

Climate, Epidemiological Insecurities and the City

Debashree Chakraborty and Shatabdi Das

While epidemiology, in its connotative sense, conjures up images that are largely medical, “epidemiological”, in its ramifications, is more of a social phenomenon, playing out, in understated mutation, across the domains of the political and the economical, subjecting the society and its actors to insecurities. As the epidemiological plays out, cities become sites of its intrusion. Cities, with their massive population and infrastructural and municipal requirements, were the worst hit during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Cities also bear heavy costs of life with epidemiological crises like vector borne diseases, outbreak of infections, etc. Such crises not only challenge the medical facilities on offer, but also challenge and even change the functional rubrics of the city. As the dynamics of economy and income change after an epidemiological crisis sets in and takes over cities, the salient aspects of the city, which generally remain hidden under facades of the “everyday” and “mundane” also change. In other words, the epidemiological is also a synonym of change and it brings with it challenges to rise up to the change. These changes are of multiple kinds and construe varied aspects of municipal and social controls which, in the end, imbue insecurities.

The challenges thrown by epidemiological insecurities are expansive in their range. While medical emergencies form the top most layer of such insecurities, its effects percolate to several other strata when posited in the cityscape. From access to emergency medical facilities to who can access facilities and how much—become part of the greater question of insecurity. Alongside, the rubrics of inequality in terms of social and economic security play out to the fore more starkly in times of epidemiological crises than they do in normal terms. The city, in such times, becomes a veritable ground of contestations which cater to insecurities more than security. Epidemiological times are thus symptomatic of insecurities. These are moments when “biopolitics from below” play out to inform “the politics of life” as Ranabir Samaddar discusses in his latest book *Biopolitics from Below: Crisis, Conjuncture, Rupture*. Epidemiological times reveal the fissures that exist in our society in terms of inequality, accessibility and democratic practices and cities become the theatres of such play outs. In this paper, we shall try to see how city changes itself or may be, reveals itself, in the face of epidemiological crises. A part of this paper will explore how the cultural terrains of cities transform as outcomes of epidemiological crises and in turn how these changes are mapped across cultural artefacts thus making them into testaments of spatio-temporal changes.