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Claiming adequate housing in urban India

An introduction

Mahesh[1] got a call. A 40-year-old slum[2] in the heart of the south Indian city of Bangalore (officially known as Bengaluru) was to be demolished the next day to make way for the upcoming metro tracks. Mahesh – a slum-dweller himself – and his fellow activists hurried to the site. It was a race against time to gain the trust of 48 families and to convince them to resist taking the compensation of $1,100 and not to vacate the land. Within three days, the mobilizers got the documentation ready and sent it out to the Legal Board, the Governor, the Chief Minister, and the Human Rights Commission. They demanded that the Metro Corporation explain how they could displace these families without notice, when the rich were getting compensated for every inch of land. The justification of the Corporation was that these families were occupying that land illegally. Calling upon their humanity, the activists managed to buy 15 days' time. Within this grace period, the mobilizers along with the community managed to get a preliminary slum declaration sealed. This meant that the state had recognized that their 'dwelling was unfit for human habitation' and that their situation was to be improved. The Metro Corporation offered to double the compensation amount if they vacated immediately. The activists brought to their attention that the metro implementation guidelines demanded housing for the displaced communities be ready before vacating the land. So, the community remained there for the next one and a half years until they were rehoused in a mass social housing unit complex at the periphery of the city, for which competing urban poor communities were squatting in front of the complex to claim units for themselves.

I asked Mahesh if he was satisfied with the trajectory of the mobilization against the Metro Corporation. He answered that it had just contributed to reproducing the same patterns that were upheld since centuries in India, namely to keep the poor and lower caste communities out! While community members at first were fascinated by the brick and mortar unit and urban services, they were soon to realize the cost of rebuilding their lives at the margin of the city of never-ending IT codes, metro-tracks, and glorious temples of consumerism for the 1 per cent club. Now they were supposed to service the city from the margins.

This episode reveals the multiple rationales of diverse state agencies and their aspirations at work that are shaping up this city aiming to be 'world-class' (Roy and Ong 2011). It also depicts the mechanics of claiming social justice in the city. In this case, the mobilizers and the community had learnt to navigate the opaque fabric of legal, bureaucratic, and policy constraints and opportunities to skilfully assert a chance at adequate housing in a city of rocketing real estate value. This was rather a rare case though.

In the metropolitan city of Bangalore, according to the official statistics from the Karnataka Slum Development Board (KSDB), there were 597 slums in 2013 and 16.45 per cent of the city's population of roughly 9 million lived in them. Activists pegged the percentage rather between 25 and 35 per cent. Sixty-eight million of the 400 million Indians living in urban areas (*Census of India, 2011*: see Government of India 2011) live in slums and have missed out on the promise of urbanization and are rather bearing the brunt of it. India's political economy of land and housing has produced a situation in which there is place for vacant flats to accommodate the investments of the rich but not to house the poor. Around 12 million completed flats are lying vacant across urban India and despite this there is a huge shortage of housing; 95.6 per cent of this shortage affects economically weaker sections (Kaul 2015) for whom 'affordable housing is inadequate, adequate housing is unaffordable' (Revi, Jana, and Malladi 2015). The politicians representing the poor and iterations of social housing policy had failed them.

What if the 2 million slum-dwellers of the city flooded the streets of Bangalore to demand adequate housing? What if these slum-dwellers brought to notice the failures of housing policy, the negligence experienced, and claimed their rightful place in the city? What if? What prevents the voice from the 'urban underbelly' in a democracy that endows each citizen with a voice (Aiyar 2013)? When democracies present opportunities for the poor to vote leaders of their choice into power, why have these representatives failed to address poverty (Laxman 2011, 38)? If they all came out on the streets, they would

paralyse the city they service! But would they get heard? Would the public and state care? Would they get a response? A sustained movement bringing out the mighty number of dwellers affected by the shortage of adequate and affordable housing has not emerged in the recent past of Bangalore, whereas diverse movements on a wide variety of issues have seen the light of day. What is peculiar about housing that potentially silences the voices?

The Indian architect-activist P. K. Das, cited in the English-language Indian newspaper *The Hindu* (31 March 2009), claimed, 'Social movement sought to ensure housing for urban poor.' In a second instance he questioned, 'How do we tackle urban planning?' (*The Hindu* 19 July 2013). In the former, the activist appealed for an engagement with 'social movements and struggle as that alone would help in establishing the basic right of housing for the economically weaker section'. In the latter article he claimed that Indian cities were not necessarily 'urban', due to the exclusionary access to the benefits of development and the shrinking democratic rights and public spaces despite the expansion of cities. The special issue on 'Housing Policy Innovation in the Global South' (2018) published by the *International Journal of Housing Policy* states at a global level that housing policy innovation ought to focus less on housing subsidies and design financing schemes and rather on social movements, legal systems, and planning policies, confirming P. K. Das' argument that a movement is the sole way to assert housing for the 68 million (Government of India 2011) slum-dwellers across India's cities to lead dignified lives.

What this book sets out to do is to reveal to what extent the existing socio-political conditions are favourable or unfavourable for the emergence of a social movement on the issue of adequate housing for the urban poor in the metropolitan city of Bangalore. For this endeavour, social movement theory makes available a conceptual toolbox to examine conditions for the emergence of social movements. The central concept is called political opportunities, which specifies the interaction between the macro-level political context that represents certain opportunities or threats and the meso-level agency in the form of tactics deployed by social movement organizations (SMOs) in response to them. Political opportunities hence refer to those more structural aspects of the (formal) political system that affects the possibility that challenger groups or social movement organizations have to mobilize effectively (Giugni 2011, 271). One major shortcoming is that the US and European case studies that have informed this concept have mainly focused on formal political opportunities, as found in the blueprint of liberal democracies. I argue that for the purpose

of analysing social movement emergence on housing in post-colonial India, the investigation of political opportunities must go beyond the contextual blueprints of legal and policy prescriptions and examine the everyday reality for mobilizing opportunities and constraints in a context rife with contradictory vagaries of informality including corruption, volatile political networks, and power asymmetries.

With this task ahead, this book will strongly anchor itself not only in social movement theory but also in studies that illuminate colonial continuities, sociology of law, global urbanism and planning, corruption, and governance practices. Evaluation of the housing policy and outcomes, evictions, and urban politics will be discussed in light of how they shape up conditions for mobilizing. I will be juxtaposing legal and policy prescription analysed through formal and informal dimensions of political opportunities with everyday practices at the different levels. This will allow the decryption of the specific on-the-ground modalities by which policy is implemented to demonstrate the ruptures with formal prescriptions, and also shed light on why deplorable housing conditions persist, are perpetuated, and conditions for mobilizing on the issue are demobilizing or at the most scattered.

In order to examine in a deeply situated manner the conditions for the emergence of a social movement on adequate housing in Bangalore, in this chapter I will, in a first step, discuss the pressures of rapid urbanization that shape conditions for mobilizing. Second, I will discuss the way Indian democracy operates and carve out peculiarities that contrast certain conceptual assumptions underlying the concept of political opportunities elaborated on the basis of European and American liberal democracies in the aim to offer a more adapted conceptual toolbox. This will lead to the third section, in which I review the central concept, develop the conceptual framework, and argue that focusing on a post-colonial city such as Bangalore has the potential to expand social movement scholarship beyond its self-referential confines. Fourth, I elaborate briefly on methodology and the data-sets used to explain social movement emergence in this particular context and, lastly, I present to the reader the structure of argument for the remainder of the book.

The introduction gives the reader in broad strokes an overview of the issues relevant to the enquiry and depicts how they relate to one another in order to contextualize and build the theoretical argument with pertinent literature and secondary data. As will be presented in the structure of the argument, I will elaborate on certain reflections and explicate in detail relevant concepts and methods when and where necessary within the particular chapters.

Pressures of rapid urbanization that shape conditions for mobilizing

Rapid urbanization and rural–urban migration leading to higher and volatile population densities shape conditions for movement emergence in the sense that these pressures create higher competition and demand for land and housing. In 1951, only 15 per cent of India's population lived in urban areas, whereas by 2011 more than a third had become urban citizens. The UN World Urbanization Prospects (revised 2014) report projects that by 2050 India's urban areas will grow to accommodate 404 million people and will be the largest contributor to the global increase in urban population. In regard to housing shortage, the Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation noted in 2012 that 80 per cent of India's housing shortage was in the form of existing but inadequate housing, as they are either physically inadequate, in hazardous locations, or lack security of tenure. Bangalore's population growth due to the booming service industry has been remarkable. According to the UN World Urbanization Prospects, Bangalore's 2018 population was estimated at 11,171,000. In 1950, the population of Bangalore was merely 746,000. In 2011, there were 4,378 people per square kilometre, up from 2,985 10 years before – which represents an increase in density of 47 per cent (Government of India 2011)!

Estimating that a minimum of 20 per cent of Bangalore's 9.6 million population (Government of India 2011) lives in slums, this would amount to around 1.9 million people lacking adequate housing. Even with a modest assumption that four dwellers occupy one dwelling, 480,000 will still be lacking.

Bangalore's recent history of how it has handled its slums is rather gloomy. In the 1960s slums were seen as a transitory phenomenon, due to disappear with economic growth, but by the 1980s there grew the realization that they were here to stay. The government launched the radical approach of forced eviction and demolition in view of the persistence of the squatter settlements that came in the way of the vision of beautification (Schenk 2001). Issues of legalizing slums or land entitlements for its dwellers, compensation, and the upgradation of housing have been at the mercy of each election at any level, forcing the habitants to wait for years for any electoral promise to be fulfilled. Like in other cities, major slum redevelopment programmes have been carried out. Urban renewal programmes have driven underprivileged residents from the centre to the periphery of Bangalore, which now forms 'the dumping ground

for those urban residents whose labour is wanted in the urban economy, but whose visual presence should be reduced as much as possible' (Davis 2006, 172).

The shortage of adequate housing compels urban planning and politics to negotiate pro-poor approaches. But 'India can't plan its cities', Ananya Roy (2009) points out, as India's planning regime itself is in a constant state of deregulation, ambiguity, and exception. The governance systems operate by an 'unmapping' of cities through a territorialized flexibility to alter land use and resources. I argue that this territorial flexibility is imperative to accommodate interests of capital for mega-projects that is resulting in an evolving political economy of land development, reflected in the sheer rate of urban growth and rise in land value (Goldman 2017). Bangalore being situated on a plateau with an almost never-ending periphery embodies regional primacy that is felt throughout Karnataka, imposing connecting infrastructure and land economy and thereby gulping up every village in its way. To accommodate industrial interests and capital landing (Halbert and Rouanet 2013), the city is transforming its institutional set-up, governance, and regulation practices. This state of affairs has led to anarchic growth coupled with infrastructure pressures.

Access to land for the purpose of housing the urban poor is the prerequisite for any housing intervention. Land is largely regulated by the state, hence political will to realize housing for the urban poor is the crux. In India under the federal system of government, the constitutional list allocates urban development, housing, and land into the functional domain of the state governments (Banarjee 2002).

Today, urban-planning trends are pushing densification and redevelopment strategies (in contrast to upgradation of existing settlements). Bangalore's Draft Masterplan 2031, presented to the public in November 2017, stated that 'no separate land provisions have been made for the existing backlog in the housing stock' and recognized slums as 'contributors to affordable housing stock' (BDA 2017, 84). The document further stated with great confidence that it could be safely said that 'Bengaluru's share of slum population is between 8–14% of the total population and considered at an average of 10% for the purpose of assessment' (ibid., 82). According to the survey run by the 2013–2014 iteration of housing policy, there were 576 slums in Bangalore. The plan foresees that 'the major share of slum population (75%) can be provided the housing through redevelopment of the existing land to cover up for the existing slum population and the balance of about 25% of the total slum' (ibid., 84). Civil society organizations and activists were gearing up to counter the conservative

number of the city's slum inhabitants, the pejorative language used to describe low-income communities, and to assert their claim to a fair share of land from a plan that did note envision mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods but rather ghettoized stacking of dwelling units for the poor.

Against this background all efforts in directing and shaping the political will, which is starkly influenced by corporate consultancy firms and interests, are necessary to claim access to land and housing for the urban poor. The challenge that public housing policy ought to address is: How can housing that meets families' needs be provided at large scale and quickly, while considering livelihoods, evolving family compositions, and opportunities for increased social cohesion? The state being the one articulating, planning, financing, and implementing (increasingly with private sector partnership) housing policy, it remains the primary target to address housing claims, as delivery of housing by the development aid or civil society sector can only be very limited due to a lack of funds and expertise (Sen 1998).

The socio-economic, legal, and political context, democratic polity, and governance practice intrinsically shape how housing claims are articulated and addressed to the target.

Welfare between governance and negotiations

Representative democracy presents opportunities to vote for a political leader who would articulate the interest of the constituency. The habitants of low-income settlements represent an important electoral base, so why have political representatives failed to bring their housing needs on the political agenda to uplift them from shelter poverty? At the core, political representation of the interest of the poor is a double-edged sword. While there is a rise in identity-based politics based on caste and religion that is provoking high political aspirations, it has also hijacked the political process through vested interests (Himanshu 2018; Chandhoke 2005). Even cash transfers and vote-bank politics through patronage networks have not produced the desired outcomes (Björkman 2014a). Hence, when political representation is not promoting the poor's interest, is then mobilization really the likely option?

Housing is a domain that is starkly regulated and delivered by the state; it becomes, hence, pivotal and necessary not only to know the duties and organization of public Indian institutions, but also to understand their workings and how they translate into everyday interactions. The search for answers for the absence of movements leads me to investigate the conditions for mobilizing

in democratic India, interrogating the socio-political and institutional set-up and to understand in what type of everyday transactions and practices the aforementioned set-up translates and how it shapes mobilization efforts.

W. H. Morris-Jones described the political system of the largest democracy in the world as a 'mediating framework for a dialogue between the two inherited traditions of governance and movement' (Morris-Jones 1964, 126 quoted in Mitra 2006, 50), having inherited a large colonial administrative apparatus to govern the populations of the territory and an independence movement which had developed its unique and powerful action repertoire that had held the world in its thrall. Could it not be expected that addressing the basic human need for adequate shelter would be claimed and made possible?

Following Independence in 1947, India walked the path of nation building, having to bridge ethnic and religious diversity as well as economic disparity, overcome a societal system crippled by casteism, raise an economic system from exploitation, and emancipate an administration.

There have been numerous appraisals of India's institutional performance. I outline three perspectives. Some scholars (Mitra 2006; Vora and Palshikar 2004; Drèze and Sen 2002; Lijphart 1996) regard the Indian democratic experiment to be a success story due to its sheer survival in a society as diverse and complex as India and to have established a working procedural democracy. Others commend its 'surprising' resilience due to the internal institutional complexities of the state (Kapur and Mehta 2005, 12).

Drèze and Sen (2002) argue that the main particularities of Indian democracy relates more to democratic practice, which in India has often been deeply compromised by a variety of social limitations inherited from the past (ibid., 12). One such social limitation in India is the still rigid stratification of society through caste. In an effort to redress inequalities structured by caste, India was among the first countries to include legislation aimed at affirmative action to combat the lasting influence of caste. The 'reservations' and other priorities for Scheduled Castes (formerly, the 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes expanded the horizon of legal support for social equity through constitutional provisions (ibid., 7). These reservation policies aim to identify subjects that are eligible to become targets of reservation or welfare benefits. This implies that there is a link from the constitution of the subject to the rationalities of the state, which is grasped by the Foucauldian concept called governmentality, which differentiates between those dominated and those holding powers to govern these subjects (Lemke 2000).

Anthropological studies on the Indian state that focus on practice, perceptions, and the everyday embodiments of such systems of governmentality

paint a picture of an Indian bureaucracy that is unique. Gupta (2012, 38) states that a focus on the practices of governmentality allows us to uncover that the state is not the only organization in pursuit of welfare of the populations, but that there are other agencies that either compete with the state in the provision of services or complement it by performing functions that it is incapable of doing. Gupta (2012, 23) argues that the Indian state probably outdoes any other poor nation-state in the number and range of its benevolent interventions, as 'it would be difficult to imagine a more extensive set of development interventions in the fields of nutrition, health, education, housing, employment, sanitation, and so forth than those found in India'. When rhetorically benevolent intentions are cyclically proclaimed loud and clear, why is it that welfare programmes fail and when they succeed, why do they so erratically (ibid., 24)? In other words, why are outcomes of such programmes systematically arbitrary? Numbers speak it out.

According to Pande (2003), the vast majority of the poor stem from the lower castes and classes. Three hundred and fifty million Indians (Rangarajan Report 2014) are surviving without their basic human needs adequately met and turn to the state for welfare benefits. According to Census 2011, there were 44,226,917 Scheduled Caste households, out of which 3,564,292 lived in dilapidated houses and 21,649,238 dwelled in just liveable housing conditions.[3] A number this high that could potentially avail welfare benefits from systems of governmentality; could the Indian state deliver? At least rhetorically it seems to want to, but the equation is skewed: the demand is much larger than the supply. Hence, a welfare entitlement (housing or others) becomes political currency. Politics embodies the competition over a scarce resource. So, the allocation/delivery of a welfare entitlement is politicized, competed over, demanded because of political loyalties – to influence arbitration. Chatterjee (2004) calls populations ascribed as targets of welfare policies 'political society'. He describes political society as a site of constant negotiation and contestation opened up by the allocation of welfare entitlements by governmental agencies. They hence have an inherently political relationship with the state. The competition over these few entitlements opens up paralegal and informal modalities of claim-making. Chatterjee (2004, 74) describes them as 'tenuously' right-bearing citizens in the manner that they have to negotiate for entitlements, rather than rights (ibid., 38). This is in contrast to the smaller section of 'civil society', who are given equal rights and freedom, as they are not dependent on the state and are not ascribed policy targets (ibid., 38). In this study, Chatterjee's 'civil society' will be referred to as elite society for the sake of clarity. In this book, I will use the term 'civil society' as comprising both political and elite society. In essence,

Chatterjee's (2004) treatise suggests that civil society in post-colonial society is deeply segmented with respective public spheres, in which distinct forms of political cultures may be observed.

Welfare benefits in exchange for votes, political loyalty, or a bribe extends the formal Weberian welfare model into the fray zone of the informal transactions that are enmeshed in everyday lives. Some call it corruption, others call it a substitution for absent services. Seen through the former perspective, corruption then disenfranchises the poor by making essential goods and services more expensive. The latter perspective suggests that the poor are not only victims of corruption but use the levels of the state and the networks around it to obtain some leverage and direct arbitrariness in their favour, hence giving them agency (ibid., 34; Björkman 2014a; Witsoe 2011; de Wit and Berner 2009).

The power to influence arbitrariness is equally influenced by an institutional context that is perceived to be flexible and informal. Laguerre (1994) argues that informality must be understood as being not separate from formality but rather shaped by it. Informality transcends livelihood and habitation to forge an 'informal way of life' (Bayat 2010). This way of life represents natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives (Bayat 1997). In this sense, the informal way of life brings about continuities between everyday life, routine politics, contentious action (Auyero 2004), and what I call informal repression against claimants engaged in mobilizing. Repression is generally within the monopoly of the state to ensure law, order, and security within its jurisdiction. The locales from which informal repression also sprouts are where actors engrossed in violence secretly meet and enmesh rationales of political aspirations. There is almost complete silence in the literature of possible participation of authorities in 'unofficial' violent acts as Auyero (2011) suggests.

Democracy provides the framework and the modalities for these negotiations, interaction, contestation, and its extension into the informal grey zone provided by arbitrary power that facilitate unpredictable outcomes. These in turn condition these modalities of citizen–state interaction and hence shape the status and practice of citizenship. *Housing and Politics in Urban India* tackles these interactions to decipher the surprising outcomes despite formal, democratic, and predictable modalities of interaction.

In the following section, I develop a conceptual framework that articulates a bridging mechanism between the macro level of formal state institutions and informal institutions and the meso-level agency of two types of social movement organization. At the macro level, institutions are entrenched