

Biopolitics and Marginality: Poor Migrant in Urban periphery¹

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Cities are crucial as spatial constructs, because they condense and signify the affirmation and contestation of power relation of that society, and they do so because they concentrate within the same constricted geographical boundaries, the processes of production, and those of appropriation of space...city landscapes are thus designed by two parallel, yet contradictory processes, destined to be in a state of civil war with each other³. However, under the tutelage of modern capitalist state, organized effort has been initiated to homogenize urban social order defined and dictated by neo liberal regime. It involves the construction of roles, it involves the insertion of people into predictable and safe ways of thinking and behaving, it involves the construction and constitution of communities and individuals, it involves disciplinary mechanisms as the researches of Foucault have showed us, it involves civilized behaviour, above all it simply involves the 'socialization' of people into the values of capitalist society (ibid: 67).⁴ Governmentalised understanding of development expects population to abide by the 'order of development' decided by aid agencies like World Bank and executed by various state agencies.

Ordered-prescriptive democratic regime expects that population would be law-abiding, pliable and obedient to state. Based on these assumptions, state-urban poor encounters are, more often than not, dictated by newer technologies of rule where the very existence of poor is being seen from the lens of illegality and therefore spaces of their participation disappears. The approach in which technologies of rule consolidates its authority depends on the method in which they are construed and put into practice by actors of governance. It is also important to realize why and how they are seized upon, understood as also contested by differently placed people within 'the poor'. The policies and programmes under the governance regime are taking place in contexts in which the contracting and retreating neoliberal state is increasingly exclusionary and apathetic towards the poor. This is exacerbated by the fact that large sections of the urban underclass are threatened against their claim of citizenship in the city due to polarization of groups around nativist rhetoric. Here, one has to deal with the issue 'who constitute unruly population?' And what kinds of security concerns are given official recognition by the state.

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³ Chandhoke, Neera. (1993) On the Social Organisation of Urban Space: Subversion and Appropriations. Social Scientists, vol. 21, No 5/6. Pp 63-73.

⁴ ibid

The spaces for urban poor and the processes of governance within it are enormously vexed issues. In the name of authority of government and responsibility of governance, the state sees evictions and demolitions as one of the major solutions to the “problems” of slums. In Mumbai, out of the total population of 13 million about 55% constitute its slum population, who occupy about 12.85 % of the city’s total land area. Greater portions of the lands on which slums are located today were previously uninhabitable and it is through the efforts of the slum dwellers that these lands were “reclaimed” and rendered habitable. Approximately 6 to 6.5 million live in slums in the most unhygienic and filthy conditions and another one million live on the pavements. It is also estimated that nearly 2 million people live as tenants in rented premises, a large number of which are old and dilapidated structures, including ‘chawls’. As a result we find that nearly 9 million of the city’s population lives in sub-standard or unsafe housing conditions under the abuse and continuous threat of displacement.

Mostly such displacements happen to facilitate the projects that include urban infrastructural development, urban renewal and housing schemes, transport systems, etc. Through demolition of substandard slum settlement, a perceptible representation of poverty, the displacement of people for infrastructural development or other urban re-newel programs claims to improve the living condition of poor. All these happens through a well planned and organized policies and programmes so that the process of relocation can be smoothed and portrayed as state’s concern for the ‘well being’ of the poor. Unfortunately, such displacement has resulted in enormous adverse consequences and heightened insecurities for the impoverished population. Since most areas affected by such projects are inhabited by daily wage labourers engaged in construction, conservancy and other low paid jobs they are in a constant threat of losing their livelihood with displacement. In a relocated place they face a situation of unemployment, police repression, social breakdown, and loss of sense of belonging due to lack of collective identity. Most often than not, involuntary relocation increases people’s inability to access education facilities, health services, and livelihood opportunity and therefore their everyday life is marred with insecurity and struggle for survival.

The pace and frequency of relocating the poor for providing space for the use of upper echelon of the society is rampant and at times remains invisible and unrecognized. It always undermines communities’ relentless effort to make their space habitable by their labour and resources, bereft of any government assistance. The hard work of ‘squatters’ in creating homes, their love for their communities, their pride in creation and their struggles with government to gain recognition and concludes that in fact, squatters give reality to Henri Lefebvre’s concept of ‘right to the city’⁵. Once the poor enhance the marketability of the place of their habitation, the

⁵ Neuwirth, Robert. (2005). *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World*. Routledge. New York.

legality and illegality of their occupancy is being ascertained through governmental technologies such as voter list, slum survey, PDS cards, etc. Mostly the importance of the space and subsequent discussion for eviction start happening once these erstwhile low priority lands are developed through the efforts of the residents, these are termed as illegal occupancy. It was observed that those who failed to provide documentary proof to support their credentials were unable to get their entitlement of housing in the relocated site.

When it comes to displacing and evicting the poor, the state and its actors couch it in a manner as if they are guiding the 'ignorant' for their betterment. The use of power as guidance signifies that coercion or consensus is reformulated as means of government among others. While referring about Governmentality, Lemke refers Foucault's view that governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarities and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself⁶. It is interesting to understand, examine and analyse those processes and techniques that try to shape, sculpt, mobilise and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups.

The notion of 'developmental state' provides logic and rationale for application of technical means of governance. These technical mean include constructing the notion of 'population', as a totality of subjugated voices. Rule in modern societies, according to Foucault, is to be understood as triangulated around practices of sovereignty-discipline-government and to have as its essential object the population. Contemporary societies continue to contain struggles against direct domination and against capitalist exploitation, but increasingly they manifest social struggles against the form of subjection themselves...They possess a totalizing moment, in which states group subjects together in order to rule them, and an individualizing moment, in which subjects are separated as the objects of pastoral power. The politics and practice of urban governance in Mumbai plays out individualization techniques and totalizing procedures as a nuanced strategy of state power. Techniques of individualization in the process of resettlement happen by individualised documentary proofs, justification of legality of habitation, ensuring individuals rights and entitlement for compensatory relocation, etc. The process of individualization in the context of slum dwellers of Mumbai can be understood by the fact that as early as in the year 1976, a census of huts on public land was conducted and 'photopasses' were issued to those who met certain criteria, prepared by the state to decide 'eligibility' for resettlement. The 'photopass' became a certified document with the individuals to claim their eligibility for resettlement if the land on which their habitat exists is required by the state for a 'public purpose'. More often

⁶ Lemke, Thomas. (2000). Foucault, Governmentality and Critique. Paper presented at the *Rethinking Marxism Conference*, University of Amherst (MA), September 21-24, (Retrieved from J Stor).

than not, these passes are considered as a document for security of residence. However totalization procedure happens through demolition, collective eviction and shifting in transit camps and from there to relocated sites and several other forms. In deciding the entitlement, each and everyone is considered as PAPs and compensation is uniform and totalized, without recognizing the composition of families, the size of earlier tenements, etc.

In the process, there is a movement from a relative freedom in the 'city-state' to the closely administered 'state-city' in which freedom are subject to a panoply of varied forms of control that is akin to liberal and authoritarian governmentality. Bio-politics denotes a cumulative process by which human life itself becomes incorporated within the aegis of the state. The capitalist project of the state unfolds itself in a manner which forces dominated class to share the values and principles of dominant. This has profound impact on the liberal traditions of freedom – freedom to reside, move, visit, work in a particular area, etc. Developmental agenda on one hand increases the governmental power to reconfigure the space continually, and on the other hand it decreases the liberal space of freedom. Again we need to know how this began in independent India, its specific impact on the pattern of conflicts in society, and how it impacts on the relation between those who govern and those who are governed.⁷

The analytics of government not only concentrates on the mechanism of the legitimization of domination or the masking of violence, beyond that it focuses on the knowledge that is part of the practices, the systematization and rationalization of a pragmatics of guidance. The conditions and constraints under which the poor negotiate with the state are the conditionality made as sacrosanct and given. The urban poor are frequently in a situation where the process of governance results in making them more insecure and deprived under the rubric of their 'illegality'. The logic and 'legality' of urban governance leave the urban poor with no other choice but to rely on 'illegal' arrangements that the poor always have to make- illegal structure, illegal strategies, informal arrangements for basic civic services, etc; thereby making them a permanently vulnerable group at the hands of the agent of the state as also slum lords. As a result they are forced to operate in peculiar forms of temporality. In the process they are often branded as unruly population. Their everyday life operates in the situation of insecurity, urgency, and of emergency.

The class character of the state is quite apparent where deliberate attempt is made to insulate, spatially and socially, the bourgeoisie from undesirable others. The lives exist in places, known as resettlement colonies, become visible in the forms of bare life. The right to the city becomes illusive to the poor. The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization and

⁷ Samaddar, Ranabir. Public lecture on 'Development, Democracy and Governmentality', TISS, Mumbai (22-12-08)

socialization, to habitat and to inhabit.⁸ To exclude the *urban* from groups, classes, individuals, is also to exclude them from civilization, if not from society itself. The *right* to the city legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization.⁹ The central and peripheral/marginal zoning of city space that takes place under sovereign power demonstrate governing of development democracy in a unique form. It therefore marks an excluded but included space within the topography of sovereign power, and potentially opens this topography to an expansion of bare life to more sections of the underprivileged population.

Even though the visibility of these squatter settlements is constantly sought to be erased by moving them elsewhere, by bulldozing them, and by evicting the inhabitants, squatter settlements are spatial forms which make assertions, which contest dominant relations, and which make the dialectic between the forces of domination, and those of resistance starkly visible in a way no other medium can do. The production of space is inherently political process and it is symbolic of both power and resistance to these symbols of power. The political power of place also comes from its unique ability to link the experiential (phenomenal), social and symbolic dimensions of space. Transformative politics comes from separating, juxtaposing, and recombining them. In order to challenge the dominant practice of society, there must be a space for subaltern resistance. Nancy Fraser argues that subaltern counterpublics can overcome the elitism and homogeneity that characterized the bourgeoisie public sphere in its golden age.¹⁰ To be effective politically, a subaltern counter public must be a space where groups can develop the resources to present a consistent challenge to dominant practices...It must provide, at least temporarily, a space protected from the dominant discourse in which an alternative can be imagined, lived, and articulated (Kohn 2001: 507)¹¹. The spaces of subaltern counter public, unfortunately, have been dubbed as conglomeration/organization of unruly population, that could be dangerous for the 'security' and therefore to be dealt with by several arms/ agencies of the government and through a variety of nuanced governmental technologies.

⁸ Lefebvre, Henri. (1996). *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Fraser, Nancy. (1992). *Rethinking the Public Sphere* in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and The Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Pp 109-42.

¹¹ Kohn, Margaret. (2001). *The Power of Place: The House of People as Counterpublic*. *Polity*. Vol 33. No 4. pp 503-526