



Infrastructure, Gender and Violence: The Case of Sanitation in Indian Cities



SPEAKER

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Abstract

In Indian cities millions of women and children each day experience varying forms gender-based violence when making choices about their defecation activities. Who then is responsible for such social consequences and social harms being caused by a lack of adequate sanitation infrastructure? Generally, infrastructure has been largely considered to be a technical apparatus that is designed and managed by urban planners, government officers and civil engineers. Such a view though has created misconceptions about the nature of infrastructure and a consequent lack of recognition of the political, cultural and socio-economic assumptions built into it along with the harms inflicted when they malfunction or are completely absent in everyday lives.

One approach to understanding why this happens is to use the notion of infrastructural violence that seeks to identify the political economy underlying the socio-spatial production of suffering in contemporary cities. There are two notions of infrastructural violence – (1) active or violent and (2) passive or physical exclusion. In this presentation the focus will be on this notion of physical exclusion from sanitation infrastructures. When women and girls from slum communities are forced to enter dangerous spaces for open defecation, because of their physical exclusion from sanitation infrastructure, they are often exposed to gendered, caste and class-based forms of both physical and emotional violence. This is facilitated by the lack of political will at all levels of the state to take a systematic approach to the planning, implementation and maintenance of sanitation infrastructure programs and projects, and the continuing lack of analysis of gender as a process (based on unequal power relations), in the design, location and construction of public and community toilets.

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