

Geographien Südasiens

14

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Aktuelle Forschungsbeiträge zu Südasien

12. Jahrestagung des AK Südasien, 21./22. Januar 2022, Bonn/online



Arbeitskreis
SÜDASIEN



Geographien Südasiens

Schriftenreihe des Arbeitskreises Südasiens
in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie (DGfG)

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Arbeitskreis Südasiens

Der Arbeitskreis Südasiens in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie (DGfG) wurde im Januar 2011 gegründet. Hauptziel ist die Vernetzung von Geographinnen und Geographen, deren regionaler Arbeitsschwerpunkt in Südasiens liegt. Hierzu gehört die Diskussion aktueller Forschungsergebnisse in der gesamten Bandbreite des Fachs, der Dialog zwischen Geographinnen und Geographen aus Praxis, Wissenschaft und Schule, der Austausch über die konkrete Arbeit in Südasiens sowie die gemeinsame Erörterung aktueller Entwicklungen in einer sich rapide wandelnden Region. Der Arbeitskreis richtet sich hierbei gleichermaßen an physische Geographen und Anthropogeographen. Auf diese Weise bündelt der Arbeitskreis vorhandene Expertisen und verdeutlicht die Regionalkompetenz der Geographie, auch in der Außenwirkung.

Zu den weiteren Zielen des Arbeitskreises gehören die Erstellung gemeinsamer Publikationen, die Vermittlung geographischen Regionalwissens, die Förderung der Kooperation zwischen Universität und Praxis und gemeinsame Forschungsaktivitäten der Mitglieder. Ein besonderes Anliegen ist die Förderung des intradisziplinären Austauschs zwischen physischer und Anthropogeographie. Aktuelle Informationen zum Arbeitskreis und seinen Aktivitäten finden sich unter: www.geographien-suedasiens.de.

Schriftenreihe: Geographien Südasiens

Die vorliegende Schriftenreihe wurde vom Arbeitskreis Südasiens mit dem Zweck gegründet, Einblicke in aktuelle geographische Forschung zu Südasiens zu ermöglichen. Um einen möglichst großen Leserkreis zu erreichen, sind die Beiträge über Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP) kostenlos im Sinne des OpenAccess zugänglich. Die Schriftenreihe dient in erster Linie dazu, die vielfältigen Forschungsarbeiten der Arbeitskreismitglieder vorzustellen. Hierzu werden Beiträge der Mitglieder auf den jährlichen Arbeitskreistreffen in Form von Extended Abstracts in einem jährlichen Sammelband zusammengefasst. Zusätzlich besteht darüber hinaus die Möglichkeit, neuere Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung in zusätzlichen Bänden ausführlicher zu behandeln.



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ISBN: 978-3-948791-58-2

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.1166>

URN: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-hasp-1166-3

Cover: Abhimanyu Pandey (linke Fotos) und Huda Javaid (rechtes Foto)

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Reimagining urban safety in COVID-19 era urban India

Pablo Holwitt

Keywords: Citizenship, COVID-19, mobility, platform cabs, space

Introduction

In November 2020, the Indian branch of the global platform cab provider Uber launched an image campaign called 'Saferforeachother' in response to the ongoing issues on urban mobility posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign showcased various measures implemented by Uber to minimize the risk of getting infected with COVID-19 while taking a ride with an Uber cab. One part of the campaign was a video that presents Uber's measure of installing plastic screens in cabs that isolate bodies of cabdrivers from those of passengers to inhibit pathogens from being transmitted between them. The text that accompanies the video reads "Walls may have tried to stop us in the past, but little did they know that the human spirit is unstoppable. That's why today there's a wall helping us move forward with safety, in Uber Autos. And even when we're on either side of this wall, we're actually #Saferforeachother."

This paradoxical notion of a wall that helps people move is emblematic for the contradictions of applying binary logics of material segregation to a space of dynamic bodily exchanges. To reduce the risk of infection, a space that is characterized by movement and exposure is reimagined as a space of isolation and containment. In this paper, I will discuss the issues that such an attempt creates, as well as various other measures created by platform cab companies that illustrate their contradictory and patchy responses to the pandemic. I argue that these measures are illustrative of larger shifts in the notion of citizenship, not only in the context of the pandemic but also in the proposed contemporary era of intensified human-environment entanglements that is commonly referred to as the Anthropocene. The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in Delhi and Mumbai between June 2019 and March 2021.

Class relations and conflicts in urban India

Class relations in Indian cities have predominantly been understood in binary categories. Particularly contestations between the middle class and the poor have dominated the literature. It has been pointed out that the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s precipitated the formation of a new, globally connected Indian middle class that indulges in new practices of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984) and lobbies for the reorganization of Indian cities to the demands of its tastes and preferences (Fernandes 2006). This leads to an increase in social polarization

and the exclusion of the poor, as exemplified by the removal of slums, working-class housing and illegal street vendors and the creation of gated elite residential enclaves, theme parks and shopping malls (Baviskar 2020; Brosius 2010; Chatterjee 2004; Ghertner 2011). At the same time, it has been pointed out that the middle classes depend on various services provided by the less affluent who work as household helps, cooks, caretakers, and drivers. Therefore, irrespective of attempts to increasingly segregate urban spaces according to class, Indian cities are the site of enduring entanglements between members of the middle and lower classes (Srivastava 2015). This creates a tense relationship of mutual dependence and suspicion between the rich and the poor.

The platform cab constitutes a unique site to study these contentious and complex class relations. During the early 2010s, companies like the globally operating Uber and its Indian competitor Ola introduced a new way of commuting cities by employing mobile phone app-based technology to connect cabdrivers with passengers. This model proved very successful and has since replaced traditional taxi services in Indian cities to a significant degree. Recent survey-based studies have found that most cabdrivers working for Uber and Ola are lower middle-class and working-class men with a less-than-average educational background – many of whom have migrated from rural hinterlands to the metropolises – while passengers of Uber and Ola are primarily members of the affluent urban middle classes (Annavarapu 2021; Kashyap & Bhatia 2018; Kuttler 2020; Surie & Koduganti 2016). The platform cab therefore can be understood as a mobile space of tense class interaction. While there is a long history of neighborhood-level studies on class-based segregation in urban India (Brosius 2013, Falzon 2004, Waldrop 2004), everyday interactions between members of different classes remain understudied. When relations between the elite and the poor are studied, there is usually a physical distance between these antagonistic groups, as in the case of gated societies and the slow gentrification of neighborhoods. Moreover, in most studies on class relations there is a clear hierarchy at work, as in the case of employers and their domestic workers, security guards or private drivers. However, platform-based cab services like Uber and Ola produce different class interactions that are characterized by a sharing of space and a more ambiguous power relation because the passenger is

the outsider in the driver's cab. Platform cabs therefore present a unique opportunity to study the ways in which middle and lower classes perceive and viscerally interact with each other.

Atmospheric citizenship

Struggles over citizenship rights in urban India have produced a rift between what Holston has termed formal and substantial citizenship (Holston 2008). While citizenship is formally granted to a vast number of people, only a limited number of these people – usually members of the affluent middle classes and the elite – can claim and express substantial rights based on this formal inclusion. The vast majority of the marginalized and poor who are formal citizens are excluded from this regime of citizenship due to governmental mechanisms, prejudices, discrimination, or lack of access to means of expressing grievances in a judicial arena. This has led to a state in which the middle classes exert an influence over questions of urban citizenship in India that far surpasses their actual numbers (Ghertner 2015, Baviskar 2020). However, this middle-class dominance rests on the ability to assign urban spaces and environments to members of different classes. Struggles over air pollution in Indian cities like Delhi provide a vivid example of how this segregation of urban environments has become increasingly complicated in recent years.

Ghertner argues that increasing concerns over air pollution in India's capital city of Delhi have led to a new quality of struggles over citizenship by putting a new type of body at the centre of these struggles, the 'citizen body'. This new type of body, he argues, is different from the individual body that underpinned previous citizenship struggles in that it does not neatly map onto social collectives – like the poor or the middle classes – but transcends these by putting categories such as body parts, intensities of life and population categories at its center (Ghertner 2020: 136). Since atmospheric pollution cannot be confined to certain spaces of the city, it affects all members of Delhi's population and therefore must be tackled collectively. This releases liberatory potentialities because due to the encompassing quality of polluted air the category of life starts to transcend social differences. At the same time, struggles over environmental destruction are informed by an enduring desire of the privileged classes to translate concerns over the collective good into the protection of private interests. Ghertner states that "segregated atmospheres, while meteorologically impossible, remain alive in the sociotechnical imaginary of the city's elite" (Ghertner 2020: 155). Therefore, he sees the liberatory potentialities of atmospheric citizenship being compromised by attempts to segregate atmospheres according to social divisions based on class, religion, and caste.

Exclusive and inclusive potential of COVID-19

This tension between socially inclusive and exclusive forms of citizenship also characterizes the governing of platform cabs in times of COVID-19. Since cabdrivers and passengers breathe the same air during the taxi ride, their bodies are atmospherically linked. Therefore, Uber and Ola must ensure the health of cabdrivers to reduce the risk of infection for passengers and convince them that the business model of platform cabs is safe even in times of COVID-19. At the same time, Uber and Ola implement measures aimed at segregating the atmospheric space inside the cab by installing plastic screens between drivers' and passengers' seats inside cabs, as described earlier. These contradictory developments demonstrate a tension between universalist and particularized notions of life that inform attempts at adapting the platform cab model to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and contested class relations in Indian cities.

In late 2020, drivers of Uber and Ola cabs were asked by the companies to install plastic screens in their vehicles in an attempt to isolate the bodies of drivers and passengers from each other and to thereby reduce the risk of pathogens like the COVID-19 virus being transmitted between them. The costs for the installation of these screens were borne by the companies. Many cabdrivers took advantage of this option, either because they believed that this would reduce the risk of getting infected or because it would make their vehicle appear safe in the eyes of passengers. As I have outlined in the introduction, Uber and Ola advertised the plastic screens widely as a viable measure to reduce the risk of getting infected with COVID-19 while taking a ride in a platform cab.

However, cabdrivers soon experienced various problems with these plastic screens. Platform cabdrivers often spend 12 to 14 hours per day driving their vehicles and felt uncomfortable sitting inside a 'plastic cell' for such a long time. When taking a break, they were unable to put their seat into a sleeping position to take a nap – as many drivers use to do during work breaks – with the screen being tightly wrapped around it. An even bigger problem emerged in the hot summer months of 2021. For example, when temperatures in Delhi rose to more than 40 degrees, sitting inside a plastic screen became unbearable for drivers and those who had not already done so earlier started removing the screens from their vehicles. In November 2021, a regular user of Uber and Ola told me that plastic screens were hardly to be seen in platform cabs anymore.



Fig. 2: Plastic screen installed in an Uber cab in Delhi (Photo: P. Holwitt 2021)

Plastic screens constituted a regulatory attempt at segregating the atmospheric space inside the platform cab. As such, this measure stressed the exclusive potential of atmospheric citizenship by ostensibly creating a safe space for middle-class passengers inside the cab and isolating them from the potentially harmful body of the lower-class driver. However, at the same time, Uber and Ola also developed other measures to counter the threat of the pandemic that point to a more inclusive vision of citizenship. For example, Uber assisted its cabdrivers to get enrolled for the vaccination program of the Indian government and provided them with free sanitization kits and face masks during the nationwide lockdown from March to May 2020. Although these measures can be understood as a rather fatalistic acknowledgement that the health of cabdrivers is a precondition for the health of passengers – and I am not saying that this reading is wrong – they nonetheless show that Uber and Ola were forced to recognize a link between the bodies of cabdrivers and passengers. These measures do not constitute an attempt at isolating the bodies of cabdrivers from the bodies of passengers to wall off the elite from the plight of the poor, as in the case of plastic screens. Instead, they represent a realization that the shared space of the platform cab ties the health of drivers and the health of passengers to each other in times of COVID-19.

This coevolution of exclusive and inclusive attempts at reducing the risk of infection demonstrates the contradictory logics inherent to the rise of atmospheric citizenship in times of the Anthropocene and COVID-19. Measures aimed at guaranteeing safe urban transport in times of a pervasive viral threat in some ways exacerbate and in other ways subvert existing social inequalities in urban India. However, we need to consider another aspect in a discussion about the consequences of the pandemic on the platform cab industry and this is the redistribution of risk between drivers and passengers.

Redistribution of risk among cabdrivers and passengers

Social divisions have been a major factor in the story of platform cabs in India. Since their introduction to India's urban transport systems during the early

2010s, platform cab services have been at the center of controversies over the safety of passengers. The main focus of these debates is the safety of female passengers. In 2014, the case of an Uber cabdriver in Delhi who raped a female passenger led to public outrage and caused the temporary ban of Uber in the Indian capital (Sharma 2014). Although Uber and Ola were quickly allowed to continue their services in the city, this event tarnished the image of the companies in a lasting manner. Platform cab drivers were collectively framed as sexual predators by the Indian media (Annavarapu 2021) and the companies were accused of turning a blind eye to the safety of its female passengers.

Another cause for concern over passengers' safety are the vast class differences between drivers and passengers. In 2017, Indian news media widely reported the case of an Uber cabdriver who had kidnapped his male passenger and demanded a ransom from his relatives (Bhardwaj & Raju 2017). This case connected to established concerns over the threat posed by poor male rural-to-urban migrants to the educated urban middle classes. As Srivastava (2015) has noted, the figure of the dangerous 'backward' villager coming to the city and engaging in criminal activities has informed the Indian middle classes' anxieties over urban safety for a long time.

Cases like these prompted Uber and Ola to implement various measures to ensure the safety of passengers. Both companies started conducting background checks of their cabdrivers' legal records and implemented a new feature in their apps that enables passengers to share their live location during their ride with friends and relatives. Additionally, safety became a keyword in public image campaigns of Uber and Ola who struggled to counter the middle classes' lack of trust in their business model. The basic assumption underlying these measures of platform cab services was that it was the passenger who took a risk when travelling with a platform cab. It was uniformly understood that the driver was the potential threat, and that the passenger was the potential victim inside the vehicle.

However, since the outbreak of COVID-19 in India, this boundary between perpetrators and victims gets increasingly blurred. Now, passengers also constitute a threat to the safety of cabdrivers who are forced to expose their bodies to the danger of contracting the disease from their passengers to earn a living. The failure of attempts at segregating the atmospheric space inside the platform cab – such as the installation of plastic screens – only underscores the fundamental linking of drivers' and passengers' bodies. This raises the question whose safety matters in times of COVID-19.

Interactions between cabdrivers and passengers are affected by this fundamental redistribution of risk in many ways. Some cabdrivers accuse passengers of violating sanitization and distancing measures during

rides. One of my interlocutors from Mumbai reported that he had witnessed an altercation between two of his neighbors and the Uber driver who had dropped them at their building. The cabdriver loudly complained that the passengers would endanger his health because they did not wear their face masks properly. The passengers were taken aback by these accusations. They did not expect a cabdriver to consider a passenger to be a potential threat to his health. When I spoke to the passengers some months later, they accused platform cabdrivers of refusing to get vaccinated and of not properly observing distancing and sanitization rules. At the same time, several platform cabdrivers I am in contact with have stopped driving for Uber and Ola. Most of them state that the high risk of getting infected by passengers, coupled with Uber's and Ola's cuts in incentives, constitutes an unfeasible situation where their concern over their health outweighs the financial benefits of working in the platform cab industry. Others have shifted to other jobs or continue driving for Uber and Ola only due to a lack of other options. These examples show that discussions about safe urban transport need to be reviewed in times of COVID-19. The atmospheric linking of drivers' and passengers' bodies inside the platform cab renders both parties vulnerable to the risk of infection. This redistribution of risk sits uneasily with the established separation between victims and perpetrators based on class and gender differences in the platform cab industry.

Conclusion

The inclusive and exclusive potential of atmospheric citizenship studied by Ghertner in the context of air pollution in Delhi can also be observed in the field of platform cabs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Uber's and Ola's attempts at segregating the atmospheric space inside the platform cab by installing plastic screens replicated the logic of established practices of fencing off the bodies of the poor and the elite in residential spaces of Indian cities. However, these practices of spatial segregation proved to be unfeasible in the context of the platform cab and the highly mobile COVID-19 virus. More inclusive attempts at reducing the risk of infection during a ride in a platform cab have been developed but so far, their implementation does not live up to the companies' promises.

At the same time, the pandemic has led to a fundamental redistribution of risk in the platform cab industry. Since cabdrivers are forced to expose their bodies to those of passengers in order to make a living, they risk getting infected with COVID-19. Irrespective of these changes, established figures of passengers-as-victims and cabdrivers-as-perpetrators still inform common perceptions of urban transport in India. In this sense, notions of safety based on class and gender differences do not neatly map onto a biomedically informed notion of safety that dominates discussions about urban transport in the times of COVID-19.

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Can money compensate? Gain and loss accounts from urbanizing villages of south-eastern Lahore, Pakistan

Huda Javaid

Keywords: Lahore, peripheral urbanization, gentrification, development, land commodification, socio-ecological change, women and ecology

Introduction

Southeast Lahore has been undergoing massive transformation since 2000. The change in physical landscape took on a hectic pace with the construction of the new Allama Iqbal international airport, adjacent to the old airport on the south-eastern fringe of Lahore city. This area is dotted by dozens of historical villages which till 1947 lay sandwiched between the twin cities of Lahore and Amritsar (India) that are 50 km apart. Today, the international border between India and Pakistan divides this area almost in half. Two major roads (Burki and Bedian) run almost parallel and connect Lahore with rural areas. This is a rich agricultural land, watered by the Bambanwala-Ravi-Bedian (BRB) Canal and its distributaries. These villages feed the city and are also a source of manpower. At present, it is a desirable place for investors and realtors, rolled back by the state for buying land from the vulnerable, excavating topsoils and dumping them underneath road carpets to raise the level up to 1 m (see Fig.2), transforming food-producing resources into gated communities in the name of 'development' by externalizing all social and environmental costs.

My research looks at the role of cash compensation for land in villages southeast of Lahore, which has witnessed rapid development into gated housing for the affluent. This development has been led by the most influential player, Defense Housing Authority (DHA), managed by the army. Some villages have been demolished, others are at various stages of dislocation and resettlement and in-situ change. The need for cash has been on the rise for the last 50 years with increasing use of industrial inputs for farming and the taste for an urban lifestyle. However, a rural culture prevailed. Small farmers and milk producers subsisted on their own holding and on food supply to the large market of Lahore city. A host of waged workers, minor artisans and small businessmen worked between the village and the city. The land-owning, cash poor villagers have seen tremendous income from land sales. Even those who received money have not fared well equally. High social inequality and acute environmental degradation (Bebbington & Batterbury 2001, Narain 2009, Sali 2012) has enveloped many historical villages. The peripheral urbanization has not only shifted populations from one place to another and transformed the physical landscape but as an

entangled ecological process with material, social, political, and financial threads tied people and land in a web of new relationships. The framework of Marxist's urban political ecology (Swyngedouw & Heynen 2003) helped unraveling actors, institutions, the role of power dynamics in reconfiguring social structures on urban frontiers, who are the 'real' beneficiaries of the development processes and how they are responsible for destabilizing rural ecologies.

Methodology

Eight years (2014-2022) of ethnographic research has been used as a methodology to study the village as a microcosm of socio-ecological change through the voices of the people across gender, class, ethnicity, and generation. Primary data collection was based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews in villages in the south-east of Lahore around Burki and Bedian road, manifesting stages of development through land commodification for urbanizing the periphery. The fieldwork predicated on fieldnotes, photographic documentation, participant observations, followed by transcribing interviews and decoding data. This research attempts at recording the historical trajectory by comparing and analysing the older villages, usually the border villages, and contemporary settlements to comprehend the process of social change in community over the years. Currently, these villages are at different phases of urban transformation. Villages like Pathanwala, Hirasingsh and Jalalabad have been supplanted by symbols of modern development such as roads, malls, gated housing schemes etc. Some have been ghettoized, enclosed, and walled off by the new settlements such as Charar, Kalasmaari, Lehnasingh, Harpalkay. Some are transforming the appearance by being at their place such as Kohriyan, Dhoorwala. Whereas settlements like Burj and Rakh Padri on military farmlands show a different picture, the façade is in transition but keeping intangibles intact. Change detection analysis, based on remote sensing was the quantitative method to see the spatial change over time. Secondary data was acquired through literature reviews, editorials, poems, folklores, memoirs, and one-on-one conversations with experts (historians, architects, activists, and planners).

Development versus environment

The conspicuous change is characterised by landscape transformation induced by two major processes: land and soil acquisition processes. The land acquisition process lacks transparency. Land acquisition processes accommodate third parties as investors/land brokers hired by DHA itself. The investor/broker is usually a trusted member of the community, who helps fix deals at the lowest possible rate through bargaining and gradually upping the rates with respect to flexibility or rigidity of the holder. Those investors, who make a deal with landowners, fix the prices. The owners are then paid by the investors and the land ownership files are transferred to the investor's name. Thus, the investor provides land to DHA by purchasing it from landowner and he himself becomes the owner of land (which was supposed to be given to the former proprietor as compensation). However, the landowner ends up exchanging his property for one-time cash offer. DHA does it secretly to avoid people having time to organize to resist. They begin with acquiring parcels for sale to big investors. After taking over the agricultural land, they erect a boundary wall where locals are not allowed to enter and leave the land fallow to let it die on its own pace.



Fig. 1: Gold turning into dust. Processes of land-use change through land and soil acquisition. Five feet of village topsoil (the most fertile part) being removed for transportation to DHA (Photo: H. Javaid 2021)

The soil acquisition process is another way to compel people to leave their farms for the rich. It is a simple process in which the compensation amount is fixed between landowners and contractors. Land remains under the possession of the landowner, but the soil is sold to the contractor. The extracted fertile topsoil is used to raise the road level (Fig. 1). The topsoil sold by farmers is the soul of a land and removal of an inch of topsoil needs 500 years to get naturally replenished (USDA 2003). Selling topsoils cripples the land that cannot produce as it is used to before (Cosier 2019). Ecology has been degraded in multiple ways. Else than making land unfit for crop production, the agricultural lands have been used as waste disposal sites by the municipality.



Fig. 2: New Landscape - land being prepared for DHA extension, roads raised with topsoil sold by the villagers (Photo: H. Javaid 2021)

Other ways for expelling people from the land is by coercion and violence (physical and psychological). It is done through cutting gas and electric connections, disrupting the water channels, not allowing villagers to leave their cattle outside the premises of erected walls, creating problems through improper to unavailable waste disposal and sewerage system. Every single village highlighted the contamination of water due to septic tanks of the surrounding gated communities. There are incidents of resistance from villagers turned into brawl that lead to casualties.

The other popular site for landgrab is graveyards where the only condition for compensation was a documentary proof with the deceased and the unmarked graves shifted without a compensation. The maximum bid being heard so far for selling a grave to DHA is 10 lacs (appr. 3550 Euros; villagers 2022). This phenomenon is yet not as rampant because people still are culturally and emotionally tied to the place not only because of their departed loved ones, but also because they want to secure a piece of land for their burial which otherwise has become a costly business to attend. Graveyards or shrines have served multiple purposes to rural dwellers, as open common space, a spot to get together, annual festivals and grazing land for livestock and serves as an identity of a village as well.

Village - Microcosm of socio-ecological change

In keeping with the broad landholding profile of Lahore district (GOP 2011), small landholdings and intense cultivation define the local ecology of eastern periphery of Lahore city. Most of these villages do not have large landowners, but people with the ownership of small pieces of land whereas the majority is landless. This is why there was a relative equality in poverty. Depending upon the size of arable land and the offer they get, the economic status for a few may have elevated, but in general owners of acres of land in the past now cannot afford buying from DHA and ended up in cramped housing. Most of these villages that have been pocketed by the gated

communities be it DHA, other actors such as Paragon and Imperial Garden, have become service sectors for the elite. Despite material gains, villagers unanimously lamented over the loss of intangible assets what used to determine their quality of life and what cannot be weighed out with money. People report to have lost their food, water is contaminated, they are forced to sell their animals due to non-availability of the open space, the sense of security is lost due to the fragmentation of the community. Therefore, losing a community is tantamount to losing roof over one's head for them. The relations they built over time by sharing space and time, give them sense of belonging and identity which holds them back from moving to better-off localities. Women have been affected the most through this 'development' that has not only engaged them in four walls but has damaged their physical and emotional health. Women are way more embedded in their ecology and environment (Agarwal 1989, Carpenter 2014), treat everything around them as part of their family be it animals, soil, crops, trees. From working together on farms to making bread in clay ovens, were not just chores but sharing of space for bonding (Jane 2010). At multiple occasions rural dwellers drew attention to cleavage that cash influx had accentuated amongst community, between sects and ethnicities. It is no longer possible for people to hide their standing in the society.

Conclusion

The south-eastern periphery, a latecomer in the process of development has been carrying the brunt of urbanization, which was once reserved for agriculture. Infrastructure construction (road networks and gated communities for the elite) has intensified the marginalization of the poor and has robbed people from their subsistence. Food security, access to clean water, productive farmlands, fruit

trees and healthy soil – all such natural resources are on the line without due consideration. DHA – a brand in housing and one of the most lucrative army's business ventures has established its influence and power for the longest time (Siddiqi 2007). The role of the state in facilitating urbanization and encouraging investments in land fosters socioeconomic inequalities. This area has become a hub for real-estate business accelerating because agricultural lands are cheaper to buy, and it is easier to expel the poor (Denis 2018). The 'development' that has brought immense 'regression' has been carried out with merciless scrapping of topsoil from poor farmers in dire need for cash. From a world where dependency on cash was minimal, they have shifted to market economy where money is required to buy only what the market offers including the resources (tangible and intangible such as connections, security, community, time, culture for sharing, food, water, clean air, etc.) which they once had for free and in abundance too. Villagers know that compensation is one-time offer, hence, their foremost priority is to provide education to their children and marriages. However, the modern education further disconnects the younger generation from their environment and the local language is also disappearing. People who have gained through this process could not hold themselves back from mentioning the losses and damages in the process which are far bigger and beyond repair. This research has looked at the process of urbanization and development through people's lived environments, their mundane activities, day-to-day lives and concluded that assets which once gave villagers a quality life, can never be compensated. Social fragmentation, ecological damage and rural dwellers' deteriorating lives can't be seen through state-of-the-art architecture.

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How can peasants adapt to hydrosocial uncertainty? A case study from periurban Pune

Sarah Luft, Carsten Butsch

Keywords: Periurbanisation, periurban agriculture, hydrosocial cycle, scenario-based planning, Delphi method

Introduction

Peasants in periurban India operate in the midst of social and ecological transformation processes, which manifest inter alia through a changing quantity and quality of water and alterations in the access to water, and new regimes of distribution of and control over water (Hussain & Hanisch 2014, Narain 2014, Butsch & Heinkel 2020). Agriculture is exposed to growing uncertainties in periurban hydrosocial environments (Swyngedouw 1999) and challenged with the need to plan and adapt accordingly. Yet, peasants' agency to influence developments is restricted and the demand for more integrative approaches towards sustainable transformations of periurban agriculture with greater public participation is increasing (Bruns & Frick 2014, Mitra & Banerji 2018, Punjabi & Johnson 2018). Our study is guided by the question how periurbanisation transforms local environments and alters the preconditions of water-based livelihoods. It aims to contribute to a broader perspective of alternative periurban futures in India. The approach developed here aims at enabling and empowering peasants' adaptive decision-making towards their future livelihoods (Luft and Butsch 2022). Through this we explore how peasants can actively shape environments in the future.

The production of hydrosocial uncertainty

The concept of the hydrosocial cycle (Budde et al. 2014, Linton 2014) investigates water as created through socio-natural processes (Swyngedouw 1999). In our case study, the conceptualization of a reciprocal relation between water and society, influenced by power structures, provides a valuable framework for the analysis (Butsch et al. 2021). In this, we take water-related infrastructural developments, practices, and institutions into account. The constant changing, adapting and (re)shaping of the periurban by multiple actors creates uncertainty, especially for those most dependent on water. The production of hydrosocial uncertainty (Fig. 1) is considered from two perspectives: (i) Through uneven access to water (e.g., through climatic variability), rising urban demand and resource competition (Butsch & Heinkel 2020, Follmann et al. 2021) resulting in unsustainable practices, and changing environments (Hussain & Hanisch 2014, Thomas et al. 2017). (ii) Through institutional ambiguity due to parallel existing governance entities (e.g., gram panchayat, Irrigation

Departments) (Butsch et al. 2017, Hui & Wescoat 2019) and the replacement of existing actors by new ones. This results in uneven and changing access to water infrastructures for different groups (Versteeg et al. 2021). Livelihoods that depend on the quality and quantity of available water resources, such as farming, are highly exposed to hydrosocial uncertainty during periurban transformations.

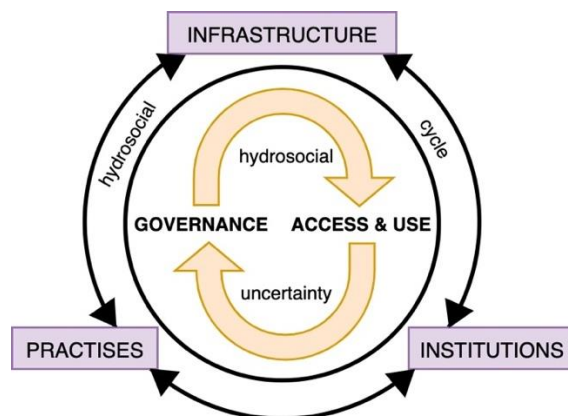


Fig. 1: The production of hydrosocial uncertainty (own draft)

Hydrosocial patterns of Paud, India

Paud, with its 4,000 inhabitants, was selected as one of six study sites in the project "H2O-T2S", as an example of an early stage of periurban transformation (Butsch et al. 2021). It is located 30 km West of Pune on the banks of the Mula River almost in the Western Ghats (Fig. 2). Agriculture, especially paddy cultivation, is one of the main traditional water-based livelihoods. However, over the last 50 years, hydrosocial changes have affected farming patterns. Originally, agriculture was mainly rainfed, but climatic variability and the higher water requirements of new crop varieties deemed this risky. Thus, many peasants invested in hydraulic systems for effective irrigation. Access to water underlies specific water user hierarchies and power gradients based on individual and collective hydrosocial preconditions. Official support systems for peasants are not in place. As a result, informal institutions emerged, e.g., neighboring peasants sharing access to water or equipment. Nevertheless, water becomes an increasingly scarce resource, as other water-based livelihoods compete with farming, and agricultural land is slowly transforming into settlements with higher water demand. Due to these hydrosocial

alterations, peasants have the options to intensify or withdraw from their livelihood.

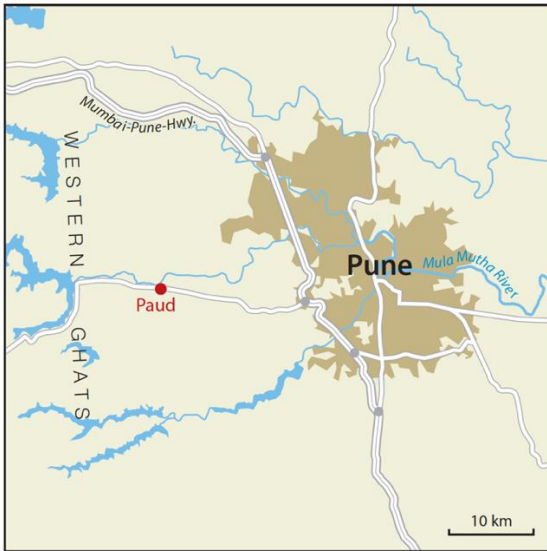


Fig. 2: Location of Paud (cartography: Martin Gref)

A modified Delphi method as tool for scenario-based planning

Scenario-based planning is an interactive method applied in planning and used by scientists to understand complex, long-term uncertainties and their development over time. It supports adaptive decision-making under uncertainty and helps to identify context-dependent pathways and future coping mechanisms (Giaoutzi et al. 2012, Wulf et al. 2013). The Delphi method is one method applied in scenario-based planning. It follows the criteria of anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, and group opinion. It creates non-biased expression of opinion, represents (dis)agreement, and reflects individual viewpoints through progressively addressing specific aspects over time (Tapio et al. 2011, Perveen et al. 2017). We modified the Delphi method by simultaneously tapping into local and expert knowledge systems. We selected 16 local actors of different livelihoods, institutional affiliations, gender and age categories, and 18 Indian and international experts, representing diverse regional expertise, different affiliations (academia, research, NGOs, planning), and research interests. We conducted three rounds of interviews with both panels between

December 2020 and October 2021. As field access was still restricted due to COVID-19, we worked digitally and remotely. The first round focused on building normative future scenarios; in the second round, these scenarios were prioritized by evaluating specific scenario elements; the third round was used to reflect and sequence the scenario elements. We chose specific communication modes for the local actors (structured telephone interviews, WhatsApp) and the experts (digital semi-structured interviews, online surveys). In each round, the panelists received information on the village and on the previous round's results in form of videos (Luft & Butsch 2022).

Periurban futures in Paud

Three different future livelihood scenarios for Paud could be identified (Fig. 2): (i) The realistic pathway ("business-as-usual" (BAU)/ "preferred livelihood scenario" (PLS)) focuses on the fact that in future multiple, diverse livelihoods are possible. (ii) The first alternative ("extended traditional livelihoods" (ETL)/ "water-sensitive farming" (WSF)) addresses upgrading traditional water-based livelihoods without leaving the primary sector completely. (iii) The second alternative ("extension of economic activities" (EEA)/ "commercial farming and fishing" (CFF)) concentrates on economic upgrading within the primary sector and points to broader economic opportunities. The achievement of each scenario is connected to the occurrence of specific drivers, with different levels of importance and timings.

1) The actors consider "village development" the most likely driver to affect livelihoods in the future. Positively, it could lead to the creation of employment, better education, and active local political participation. It is likely to transform the village into a town, and although this causes uncertainty, residents believe the outcome would produce a positive long-term impact. Negatively, "village development" could enhance intransparency, in governance action which increases peasants' exposure to uncertainty and the need to initiate change. Other drivers potentially affecting the future development of livelihoods mentioned by the actors were "land-use changes", "urbanization", and "changing water management".

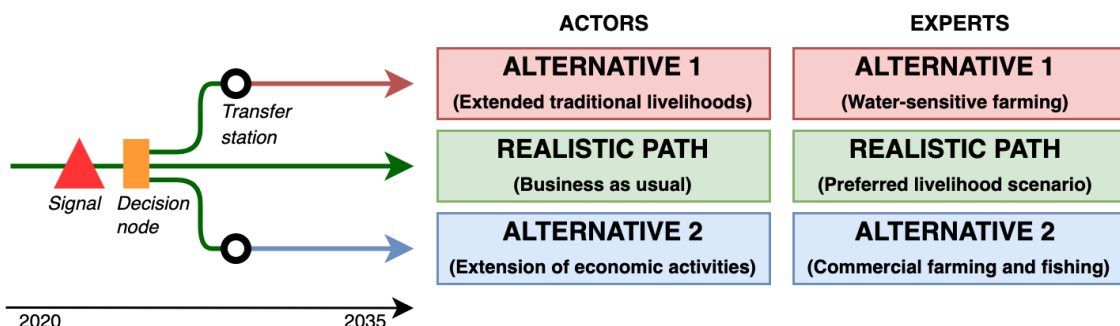


Fig. 1: Future livelihood scenarios for Paud (own draft)

2) For the experts, the driver “urbanization” has the greatest impact on livelihoods in the future. It may affect each of the three scenarios and strongly intersects with other drivers. Positively, “urbanization” may create new occupation for peasants leaving the primary sector. Negatively, it could contribute to land-use changes by triggering migration influx, which in return could affect the socio-cultural village fabrics. It could further contribute to a greater exposure to pollution, resulting in degrading water quality and quantity jeopardizing peasants’ livelihoods. Other drivers mentioned by the experts are “weak institutional framing”, “lack of access to education and finances”, “overexploitation and pressure on resources”, and “inequality among livelihood groups”.

Each driver is connected to distinct signals, which trigger a change in the pathway, eventually leading to different future livelihood scenarios. Awareness about the drivers and signals can help peasants to particularly plan and adapt towards the future.

Comparing alternative pathways

In the Extended Traditional Livelihoods (ETL) scenario, actors engage in traditional farming and fishing and also expand to other agricultural occupations. In this scenario, “village development” leads to better educational and employment opportunities, “land-use changes” lead to a strong sense of environmental protection, and “changing water management” leads to stronger water conservation initiatives. Among the necessary actions in this scenario (Fig. 3), three actions are considered most important: (i) Receiving financial support (e.g., for tools) to upgrade product scales and patterns, (ii) equally allocating local resources (e.g., to secure access to lakes, or land) to increase yields, and (iii) increasing market access, e.g., in Pune. For the actors, the scope for action is actually more restricted in practice than in theory, as hydrosocial uncertainty limits their scope of action. Especially long-term planning requires institutional support, e.g., through financial assistance, hydro-political implications, or social welfare programs. In the Water Sensitive Farming (WSF) scenario, experts consider Paud’s location in the river catchment area advantageous, as rainwater could be used for irrigation. Signals to move to the WSF scenario are falling water tables, water scarcity, progressing land development, and insufficient governance coordination, which could impede access to institutions for vulnerable groups. Compared to the actors, the experts suggested more varieties of actions and institutions (Fig. 4). Two actions are most important: (i) Receiving education and training, and (ii) analyzing and monitoring water quality and quantity trends. The experts precisely visualized how, why, and when hydrosocial alterations may be setting in and suggested counteractions for specific uncertainties for periurban peasants. With the suggested actions, local

agency could be strengthened and especially vulnerable peasants could be empowered.

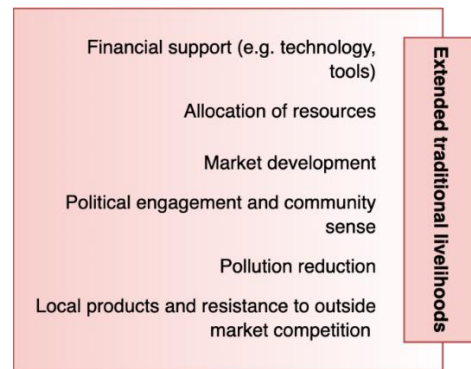


Fig. 3: Actions in the ETL scenario (own draft)

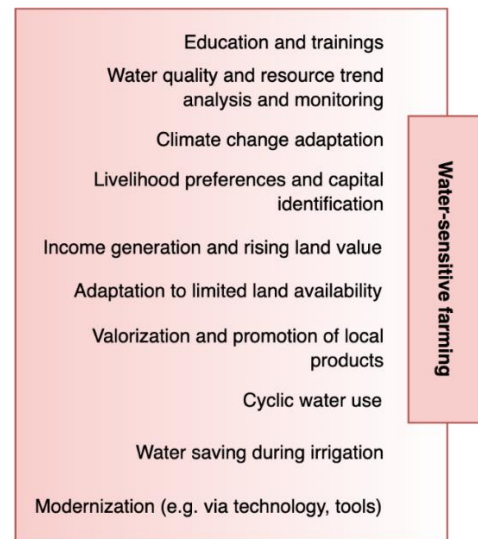


Fig. 4: Actions in the WSF scenario (own draft)

Concluding remarks

Our study illustrates the heterogeneity of future livelihoods in the transforming periurban hydrosocial environment. Against this background, scenario-based planning through progressively integrating local and expert knowledge is a useful approach to enhance long-term perspectives on livelihood development related decision-making and to build adaptive capacity accordingly. By complementing different knowledge systems, it supports especially peasants to create a better understanding of hydrosocial changes, and to restructure their access to water according to changing environments and water-related power relations in the short and long-term. Given the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the transformative potential of this participatory research could not unfold. Yet, adaptive planning allows for a structured interaction on the local level and the empowerment of marginalized communities. Through more inclusive longer-term research, and with transfers from theory into practice, our results could in further refinement contribute to facilitating a more sustainable transformation of periurban agriculture.

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Fragile mountains, extreme winters, and bordering China: Interrogating the shaping of remoteness and connectivity through roads in a Himalayan borderland

Abhimanyu Pandey

Keywords: mountain specificities, borderlands, roads, development, Himalayas

Introduction

Despite appearing somewhat archaic compared to the 'sparkling agility' of virtual technologies, roads continue to be the paradigmatic material infrastructure of the twenty-first century, vitally supporting the production, reproduction, and circulation of commodified goods and labour (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012). Roads enable the spread of governmentality (Hannah 2000), and the flows, especially the spread of electronic media and migrations, that usher modernity (Appadurai 1996). In the Himalayas, several scholars have studied the varied processes set off by the road linking of mountain regions to lower centres of economic and political power as network effects, an approach that is illuminating in its ability to shed light on the links between the local and wider scales of the social, cultural, political, and economic processes enabled by roads (e.g. Gerwin and Bergmann 2012; Murton 2013; Louaillier 2016). However, this approach falls short in accounting for the peculiar frictions, challenges, and openings afforded by Himalayan roads due to what the economist Narpal Singh Jodha (Jodha 1989) calls the bio-geographic, socio-ecological, and socio-cultural 'mountain specificities' of Himalayan regions and communities, which these roads pass through and connect. This deprives studies of Himalayan communities of an understanding of the interplay between connectivities of various other kinds – electricity, telecommunications, market linkages, embedding in broader political and cultural networks and flows – and precarity and disruptions brought about by roads, which are simultaneously geographically and socio-politically constituted. Saxer (2016) provides a methodological solution to bridge this gap between the network approach and the mountain specificities heuristic in the Himalayas by inviting the researcher to pay attention to the routes of human movement simultaneously in its geographical and social aspects, as well as to the embodied practices and articulations around journeying on these routes. My doctoral research studies how practices, discourses, and negotiations around roads – in the complexly intertwined realms of governance, communal life, and flows (cultural, political, and economic) – shape everyday lives, livelihoods, identities, mobilities, and

citizenship in the Indian Himalayan borderland of Spiti valley. Going with Saxer's (2016) proposal, this paper interrogates the ways in which certain specificities of the road network enmeshing the Spiti valley – namely geographic instabilities, extreme weather conditions, and the valley's border with Tibet (China) – have shaped the local community's experience of crucial state-led developmental interventions in this valley, particularly since the 1990s.

Field-site and research methods

The Spiti valley is located at the north-eastern corner of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh (HP), sharing an 80km border with the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. Administratively, Spiti valley forms the Spiti sub-division of the Lahaul-and-Spiti district, HP, with its headquarters at village Kaza. According to the 2011 Census of India, the population of the Spiti sub-division was 12,445 persons living in seventy villages, spread over 7,101 km². Geographically, Spiti is characterized as a high-altitude, Trans-Himalayan cold desert (Murali et al 2017), with settlements between 3,500m and 4,100m above sea level. Winters in Spiti (October-April) are severe, with several spells of snowfall and temperatures falling upto – 40°C. Summers (May-June) are very dry, and the temperatures can rise up to 30°C (ibid). Monsoons (July-September) in Spiti are generally very mild, but the windward regions south and west of Spiti, i.e. Kinnaur, Lahaul, and Kullu, receive very heavy rains (Meteorological Center, Shimla 2021). These weather conditions accommodate only one agricultural season, as well the official 'working period' for all state developmental activities, from April till October. The entire local population follows Tibetan Buddhism and has been designated as a Scheduled Tribe by the Government of India. This designation makes Spiti locals, vernacularly called 'Pitias', eligible for reserved seats in government universities and jobs across India, besides various other state benefits. Agriculture, government jobs and contracts, and tourism are the main livelihood avenues within Spiti. The valley is connected to the rest of India by two national highways: one from Shimla, the capital of HP, and the other from Manali, a popular hill town. Within the valley, these two highways meet, and

from them several link roads lead out to villages distant from the highways. The Manali road is closed for five to seven months every year, due to heavy snow cover. The Shimla road is open throughout the year, barring episodes of closure due to landslides, avalanches, and road construction.

My research is based on a total of nine months of ethnographic field research in Spiti, spread over four phases broadly corresponding with different seasons, between early May 2018 and late January 2020. Each phase generally corresponded to the span of a particular season, since road conditions in the valley were significantly influenced by seasons and seasonal changes. I supplemented this in-situ research – in Spiti and along the roads within and leading to Spiti (henceforth collectively called ‘Spiti roads’) – with archival research in Spiti, Shimla, New Delhi, and London.



Figure 1: A cliff-hugging section of the highway to Shimla, within Spiti valley (Photo: A. Pandey 2019)

Three defining features of the Spiti roads

The three defining features of the Spiti roads are geological instability, vulnerability to weather conditions, and the fact of this region’s bordering Tibet (China). Both the adjacent valleys through which the two highways leading to Spiti pass – the Sutlej and Chandra valleys – are geomorphologically very fragile. The upper reaches of these valleys are devoid of trees and consist of miles upon miles of loose boulders and rocks precariously balanced by chance. Numerous times every year, precipitation and blasting for road-widening in these valleys cause large landslides and avalanches on these highways. The landscape is geologically somewhat more stable within the Spiti valley. However, every day, both within Spiti and in its aforementioned adjacent valleys, moderate winds and animal movements on upper slopes cause small rocks to fall on these roads at lightning speeds, posing significant danger to travelers. During winters in Spiti, heavy snowfall cuts off road access of nearly half the villages for weeks, sometimes months. Winter snow on these roads, once compressed by traffic and time, soon turns into ice, making driving very dicey. Besides, driving on the Spiti roads is generally more challenging due to the absence of mobile network along several stretches of these roads; the long

distances between critical facilities like fuel stations, motor repair works, and healthcare centres, and the high-altitude and rarefied air. In addition to these geo-climatic and logistic challenges, Spiti’s border with Tibet (China) significantly influences life and road connectivity as well. Following the Chinese annexation of Tibet 1950 onwards, there has been a marked anxiety in the Indian state about Himalayan border regions with populations of the ‘Mongoloid stock’ (Roy 1956), which possess greater historical, cultural, religious, and racial continuities with Tibet than with much of India (Roy 1956; Demenge 2012). Ever since the mid-1950s, the integration of remote Himalayan mountain regions, including Spiti, into the ‘national mainstream’ particularly through road construction has been a policy priority for the Indian state (Kinnaur District Gazetteer, 1975). From then down to this day, roads travels to Spiti have seen varying forms of state regulation and surveillance, which have been varied in response to geopolitical, economic and cultural developments over time.

The shaping of development in Spiti by road conditions

Three key developmental processes in Spiti which have been facilitated by roads are cash crop agriculture, the spread of a mobile network, and a tourism boom. Each of these three processes has engendered important impacts across Spiti. However, the mountain specificities of Spiti roads provide certain caveats that shape how each of these processes is experienced and negotiated in Spiti. Green pea and apple cultivation were introduced in Spiti by the Indian state in the mid-1990s. These cash crops, particularly green pea, have led to a general augmentation of incomes all across Spiti, created a novel demand for migrant labour, as well as linkages with distant agricultural markets. However, the harvest period of both green pea and apple overlaps with the monsoons, when there is a heightened possibility of landslides along Spiti roads. Even a single day’s delay in the transport of the harvest can cause significant drop in its value. In August 2014, there was a dramatic case wherein two local Pitiya leaders, hailing from a part of Spiti temporarily cut-off from road access by a flash flood, were arrested on the charge of ‘sedition’, for publicly chanting ‘Let’s go to China!’. This sloganeering had apparently been triggered by the leaders’ frustration with the local administration’s apathy in restoring road access – in time for them to be able to transport their harvest to agricultural markets in the lower hills. But due to the place and the nature of the slogans raised, the incident raised alarm up to the highest levels of the state machinery, and it won widespread media coverage, including in national dailies. The leaders were soon released, and the road access was eventually restored. One of the leaders was even elected to an important tribal affairs advisory body. This episode shows the fundamental importance of road access for Spiti’s new agricultural market

linkages, as well as a strategy to negotiate better deals with the state in this borderland community that plays on the latter's anxiety's related to China.

In the realm of telecommunications, there has been an uneven but growing expansion of the mobile phone network in Spiti since the early 2000s. In recent years, the infusion of this telecom technology in Spiti has strongly challenged the primacy of roads in the local community's discourse about remoteness and connectivity. Pitiyas often remarked to me that nowadays, the villages which were as yet out of network coverage were 'backward' and 'losers' on the road to development. This was regardless of the fact that by early 2020, nearly all Spiti villages were connected by road; those that remained unconnected were all less than half an hour of walk away from the nearest road. However, in times of heightened vulnerability to the elements, such as during medical emergencies, the transport of harvested crop, and winter road closures, the difficulties of navigating raw physical connectivity with the world outside via Spiti roads somewhat sober down the sense of being better connected to world that is afforded by mobile phone connectivity. In addition, the poles and lines carrying mobile signal and electricity to Spiti go parallel and close to Spiti roads and are often damaged by landslides and avalanches along these roads, thereby interrupting network coverage.

Along with other tribal regions in HP, tourism has been officially promoted in Spiti from 1992 onwards, 'keeping in view the spirit of liberalisation' of the Indian economy in 1991 (HP Home Department 1992). According to a Spiti-based official, the numbers of tourists visiting Spiti shot up suddenly in 2016, to about 30-40,000 tourists that year, up from the 2,000 or so tourists a year that had been the case since the late 1990s. Several local key informants I interviewed concurred with these estimates. However, systematically collected data is not available on tourist numbers in Spiti until 2018. According to a source in the Spiti administration, over 2019, a total of 64,700 Indian tourists and 3,612 foreign tourists had visited Spiti via the Shimla-Spiti road. These numbers largely exclude the tourists visiting from the Manali-Spiti road during the six months in 2019 while that road too was open. Later, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the local community closed the valley down completely to all non-essential visitors, including tourists and migrant workers, from mid-March 2020 till mid-February 2021. Ever since, locals have reopened the valley and tourism has strongly rebounded in the valley. Among other things, this massive spike in tourist numbers is attributable to the visibility of Spiti on social media since 2014-15, and to the rising disposable incomes among middle class Indians, who form the bulk of the new visitors. Through tourism, the very factors that generally underlie the Indian state's anxiety towards Spiti, i.e. Spiti's geographic

and cultural continuities with Tibet, and its physically challenging (but visually sublime) roads, have transmuted into a significant source of income and livelihoods for many Pitiyas. However, the same caveat that is posed by the Spiti roads to telecom connectivity, i.e., the times of heightened vulnerability to the geo-climatic elements, applies to tourism as well. In addition, in tourism, there is an additional caveat in the form of an Inner Line permit requirement for all foreign nationals intent on visiting Spiti, and significantly stiffer entry regulations particularly for the nationals of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan. Indian visitors, whether local or non-local, merely need to get their vehicles registered upon entering and exiting Spiti. Overall, these restrictions exist due to the state's perception of Spiti as a sensitive borderland, and in response to the geopolitical developments in certain countries in India's geographic proximity over the recent years.



Figure 2: The Spiti valley during monsoons (Photo: A. Pandey 2019)

Conclusion

Over the last three decades, there has been a gradually increasing diversification, multiplication, and acceleration of economic and cultural transformations in Spiti valley, particularly as this valley has been sought to be linked with wider markets by the post-liberalization Indian state, be that through agriculture, telecommunications, or tourism. However, certain specific features of Spiti's road connectivity play an important role in shaping the ways in which these different processes manifest themselves in the valley. These features are (a) the long distances between crucial facilities for safe road travel, and to major towns and markets (b) the passage through geologically hazardous and visually sublime landscapes, (c) the extreme winters, with heavy snowfalls, in this region, and (d) the routes of these roads through a sensitive borderland bearing geo-cultural continuities with Tibet. Thus, even amidst the deepening enmeshment of Spiti in broader economic, technological, and cultural currents, roads continue to play the central role in territorializing Spiti, and in defining experiences and negotiations around livelihoods, citizenship, and identity.

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Social Distancing as Utopia: The Urban Poor's Perspective from Islamabad, Pakistan

Arslan Waheed

Keywords: Social Distancing; COVID-19; Ethnography; Public Health; Exclusion

Introduction

The proliferation of COVID-19 all over the world is coupled with social distancing as one of the most acceptable and scientifically reliable strategies to deal with the pandemic. Even after immunization, it is still recommended that social distancing should be observed at all times. In Pakistan, timings of the marketplaces, wedding halls, social and political gatherings, and educational institutions were regulated to minimize physical contact and gatherings. Access to fundamental amenities like public transportation, subsidized utility stores, congregations, and prayer places were all regulated and given a wide range of Standard Operating Principles (SOPs) to be followed strictly. As effective as it is, the question remains to what extent this physical or social distancing is possible for the millions living in congested and underprivileged neighborhoods frequently branded as slums, squatter settlements, or informal settlements. We have already seen some evidence about density and the pandemic (Hamidi, Sabouri, and Ewing 2020), and some reviews focused on cities and their assessment concerning COVID (Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir 2020). Therefore, I have tried to present evidence from Islamabad – the capital of Pakistan – as a modernist and planned-from-nothing city on one hand and same as sources of structural vulnerabilities on the other hand for the urban poor of the city.

Methodology

This paper is based on extended fieldwork in 12 slums of Islamabad (Fig. 1) from 2018 to 2020. Islamabad has 11 formally recognized slum settlements and more than 50 otherwise (see also Waheed et al. 2022). This fieldwork was carried out in both formalized and informal slums located at various locations throughout Islamabad, like France Colony, 100 Quarter Colony, Issa Nagri, Muslim Colony (formal), and some nameless settlement in Sector E, G, and H (informal). The participant observation was coupled with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010 2013 2015; Jacobs 2004, Johnson 2011) of governmental discourses. I have purposefully limited myself to the urban slums of Islamabad where the accounts help us understand socio-economic, political, legal, and medical

challenges faced by the slum residents amid the pandemic.

Findings

Like for everyone, water is a lifeline for Shoukat¹ who is a resident in one of the households among 55 others in one of the slums of Islamabad. His settlement does not have any dedicated source of water – neither water pipelines nor private/personal water pumps. Shoukat told the author that those who do not have access to normal water supply in their homes have to manage it first and thinking about the virus or social distancing comes afterwards. Therefore, Shoukat insists that following anything like social distancing or staying home during lockdowns is a luxury for them, which they are never entitled to, given the socio-economic and governing structures.

Shoukat believes that residents of informal settlements are discriminated and that this discrimination is rooted in the very governing mechanisms and planning rationalities with which the city was conceived back in the 1960s. The whole administrative logic of Islamabad is intentionally designed to leave similar neighborhoods in perpetual limbo ridden with crises and hazards of almost all types (Roy 2009). The governmental logic is to frame the urban poor as dirty, uncivilized, and resultantly unacceptable as responsible human beings are presented as evidence of impossibility to maintain social distancing among the slum dwellers.

Shoukat's account is representative of one complete form of life reality among the similar neighborhoods where bio-medically prescribed ways of life are impossible to be realized and lived. Similar, if not the same, is the situation for other "slums" of the city. They find themselves compelled to go out even for the very basics of their needs like water, toilet, food, and clothing. For instance, Nasir believes that the pandemic is serving just as another excuse to further deteriorate the slum dwellers' situation and normalize their exclusion. For Jamil, another resident of a big slum settlement, death appears to be inevitable; either at the hands of the COVID-19 or hunger.

Furthermore, almost every household is dependent upon a constant source of earning where many men and women go to work as domestic workers in well-

¹ Pseudonym

to-do houses. Some of the slum dwellers also shared their experiences of being treated as potential carriers of the virus on the one hand and compulsion to work on the other hand.

Things are not different in other recognized and 'formalized' slums in Islamabad. For instance, slums in sector G-7 have been provided with the common hand pumps in the state's slum upgradation and rehabilitation policy back in 1999-2001. More than 10,000 people in those "slums" are dependent on less than 10 common water taps to meet their daily water needs. Amid the pandemic, when social distancing is all that is propagated and aspired by the governments around the globe, thousands of people in the "slums" of Islamabad believe it to be a conundrum in which they either can decide on something like water and food or their societal approval by following the protocols of social distancing.



Figure 1: A Young Boy Crossing one of the Entry Points Bordering a Slum Settlement in Islamabad (Photo: A. Waheed)

Social distancing is one of the most affordable and durable methods to contain the spread of the pandemic is yielding desirable results (Khataee, Scheuring, Czironk & Neufeld 2021; Cunha, Domingos, Rocha & Torres 2021; Pedersen & Favero 2020). This, however, does not mean that the strategy is all-inclusive and universally applicable to everyone everywhere. Shoukat's life is a microcosm of millions of people living in "slums" around the world. While living with them their everyday life, affordability, and sustainability of social distancing as an all-encompassing policy towards COVID-19 hardly seems inclusive let alone sensitive towards all socio-economic assemblages. It appears to be an exclusive, pro-middle class, and rich-friendly policy that would have adverse social impacts on the societies that are already disregarded, relegated, and sentenced to live in ghettoized spaces.

Conclusions

These findings are not peculiar to the case of Pakistan, rather, similar findings are available for the case of Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria (Ahmed, et. al. 2020), India (Downs-Tepper, Krishna & Rains 2022), Brazil (Waheed, Qadar & Mehmood 2022), and Ghana (Morgan 2020). This research does not discredit social distancing as a feasible and rewarding response to COVID-19 but calls for a more thoughtful and inclusive approach to introduce and implement measures like social distancing in the global south. We should understand that social distancing is neither inexpensive nor practicable for everyone unless it is coupled with other class- and space-specific intercessions like provision of water, toiletry, cash inflows, and sleeping arrangements especially for the urban poor who are living in midst of urban planning and development authorities. In this way, not only social distancing would become possible and inclusive for them but will play an important part in bringing together all those who have been disregarded, ghettoized, and banished for decades despite providing essential services to city.

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