

Book review

Urbanizing Citizenship: Contested Spaces in Indian Cities

Renu Desai and Ramola Sanyal (eds). 2011. New Delhi: SAGE Publications

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India's story of modernity is fast becoming an urban one in which the middle and the lower classes are competing for their claim to city spaces. *Urbanizing Citizenship* demonstrates that these conflicts are well-understood as engagements of citizenship, and demonstrate that these adhere only partially to the classic western social theory of urban citizenship. The book challenges a set of naturalized, gendered, and dichotomous analogies that has characterized both urban and political studies. The volume unfolds like a two-part nine-act drama. It is structured into two parts, which in turn are represented through eight case studies. The eight case studies explore urban citizenship paradigms across Indian cities—Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, and Varanasi. Essentially, these case studies demonstrate a series of splinters that constitute Indian cities, and demonstrate how the very idea of urban citizenship is continually challenged in its urban spaces.

The *sutradhaar*, or story teller, of the ensuing drama is a thought-provoking introduction penned by editors Desai and Sanyal. The editors mention that in the rapidly changing global political context, there is an increasing acceptance that cities in the global South are far more generative of urban change and innovation than previously theorized, and that they are in productive conversation with cities in the global north, rather than being mere foils to them. Vast inequalities and a large share of informal spaces in urban areas categorize cities of the global South. This needs to be locally contextualized,

understood, and then fed into reshaping fundamentals of critical urban theory. The changing concepts of 'citizenship' in Indian cities over time are explored and it is indicated that one is not necessarily a sub-set of the other; rather, citizenship and cities are constitutive.

In the first study, Renu Desai presents how, after the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, the state desperately tried to re-brand its cities as a culturally dynamic space, but at the same time, kept Muslim communities away from this image-building exercise. Desai mentions that a 'politics of erasure and denial' was pursued wherein politics of Hindu nationalism and identity, pride in regional Gujarati identity, and a civic pride in entrepreneurial Ahmedabad was promoted, leading to creation of urban citizenship that is exclusionary based on class and religion.

In the following case studies, Liza Weinstein and Sapana Doshi explore urban citizenship in the context of urban renewal projects involving resettlement of informal slum dwellers. Weinstein studies the Dharavi Redevelopment Project where inclusion of the voices of local groups in the planning stage was largely decided by extent of wealth, status, and influence possessed by these groups. Here urban citizenship was linked to symbolic power and political resource and linked to class, caste position, and historical claims on space. Doshi's case study picks up the participatory slum resettlement under the Mumbai Urban Transport Project. Here participatory gendered citizenship was mobilized and harnessed, and while this carved out space for women slum leaders to play

empowered roles in usually top-down elite-driven projects, it also reinforced already existing socio-economic inequalities among slum residents.

The fourth case study is by Malini Rangathan, assessing the e-governance grievance redressal rolled out in Karnataka cities. She indicates that this approach has led to contractualized urban citizenship undermining collective struggles and imbibing socio-economic and gender biases. She expresses concern over the fact that e-governance fails to capture both: the work done informally—to cover official failures—as well as the collective nature of problems. All four case studies of the first part of the volume talk about the fracturing of urban citizenship along axes of class, religion, ethnicity, caste, and gender as new paradigms of 'good governance' are introduced across Indian cities.

The second part examines and presents how the changing politics of protests and negotiation, and the shifting relationship between different classes and religious groups as well as between the state and these groups are shaping urban environment and citizenship. Sunalini Kumar analyses the case of Delhi public transport vehicles shifting to compressed natural gas (CNG). This move followed judicial activism that was driven by middle-class values of right to better environment, in direct conflict with right to work in context of the drivers and owners of taxis and para-transits. In this case, the social, economic, political, and ecological problem of air pollution was whittled down to a mere technical solution, and the voices of the masses with threatened livelihoods were not given a chance to challenge.

Jolie Wood examines protests and claim-makings in Varanasi and builds interesting observations. She says that changing economic, political, and spatial conditions in the city have led to middle-class occupational associations preferring more non-formal means of public protests compared to lower-class occupational associations which prefer formal means of public protests through appeals to the concerned

government officials. References to the resemblance of the Sao Paulo favelas experience are made where low-income groups adopted formal forms of negotiation with the state rather than informal forms conflicting with it to gain formal rights to urban space.

Jaideep Gupte explores the legacy of over two decades of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai. He argues that state failures in providing security against various vulnerabilities lead to violence becoming a survival strategy for more vulnerable urban communities. He also explores the role of extra-state actors in perpetuating communal violence by challenging state power and legitimacy, and indicates that urban violence can be reduced by addressing causes of urban vulnerabilities. On a similar note, Romola Sanyal shows that during Partition, refugees from East Bengal seemed to have rights of formal space in urban areas, although not supported officially. More recently, those who want to move into West Bengal no longer enjoy that status and have to use covert means to gain access to urban spaces, and that too more informally than others who migrate from within the state/country.

The volume demonstrates that all authors recognize that there is a fracturing of urban citizenship among various axes in Indian cities, each with its own underlying issues of political philosophy. These theories are akin to established western theories of urban citizenship, but differ enough from them to be looked at again. The volume is extremely informative and the case studies are quite lucid and easy to read, making it an essential read not only for students, researchers and academia interested in studying changing paradigms of urban citizenships, but also for practitioners. It will help policy-makers to know and understand the underlying politico-philosophical undercurrents that determine how fractured the relationship between formal and informal segments of urban society are, and thereby help them design their interventions in a more informed and inclusive manner.