

Navigating Urban Inequality: Water Supply and State Interaction in Rangpuri Pahadi, Delhi.

Cities over the world witness migrant influx. In the Indian case it may be due to marriage, rural distress, socio-economic aspirations among a myriad of other factors. However the migrant's living standard and conditions in the city is not analogous to their former living outside the city. A large section of the migrants who arrive in the cities are seen working in the informal sector and living in unplanned and informal settlements. These settlements face a constant threat of erosion in the form of the sudden demolition drives. But in addition to the threat of demolition that imperils of completely wiping off their existence from the city, there is something else which keeps the migrants daily lives in abeyance by its presence yet absence. This is the provision of public services with which the migrants- and now residents of the informal settlements in the city- struggle and negotiate almost on a daily basis with the state. In my research, I will be looking at public water services through which the state makes itself visible and tangible to the residents. The hydraulic infrastructure of pipes, water meters, tankers, etc are few ways through which the state connects with the citizens as well as the ways through which the citizens experience the state. However, this hydraulic infrastructure of the postcolonial city is not uniformly maintained as one sees the inequality in the spatial water distribution between the wealthy areas and the informal settlements. It is seen that the formal and (somewhat) enduring hydraulic infrastructure of piped water supply is not available in the informal settlements and there is a reliance on water collection from tankers and common water taps. Even the latter form of water supply is erratic and embroiled in a web of complex politics. The water problem gets exacerbated in the summer months when the water demand is more and its supply gets constrained further. However its curtailments are not as stark in the propertied households and places located nearby. It is through my fieldwork experiences in Rangpuri Pahadi, an informal settlement located in the vicinity of posh Vasant Kunj in South Delhi that I try to interrogate the nature of water supply-its reliability and costs- as experienced by its residents. Water is a condition necessary for human survival and a control over its supply is a means through which the state tries to governmentalize populations and their demands. It is through the nature of water supply that the city creates a hierarchy between the different population groups. The dissemination of the narrative of scarcity seems to legitimize the state's actions. The relation with water is one of the ways through which the migrants experience the city. The lack thereof shapes their conduct, behavior and daily time-tables. It is through the fieldwork data that records the experiences of the residents in the urban informal settlement of Rangpuri Pahadi that I try to make a case of water as a way through which the migrants experience the state and engage with it. The research paper tries to investigate the hydraulic infrastructure available in the informal settlements to understand how the city looks at the migrants who have now been living there for years as well as the politics around water to understand how the migrants make sense of and negotiate with the urban administration for the continued and regular supply of water.

