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IDEA, INTENTION AND DELIVERY OF EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Politics of distribution in urban water supply across socio-economic spaces in Delhi

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The research essentially suggests a way of reading the city, conceptually and methodologically, through the vantage point of the distribution of basic services. It also describes how disparate delivery of such services tends to relate to varied spatial and social conditions of urban living. In doing so, the work locates itself contextually in the post-independence planning of Delhi and investigates whether the delivery of water supply is selectively provided across socio-economic spaces in the city. Consequently, exceptions, made in favor of certain spaces (or areas) in the city, yield to the mixed condition of (in)equity and (in)justice and, in turn, instigate the politics of distribution outside the policy regime.

The context of the research is the post-independence planning of Delhi. Independent India envisioned the idea of democracy with equality and liberty as its basic tenets. With an intention of attaining such an idea, planning was adopted as the policy that would take the new nation forward. Delhi was, indeed, the microcosm and the model of demonstration of similar intentions. Loaded with the utopia of high-modern urban planning, the Master Plan for Delhi would, then, aspire to shape the city in an equitable manner leading to the production of the instrument, the end-state land use plan. However, the real existence on ground today, is full of multiple conditions of urban living. Only a few parts of the city somewhat resemble what was originally intended, while the rest has grown outside and beyond the dictum of planning. These are the heterotopias, this work focuses on and outlines three broad objectives: the first, to construct and assemble a theoretical framework that can capture different ideological moments of the State and related instances of its practices; the second, to build around such a framework, an account of justice and equity in the delivery of urban basic services of water supply; and the third, to explore possible tactical and systemic nuances in approaching conditions of equity and justice. The transition of India from the welfare-State condition to the neo-liberal one and corresponding changing notions of equity and justice are captured through the ideology-policy-governmentality framework within tactical theoretical alliances between the Marxist and the poststructuralist positions. Such framework helps to adjoin and, therefore, explains the idea, the intention and the real conditions while moving across different time-spans of ideologies, India has adhered to. The mainstream Marxist theories are critically aware of the unevenness and differential conditions of social justice in a historical and geographical sense, whereas the poststructuralist notions describe the ontology of multiple existences and practices. The role of the State and the way governance conducts itself are crucial and central to such a theoretical alliance.

The delivery of water supply in Delhi is the key empirical parameter to understand the equitable distribution within this theoretical framework. The provision of water supply under the control of the State is expected to address some of its ideological commitments. While planning for water supply, the government, however, tends to dwell upon the narratives of the planned and the unplanned, the legal and the illegal, the authorized and the unauthorized. I argue that even within the so-called planned and legal spaces in Delhi, despite same norms, delivery of water supply varies across spaces. In turn, higher socio-economic groups get better supply than the lower ones. Empirical observations reveal that inequity exists at multiple levels: differential policy norms tend to guide the provision of water supply across various settlement types defined in planning documents; horizontal (or geographical) inequity prevails across territories of Delhi; and traces of vertical inequity exist across so-called 'legal' and 'planned' colonies of the city, where socio-economic spaces, occupied by the relatively higher strata of society, get more water supply. Over and above, ambiguity in information continues to render inaccurate descriptions and estimates of the reality of the supply regarding a number of aspects, for example, the coverage of water supply, the loss of water in distribution as well as the number of unauthorized and squatter settlements. In this politics of distribution, certain evidence of political patronage, too, while being tentative on the surface, may be seen effective in selective instances. Such multiple shades of equity and justice, I recognize, form an **equity mosaic** in the city. In exploring these claims, the research primarily draws on a combination of the case study, stratified random survey and statistical research methods to analyse data derived from the government documents and a primary household survey to present the lack of equity in actual delivery.

The concluding part of the research underlines the combination of few smaller interrelated observations on distributive possibilities while working towards equity and justice in water supply. Two-slab model for minimal and optimal water supply, differential pricing premiums and the structural modifications of the state-territory-enclave formulation are some of the alternative suggestions I make here. Such propositions, to an extent, help me make an attempt to understand the present urban conditions, resulting in what I refer to as the **assorted city** that may also be a conceptual possibility for the city reading.
