

Melting Cities: Reading Heatwaves as Embodied and Gendered Phenomena in Urban Living

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Inequality is enfolded into the very discourse of climate change. While the most contributing nations hail from the global north, the global south is subjected to frequent repercussions. The city of Kolkata has been witnessing severe heat waves as summers grow to be hotter each year. City design, loss of green coverage, and dense urbanisation produce a phenomenon called “urban heat islands.” Thus, urban living is now marred by negotiating with climate catastrophe. Heatwaves have been an object of study by meteorologists, climate scientists. However, scholars have argued for the simultaneous need for an interdisciplinary intervention in the study of heat. I shall attempt to add to this discussion by exploring the embodied experience of heatwaves by city residents in their everyday life. My paper shall particularly address the question of the difference in the heavily classed, and gendered experience of heat in the cities- from the public spheres to the confines of the home. What does living through a heatwave look like for women in cities in the global south? How does caregiving work, cooking in hot kitchens, etc impact the lives of women on a hot planet? Only certain labouring bodies are accorded the right to occupy air-conditioned spaces in the age of thermal inequality. For the present study, I shall conduct interviews among women of the selected households in the city of Kolkata. This would involve having conversations across generations in the family, with homemakers, working professionals, and the domestic helps.