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**OPEN LECTURE SERIES**  
**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION**



Jindal School of Government  
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Wednesday, 6 May 2015, 2:30 pm – 4:00 pm  
T2, Conference Room, IIIrd Floor  
O.P. Jindal Global University  
Sonipat Narela Road, Sonipat- 131001, Haryana

# “Infrastructures of Exception: Sewers and Sewage Workers in Metropolitan Delhi”

## SPEAKER

**Lalit K Batra**

*Ph.D Candidate, University of Minnesota*

### Abstract

*The continual expansion of modern sanitation systems, consisting of technologies such as flush toilets, piped drainage, enclosed sewers and biological sewage treatment plants, has been a key component of urban infrastructure planning and public health policy in post-Independence India. Endorsed by international development organizations, successive administrations at the national and metropolitan levels have vigorously promoted this particular configuration of wastewater management technologies as a form of infrastructural innovation that would, among other things, liberate dalits from the indignity and occupational hazards of traditional manual scavenging. However, a putatively well-intentioned program of sanitary and social improvement has produced a perverse outcome: far from liberating dalits, it has exacerbated their vulnerability by employing them as sewage workers in city municipalities. Traditional manual scavenging has arguably declined; however, manual handling of excreta-filled sewage has proliferated - only this time in the form of a far more dangerous work process, involving manual cleaning of deadly gas producing enclosed sewers that kills hundreds of workers every year. Drawing on my ongoing dissertation research into the relationship between sewage system and Valmiki sanitation workers in Delhi, I discuss how and with what consequences the connection between dalits and sanitation is reproduced in contemporary Delhi.*

### Short Bio

Lalit Batra is currently a doctoral candidate at the department of Geography, Environment and Society, at the University of Minnesota. His dissertation research seeks to understand the cultural politics of sanitation in Delhi through an examination of the relationship between the city's wastewater apparatus and Valmiki sewage workers. In his earlier avatar, he worked for several years as a labor/community organizer in Delhi, specifically around issues of housing and livelihoods of slum dwellers and informal sector workers.

RSVP: **Professor Bhuvanewari Raman**, Associate Professor, JSGP, barman@jgu.edu.in, +91 8930110913



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