Saravana D; Banerjee and Maurya, 2020). The location of Sikkim, its land, history, legends, and the unique grandeur of its religio-cultural tradition, overseen by the towering peaks of Mt. Kanchenjunga, continue to provide mesmerising experiences not only for travellers but also to immerse scholars in deep, eclectic engagements. There are several seminal and archival books available on Sikkim (Edgar 1873; White 1908; Risley 1911; Easton 1928; Das 1983; Williamson 1987; Mullard 2019; Kazi 2020; McKay 2021) that illustrate the varied aspects of Sikkim and the Sikkimese entity, such as history, geography, culture, religion, and the growth and development of Sikkimese society. Since the primary aim of our research is to probe the nature of urbanism and urbanity in Gangtok, we have sought to gain a general understanding of urbanisation, urbanism, and urbanity through several journal articles. Some of the scholarly writings can be traced back to antiquity (Clarke 1881; Hyde 1915; Merrium 1940; Beals 1951; Crane 1955; Anderson 1964), but they help to develop a clear idea about the colonial agenda behind the urbanisation process in strategic locations in India and the postcolonial implications that arose out of the process. The following academic discourses on urbanisation (Smethurst 2000; Grant, 2003; Peterson 2003; Lund 2005; Koelb 2009; Devi 2012; Slooter and Diphooorn 2016; Korenjak 2017; Pautungthang 2018; Vidal 2020; Jain 2021; Mandal et al. 2022; Sahoo 2021; Thakur and Diwan 2021; Naeem 2024; Sharma 2024; Majhee 2025) have provided the required data and analysis of the process of urbanisation in general, in the Indian context, and, in some papers, concerning India's Northeast. *The Cambridge Companion to The City in Literature*, edited by Kevin R. McNamara (2014), is undoubtedly a seminal book, with chapters ranging from mythical cities, colonial and postcolonial cities, and dystopic cities, to urban nightscapes and the urban pastoral, which helped us to assess our stance on Gangtok with clarity. The recently published collection of discourses titled *The City Speaks Urban Spaces in Indian Literature*, edited by Subhashish Bhattacharjee and Goutam Karmakar (2024), is very appropriate for gathering varied perspectives on urbanisation and literature in India. Besides these references, our precepts were further refined through our study of Robert T. Tally's book *Spatiality* (2013), which offers a concise and thorough overview of Western literary theories on the spatial turn, and of critical literary enquiry into space and spatiality. The edited book by Johannes Riquet and Elizabeth Kollmann, *Spatial Modernities Geography, Narrative, Imaginaries* (2020), is a comprehensive, contemporary literary criticism on

space and spatiality, given the wide range of analyses of island narratives, the influence of digitisation on literature, "Satellite Vision and Geographical Imagination" (Shim, 2020, p.68), and narratives about experiences on moving trains.

The extensive literature review above has only affirmed the evident research gap, namely the minimal literary criticism of texts representing smaller cities and towns in India, as well as the negligible studies of literary texts or films that have illustrated smaller cities and towns, particularly in the Northeast region. Thus, our contention has been to introduce two literary texts and a documentary film to explore Gangtok's unique urbanism and urbanity, and to establish the immense potential of literary texts and documentary films as authentic sites for unravelling the tales of an urban space.

### 8.3 The Romance of the Hidden Ridges

Gangtok, meaning "the hilltop", is the capital of Sikkim, a small but strategically located state bordering Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. The capital city of Gangtok has developed along ridges, connected by meandering roads ("Gangtok", 2025). Sikkim's principal economic generator is tourism, and the city of Gangtok has emerged as the most attractive tourist hotspot in the Northeast region for both domestic and foreign tourists alike. Today, Gangtok, with its traditional idyllic charm in combination with 'up-to-date' facilities, a vehicle-free market area, shopping malls, the availability of all global consumer brands, posh hotels and the stylish demeanour of the majority of the inhabitants, has kept Gangtok as a top tourist destination, often beating renowned places like Shillong and Darjeeling in the tourism popularity scale. All available references trace Gangtok's origin to a hermitage, which eventually paved the way for the development of Buddhist monasteries, the King's palace grounds, an Imperial residency and a market area. Gangtok's innate role as a seat of governance and urbanism was noted by the imperial traveller John Easton in his book, *An Unfrequented Highway Through Sikkim and Tibet to Chumolaori*, as far back as 1928, in the following words:

Gangtok, at the head of the Rongni valley on the road to Tibet by the Nathu La, is the capital of the State of Sikkim and contains all that makes up a capital: the palace of the Maharajah, a monastery, a hospital and a jail. Far away to the south-west one can just distinguish Darjeeling; to the north-east is the range of hills, some 12,000 feet high,.. To the north-west, her great crest towering above intervening hills, lies Kinchenjunga, white and clear in the brilliant morning sun (p. 15, Reprint 1997).

Easton, the Scottish flagbearer of the British Raj, a traveller moulded by an imperial vision of exploring a strategic location that would advance the expansive design of the British Empire in Tibet, found a welcome repose in Gangtok after the hardship of riding uphill from the foothills of Bengal. His peripatetic observations recorded the existence of a very clean hospital, the carpet factory, and the monastery of "Enche" (Easton 1928, p. 20), as well as "the impressive secretary to the Maharajah who had a very charming manner, and spoke English perfectly..." (Easton 1928, p. 17). The wondrous gaze of this adventurous spirit finds a perfect "urban pastoral" (McNamara and Gray 2014, p. 245), a hidden hearth, as enchanting and comfortable as the descriptions of places and palaces in fairy stories and myths. By the time Easton had reached Gangtok, the Imperial

establishment was already firmly in place, in the form of a residency house for the Political Officer, the agent of the British Government. Easton is all praise for this set-up:

A picturesque place is Gangtok, perched on its hill at the head of the Rongni valley, and the jewel in its crown is the Residency, with its roses, orchids and dovecot: polished oak floors, pictures, books: great fireplaces, an English country house hidden away in the hills of India ( Easton 1928,p.22).

Forty-three years later, in 1971, when Satyajit Ray was commissioned by Chogyal (King) Palden Thondup Namgyal, the consecrated King, the 12th scion of the Namgyal Dynasty, to create a documentary film on his nation-state, Ray was equally impressed by the picturesque setting and the unique urbanism of Gangtok. Although Ray's documentary encompasses all the major sites of the state of Sikkim, Gangtok's vignette stands out prominently because of the grandeur of the royal monastery and the beautiful scenery of the palace grounds. The making of the film coincided with the consecrated twelfth king's efforts to establish Sikkimese identity amid political upheavals surrounding the nation state. Ray was chosen for his finesse and aesthetics, which could convey and illustrate "cultural-political nationalistic effervescence of that period...(Das 2014, p.45). Ray's portrayal of Gangtok evokes an arcadia overlooked by the glistening snowy peaks of Mount Kanchenjunga. The commissioning of the film itself was a departure from being contained in the "urban pastoral", where the significance of a traveller or a tourist's display of perspective holds great interest. The film opens with rituals and ritual dance in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition at the Royal Monastery at Gangtok, asserting the uniqueness of the grand traditions and customs of Sikkim. The Royal regalia in brocades and the dignified, sophisticated demeanour create an everlasting impression on the viewers, who can comprehend the influence of the palace and the traditions and customs associated with it as markers of urbanism and urbanity of those times in Gangtok. Besides the royal palace and the monastery, Ray's montage shot has captured "Gangtok's Lal Bazar", which was already the "crucible of diversity" (Das 2014, p. 45) with Indians from the plains engaged in trade and commerce. Gangtok's emergence as a modern city is projected through "a shot of a parallel ropeway with two carriages advancing towards each other..." (Das 2014, p. 45), and the inclination towards western ways of education and dressing up is illustrated through the projection of an aristocratic school, The Tashi Namgyal Academy, named after the venerated ruler Sir Tashi Namgyal, the eleventh consecrated king (Das 2014, p. 46). Gentrification in the urbane clime of Gangtok was already in existence, and Ray's camera pans over many huddles of gambling men... While the king and queen attend to their royal guests at the buffet, the commoners are shown sitting on the ground... (Das 2014, p. 46). The residency (converted into the Governor's house after Sikkim's merger with India) of the British Political Officer is not shown at all, reflecting the strong message of "ethnonationalism" that the Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal and his American wife sought to propagate, and they had hoped that the commissioned documentary would fulfil their aspirations. According to chronicled history, contact between the British East India Company and Sikkim began during the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-1815, and John Claude White was appointed the first political officer of Sikkim in 1889 (Kazi 2020, xix-xx). The residency, as the permanent power hub of the British Raj on the ridge opposite the palace, was Claude White's initiative and a triumph of the imperialist vision. Despite Ray's apolitical and objective attitude, the residency on the other ridge is not shown in the film. The royalty were displeased to watch "Ray's matter-of-fact depiction of the arrival of the country-

folk to the royal grounds to gamble and eat plain rice and pork while the royalty entertained their aristocratic guests separately..." (Das 2014, p.47), and the film was stashed away from public view for thirty-nine long years until it was restored after a long legal battle in 2010 and released in Gangtok for public viewing on April 6, 2011 (Das 2014, p.50).

Satyajit Ray's brilliance shone not only in his filmmaking but also in his writings. The protagonist of his detective novel is better known by his nickname "Feluda" (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 1). He loves to travel, and his cousin "Topshe" is the narrator through whom readers learn about the adventures, mysteries and places. Ray's avid interest in exploring Sikkim lay not only in creating a documentary film titled *Sikkim* but also in his alliteratively titled Bengali detective novel *Gangtok e Gondogol* (1971), translated as *Trouble in Gangtok* (2019) by Gopa Majumdar. Pratiti Ketoki, in her article titled "Narrating the 'Hippie': Bengali Perceptions of the Trail" (2024), while arguing about the intersectionality of "hippie travel" with "local travel", designating a kind of counterculture movement (Ketoki, 2024), brings in Gangtok's vantage location as a hill station "not very far from Calcutta but is an alternative" to the highly popular Darjeeling hills among the Bengalis. Ray's detective protagonist chooses Gangtok for its Tibetan mystic influence and the Buddhist Mahayana religious tradition, to spend his vacation with his narrator cousin and to avoid the sweltering heat of Calcutta. The opening chapter describes travel by air to the foothills at the Bagdogra airport and travel by jeep upwards to Gangtok, followed by a description of the city with an array of houses with potted plants, a military camp, men and women in colourful clothes, and ethnic diversity comprising people of Nepalese, Bhutia and Tibetan origin (Ray 1971/2019, p. 8). The presence of a military camp in the vicinity described is a subtle reference to the simmering political unrest and dissensions against the Royalty. While Ray's documentary film projects both place and people, his novel documents the place and the ruptures caused to the place by outsiders, such as tourists and tradesmen.

The plot of Ray's novel is set primarily in Gangtok in East Sikkim, although certain episodes take place in and around the famous Pemayangste monastery in West Sikkim. In the novel, the detective protagonist Feluda and his cousin, Topshe, the narrator, illustrate the ambience of Gangtok through their peregrinations. The reference to the hotel "Snow View" and the colonial vestige of the "dak bungalow" (Ray 1971/2019, p. 8) highlights the city's growing tourism interests. It is interesting to note that, in the novel, the characters do not show interest in visiting the palace grounds or the residency on top of the hills, but are happy to saunter around the bazaar area and the Institute of Tibetology. Although Ray's protagonist and his brother are tourists, as a detective and his assistant, they indirectly reflect the local sentiment of commoners who were gradually weaning themselves away from the awed reverence of the royals and the palace activities. Since the 1940s, there had been intermittent dissensions against the King, and Gangtok, being the capital city, now growing at the base of the overlooking ridges, often became the centre stage of the demonstrations (Kazi 2020, xxi). The growing trade and commerce, and a medley of ethnicities merging in the city's urbanism, are markedly pronounced, with the protagonist feeling surprised to find a "paan shop" (Ray 1971/2019, p. 10); the betel leaf is a typical product of humid, tropical and subtropical climates, and its availability in the market area at an altitude of approximately 5,410 feet ("Gangtok", 2025) above sea level shows the cultural exchanges taking place in the urban scape of Gangtok. Kajri Jain, in discussing the ontology of the Indian bazaar, quotes Derrida about the bazaar as "colonial economy's 'constitutive outside'" (Jain 2021, p. 35), which can be

inverted to understand the growing activity at the bazaar, away from the Royal premises, as the centre stage. In Ray's novel, walking is illustrated as the main form of negotiating the urban space, and the presence of rows of vehicles displayed around explains the sprawling limits and postmodern conveniences. As in the film, Ray projects the chief attraction of Mount Kanchenjunga overlooking the cityscape in his novel, too. His character, Topshe, experiences, with his "reflecting eye, the touching eye" (Lund 2005, p. 29), the "proud, majestic and beautiful" (Ray 1971/2012) Mount Kanchenjunga from the window of their hotel room.

#### **8.4 Gangtok: The City which has Grown**

Sometimes, certain coincidences in history may not be chronicled but can be traced through literary texts. It is interesting to note that, just as Satyajit Ray arrived in Sikkim forty-three years after John Easton, the Imperial traveller, the former had captured his impressions of the place and people in his documentary film and his detective novel. Similarly, forty-three years after Ray, Prajwal Parajuly, from Gangtok, wrote his debut novel, *Land Where I Flee* (2014), a post-colonial and post-modern fiction set in Gangtok. Undoubtedly, perceptible differences are evident in the works of the two, divided by time and place, but their works can be decoded to trace the inevitable changes that have occurred in Gangtok's urban space.

Parajuly's Gangtok, a city of ascensions, has moved a long way from the pretty Arcadia it used to be. His novel depicts buildings that are ever on the rise, a disturbing concern that preoccupies the mind of the eighty-four-year-old lady named Chitrlekha, the protagonist in this novel (Parajuly 2014, p.70). Chitrlekha, the virago grandmother in the novel, strikes one as a 'badaud' (a bystander), whose thoughts about the city reveal to the readers the portrait of the city as it has become from what it was not. This is because of the deft writing style of the author, who portrays the aged lady as a "voyeur" in Certeau's terms (Loffler 2017, p.39). However, Chitrlekha's position as a superior matriarch with strong and advantageous social and political connections, combined with her age, does make her static like a "voyeur" who "takes up a detached, uninvolved position, observing the city from a physically elevated position or a distance" (Loffler 2017, p.39). Her mind cannot accept the increasing transfigurations of the Gangtokscape, especially the fact that a Minister of the ruling government begins the construction of a seven-storey building in front of her house, which would eventually block the view from her house of the majestic Mt. Kanchenjunga (Parajuly 2014, p. 66). To add to her chagrin, the minister had plans to convert that structure into a hotel. Gangtok has emerged as an attractive tourist destination, and tourism is the most viable means of generating capital, as implied in this part of the description. Chitrlekha's anxious concerns about urbanisation in this novel reflect the state of spatial expansion happening in Gangtok. The readers are led into the labyrinths of the worried mind of the old lady, who feels highly annoyed and deranged because of a high-rise construction beside her house (Parajuly 2014, p.71).

The urbanisation of Gangtok has become synonymous with the construction of buildings. The population of Gangtok, which was 13,308 in 1971, has risen to 100,286 according to the 2011 Census of India. According to the Census of India, the number of census houses in Gangtok in 1991 was 7682, whereas in 2011 it was 30,328, of which 26641 were modern buildings. Since this novel was published in 2014, the above-mentioned data supports the effort of the writer "who is

best able to capture the relationship between the urban environment and human behaviour" (Coverley p.116). The writer portrays how the spectacle of capitalism has assumed a marked characteristic in both the horizontal and vertical spread of buildings, of varied shapes and heights, that have filled up the ridges and the spur that make up the city (Parajuly 2014, p.66). Pine trees and cherry trees have receded from the bases to the top of the ridges (Ashok Kumar Sharma, 2010), and when viewed from the opposite hill, Gangtok appears as a mountain of thick layers of rising structures (Parajuly 2014, p.70). With buildings aiming at vertical rise, back-hill cutting of the spurs (A.R. Vijaya Narayana et al., 2012) is a regular phenomenon. The indentation of the land has led to the creation of numerous staircases, which dot the cityscape. Parajuly describes the phenomenon of the stairways as replete with meanings, as Calvino's descriptions of the city of stairs laden with dreams in his famous book *Invisible Cities* (Calvino 37). Calvino's perception of the city of stairs is embedded with both "desires" and "fears" (Calvino 38). The readers can detect a similar combination of emotion in Chitrlekha's mind, whereby her memory of the open space and the easily accessible view of Mount Kanchenjunga gets unfortunately obstructed by the rapid construction spree, which she fears would soon go out of her control despite her financial status and favourable political affiliations (Parajuly, 2014, p. 69).

Parajuly has made a brilliant assessment of the manoeuvrings within the city's space, leading to multiple segmentations of the land that affect the minds of those who inhabit the place. Solnit discusses in her book *Wanderlust* how changed "public spaces" and new architecture create crisis and fear in the minds and induce extreme resistance (Solnit, 2002, p.11). In contrast to the general acceptance of the inevitable transfiguration of the cityscape, Chitrlekha, the protagonist, opposes it. Her psyche resists the expansion of the staircases in the city (p. 69).

As a city "is regarded both as a physical and metaphysical space, an artistic and a socio-political site" (Beville 2013, p. 603), Gangtok has been growing as India's prime tourist destination, with "a regular growth in the number of tourists visiting the state, which increased to 41,000 in 1985 and gradually culminated in 25,500 in the year 2005" (C. Latu and M. Bulai, 2011). Gangtok's economy thrives on tourism, and in the novel we find frequent reference to this aspect. Gangtok's pride is Mount Kanchenjunga, the third-highest peak in the world, a magnificent gift of Nature to the cityscape, which makes Gangtok's populace happy. The scenic view of the mountain range is the major attraction for tourists to Gangtok. It is interesting to note that the tourists' awed appreciation differs markedly from the intimate feelings of the city's inhabitants. Parajuly's old protagonist displays an emotional bond with her surroundings that no outsider can feel (p.71).

The building construction and structures have inverse financial and class connotations, whereby the old social structures have been transformed, and relationships have been affected. In the novel, Chitrlekha's cottage becomes a symbol of power, a testament to assertion and frequent participation in bureaucratic machinations (p. 69). With the proliferation and ramification of government machinery in the capital, vehicular movements have increased, as vehicle ownership testifies to the maintenance of status and positions (Parajuly 2014, p. 69). The protagonist, Chitrlekha, "born during the First World War" (p. 95), is a witness to the transformation of the cityscape. The writer uses the metaphor of the mushroom to explain the widening breadth of the constructed structure on a narrow foundation (p. 70).

The present condition of Gangtok echoes what Debord explained about the new architecture that seems within the reach of the masses but, in fact, leads to subtle transformations in the conditions of living (Debord 1955, p. 173). At the back of people's minds, the water scarcity in the adjacent Darjeeling district serves as a continual reminder of an impending disaster that may strike the city very badly in future. Apart from that, the Darjeeling district, which has long been trying to carve out its statehood in the form of Gorkhaland (p. 11) and secession from the state of West Bengal, finds sympathisers in the people, and at times the streets of Gangtok resound with demands for it (*India Today*, Datta, 2017). In the novel, besides the eighty-four-year-old protagonist, other characters also feel the striking transformation of the cityscape. The reckless growth of urban space and the rapid rise in economic activity in Gangtok are noticed by Chitrlekha's granddaughter Bhagwati, who returns to Gangtok after nine long years. She gauges the transformation, and the unplanned expansion of construction sites bewilders her (Parajuly 2014, p. 66). Her amazement at witnessing the changes corroborates Debord's statement that "Urbanism is the modern fulfilment of the uninterrupted task which safeguards class power" (Debord 1967, p. 172). Bhagwati recalls the days when she had taken her would-be husband on a tour of the important landmarks at Gangtok (p. 81), and the noticeable vehicular movements strike her as markedly different from those of her previous spatial remembrance of Gangtok. *In Land Where I Flee*, through several episodes, it is implied that walking, as a natural means of navigating the cityscape, has given way to the domination of the automobile. This change corroborates Debord's observation that the "dictatorship of the automobile, pilot-product of the first phase of commodity abundance, has been stamped into the environment with the domination of the freeway, which dislocates old urban centres and requires an ever-larger dispersion" (Debord 1967, p. 174). The transfigurations and the dispersion of space affect the characters whose memories of the place do not match the present. The driveway to Chitrlekha's cottage, in place of stairs, is an affirmation of the significance of automobiles as a benchmark of social stature and prestige (Parajuly 2014, p. 74). The novel ends symbolically with the description of Mount Kanchenjunga being partially visible to Chitrlekha's eyes through the clouds, implying that, as the construction work in front of her house continues, it would eventually block her view of the peaks altogether. It becomes a veritable case of psychogeographical pathos as the protagonist comes back home from the hospital only to encounter her helplessness to curtail the construction activity. The author ends the novel with the juxtaposition of discord and desire for economic fecundity. Chitrlekha tries to drown her mental pain by puffing on a forbidden beedi and watches helplessly at the workers, "laying the foundations for the seventh floor of the new hotel" that would bring in the uncouth class of tourists from the neighbouring state of West Bengal (Parajuly 265). Chitrlekha's mental state vis-à-vis her location can be taken as a representation of the populace and their interaction with the speeding spatial transfigurations.

## 8.5 Conclusion

Through this study, we have attempted to trace a long period of urbanism and urbanity in Gangtok by scrutinising select texts that chart the gradual transformation of the Himalayan city over the years. The select texts present Gangtok as a city known for its gorgeous natural grandeur, overshadowed by the striking exquisiteness of the Himalayan range of Mount Kanchenjunga, which retains social and cultural significance as sacrosanct and is considered the guardian deity

of Sikkim (Parajuly 2014, p. 70). The legacy of the royal family is embedded in the city's cultural fabric; for example, the aristocratic school named after the 11th king, Tashi Namgyal Academy (Das 2014, p. 46), where a character in Parajuly's novel is a student (Parajuly 2014, p. 83). However, from Ray's portrayal to Parajuly's writing, one can discern a considerable change in the power structure and hierarchy, as well as the fluidity of demography, such as the notable increase of the Nepali diasporic community. Memories, desires, and expectations of one's city are overhauled by new developments that occur with the passing of time. This especially strikes the people who are aged and who live to witness the transformations. Parajuly's Chitrlekha is an example of this category of people, and as Calvino writes, for the old people, desires for a particular spatial configuration of a city regress as memories (Calvino 1997, p. 7). Although the transfigurations affect the characters in the novel, there is also an embedded premonition that the cityscape is gradually losing its uniqueness and becoming immersed in the spectacle of growing urbanisation, affecting the populace both psychologically and physically. While Ray's works have immortalised the city's Arcadian impression, Parajuly's novel leaves the readers with questions about the city, which has grown.

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