

I Introduction

Rehabilitate: to return someone to a good, healthy, or normal life or condition after they have been in prison, been very ill, etc.; to return something to a good condition;
(*Cambridge Dictionary*)

In November 2012, the chief minister of Karnataka handed over rehabilitation homes to the residents of the Ragigudda slum, in south Bangalore. In his address he stated:

Our priority is to make Karnataka slum-free. We want to clear the existing 2,251 declared slums in the state, rehabilitate the residents and ensure that new slums do not come up.... We want to rehabilitate these people and improve their living conditions. (*The Hindu* 2012)

In the southwest of Bangalore, in Laggere ward lies one of Bangalore's largest slum rehabilitation areas.¹ Spread over 54 acres of land in the periphery of Bangalore, this area is home to the rehabilitated poor – those evicted from slums and settlements in the city. This large tract of land on which four–five storey apartment buildings are constructed is divided in the middle by the outer ring road that connects all the major highways in Bangalore city. During my research, I would take the ring road from south Bangalore where my family resides to cut across to the southwest. On this road from south Bangalore to the west, one can see the scenery change from the city-like landscape with homes, buildings, shops and bus stops to a more sparse landscape. Near the Laggere bridge enroute to the Peenya road, the landscape again changes drastically with land on both sides of the road rising high, hutments on the ridges and waste spilling down to the sides of the road. The garbage is piled up so high that it appears as if these homes are built on piles of garbage. At the Laggere bridge and beyond lie densely built apartment buildings that flank both sides of the road. These are the Laggere rehabilitation homes, commonly called the 'slum quarters'.

Laggere housed around 4,000 families in 2009 when I first visited it. Between 2009 and 2015, I witnessed the construction of 33 new buildings in part of

In Search of Home 2

the area, each housing 25–30 families. Poorly constructed buildings show signs of dilapidation very soon, with crumbling walls, leaking roofs and sanitary pipes spilling into walls. Homes built in the 1980s for the first group that arrived in Laggere, were already considered dangerous to live in when I first visited in 2009. Notices of eviction from the slum board were pasted on walls, requesting inhabitants to vacate so that the buildings could be demolished and reconstructed. Residents suffer varying degrees of deprivation of basic services. There is no regular water supply and while older buildings are connected to electricity, newly rehabilitated groups in new buildings have to depend on stolen electricity for many years before they are finally connected. The area is full of garbage with no regular sanitation services. When the stench from piling garbage becomes unbearable, neighbouring homes often collect money to get the garbage removed.

The vast majority of the urban poor are evicted from prime land within the city of Bangalore, to be relocated in these new ghettos of urban poverty that are increasingly lining the peripheries of cities.² Though the government claims that it wants to ‘rehabilitate’ people and ‘improve their living conditions’, the reality of the rehabilitated poor is far from this official discourse. Silently, without a murmur, the urban poor have been steadily removed from central parts of the city to the peripheries in rehabilitation areas such as this. One newspaper article, for instance, bemoaned that the rehabilitation homes being provided by the government was resulting in dwindling numbers of domestic maids and daily wage workers. It pointed out that in 2015 in just over six months, a whopping 7,679 people were relocated by the slum board in Bangalore.³ Rehabilitation areas thus densify over time with a steady stream of slum dwellers evicted from different parts of the city pouring in. During the six years of my research, Laggere was abuzz with construction activity. Old dilapidated homes were being demolished, just as new apartment buildings were rising up into the skies to house newly evicted poor groups in other parts of the city. The spaces between apartments began to disappear as new buildings suddenly took their place. The massive scale of everyday displacements was palpable in the streets of Laggere.

Laggere is just one of several such ‘rehabilitation areas’ that are mushrooming all around Bangalore city, revealing the massive reordering of the city. A World Bank Environment Department working paper released in 1996 revealed that each year 4 million people are displaced due to dams and another 6 million are displaced due to urban development and transportation programmes and in one decade alone, between 1980 and 1990, 80–90 million people were displaced due to both dams and urban development programmes (WBED 1996). The World Bank’s projects accounted for only 3 per cent of the displacement caused by dam construction

3 Introduction

and 1 per cent of the displacement caused by urban and transportation projects. A total of 2 million people were displaced by its projects and India alone accounted for almost 50 per cent of the total displacement (974,000), followed by China (483,000) during this period (1986–92) (WBED 1996: 88).

India does not have official data on forced evictions. The Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), has established the National Eviction and Displacement Observatory, which is a network of partner institutions collecting data on forced evictions.⁴ This data collected through primary and secondary research is limited by the reach of organisations in this network, and thus not exhaustive. In its 2018 report on forced evictions in 2017, the HLRN studied 213 evictions that resulted in the destruction of 53,700 homes and affected 260,000 people. Six homes were destroyed every hour displacing 30 persons and of the 213 evictions, 99 were city beautification projects to create slum-free and smart cities, 53 were development projects, including transportation, and 30 were wildlife/environmental conservation projects. Beautification and development projects were together responsible for the eviction of 77 per cent of homes in 2017 with beautification alone accounting for 47 per cent of the homes demolished. Of those who are displaced, a small number are provided ‘rehabilitation’ housing, while a large number are denied rehabilitation through state-defined ‘eligibility criteria’ and through omission from surveys. The 2018 HLRN report provides the example of the demolition of 16,717 homes along Mumbai’s Tansa pipeline, of which only 7,674 homes were considered eligible (Chaudhry et al. 2018: 7–8). In its 2019 report on forced evictions in 2018, HLRN studied 218 cases of forced eviction, demolishing more than 41,700 homes and rendering 202,000 people homeless. In this report, HLRN’s data also revealed that 11.3 million Indians live under the threat of eviction and potential displacement. Of those affected, 47 per cent were evicted on ‘slum-clearance/anti-encroachment/city-beautification’ drives, including for mega events, and interventions aimed at creating ‘slum-free’ cities; 26 per cent were evicted due to infrastructure and ostensible ‘development’ projects, including road widening, highway/road construction, housing and ‘smart city’ projects; 20 per cent were evicted due to environmental projects, forest protection and wildlife conservation; and 8 per cent were evicted due to disaster management (Chaudhry et al. 2019).⁵

Even while large displacement projects grab headlines in India, such as the recent protest by 72 villages around the Statue of Unity (*NDTV* 2018) in Gujarat,⁶ everyday displacements in the name of urban development have become routine. Displacement has been facilitated by ‘rehabilitation’, justifying the acquisition of land⁷ and urban development. Rehabilitation thus functions as appeasement to

slum dwellers, proposing not only to mitigate the effects of displacement but also ameliorate people's lives by providing them legal housing. The Indian state has rolled out massive urban development programmes such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), 2005–14 and the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), 2011–17, that have aided slum rehabilitation. Rehabilitation has thus become an important developmental function of the state, one that is no more questioned but assumed essential to urban governance. It is thus that displacement is normalised, with resistance replaced by negotiations for rehabilitation.

The politics of rehabilitation

Rehabilitation crystallised as a policy response of the state in the 1990s in the political aftermath of the Emergency period during which slums and settlements were demolished near the Turkman Gate in New Delhi (Ramanathan 1996). Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in India in June 1975 which lasted almost two years until March 1977. Emma Tarlo through her archival research reveals how homes were provided to those who undertook sterilisation. This marked the first set of exchanges between the state and the urban poor, with sterilisation certificates being submitted with applications for housing. In 1986, the Supreme Court in its observations in the *Pavement Dweller's* case also strengthened the practice of 'rehabilitation' as an administrative measure, in the form that it exists today. Olga Tellis, a journalist, had filed a public interest litigation (PIL) on behalf of pavement dwellers evicted by the Mumbai municipal corporation. The court held that eviction of the pavement dwellers without a just and fair procedure established by law would deprive them of their livelihood. While upholding the right to livelihood, the Court noted that the Constitution does not put an absolute embargo on the deprivation of life and personal liberty and such deprivation has to be according to procedure established by law. Even as the Court rejected the municipal corporation's reference to the pavement dwellers as criminals encroaching on public property, observing that they did so out of 'sheer helplessness', it simultaneously laid out the procedure to be followed to evict the homeless. The Court ordered that the pavement dwellers be provided alternative housing not far from where they were removed and that they were not to be evicted until the end of the monsoon season. However, it stated clearly that the provision for alternative housing would not be a 'condition precedent to their removal.'⁸

The succeeding government headed by a new prime minister, V. P. Singh (1989–90), made an earnest attempt to amend the Indian Constitution to make the right to housing a fundamental right. In a bid to reach out to the poor,

5 Introduction

it identified and enumerated slum dwellers with the intent of providing security of housing. In this pro-poor environment, the Law Commission in its 138th report in 1990 suggested a law that would give slum dwellers a legal right to resettlement in cases of eviction.⁹ This law was never enacted and the government, which lasted less than a year, was unable to bring any lasting change in the status of the urban poor. However, the *Pavement Dweller's* case had already set into motion the machinery of eviction, resettlement and rehabilitation. Tellis (2015) points out that the judgment has helped the propertied classes as lawyers use this case to justify eviction of the poor. She notes that though the judgment has been often quoted as favouring the rights of the poor to housing and shelter, the pavement dwellers in the case were evicted without resettlement (Tellis 2015). Ramanathan (2006) traces the law on urban poor evictions, examining how successive judgments of the Supreme Court went on to progressively weaken claims to alternative housing, absolving the state of any responsibility towards the homeless poor.

In effect, neither law nor judicial pronouncements have supported rehabilitation as a necessary measure in case of evictions. Yet curiously the state has continued to roll out policies for rehabilitation despite this legal stance. Successive urban development programmes of the central government have strengthened the practice of rehabilitation housing with a marked preference for resettlement in the peripheries of the city.¹⁰ These programmes speak of slum-free cities and the urban poor's access to basic services, even as they have led to the exodus of the poor who now find themselves in the margins with poor housing, lesser access to services and fewer employment opportunities. Rehabilitation has little to do with providing adequate housing, but is motivated by the desire to empty cities of poor groups (Gooptu 1996; Ramanathan 1996, 2005; Bhan 2009). It is now an integral part of urban planning, which at the city and state levels has come to be largely influenced by corporate interests (Benjamin 2000) and a development narrative of 'slums' as a sign of the failure of urban development (Gilbert 2009). Rehabilitation housing is thus in this sense a small price to pay to free costly land from its pesky inhabitants. It further makes it appear as if poverty has been 'managed' more effectively. It is an effective tool to enable evictions, while at the same time placating poor groups refusing to move by offering them the promise of legal housing. Ghertner (2010), drawing from Foucault,¹¹ suggests that the state's offer of housing recruits 'slum dwellers' desires in alignment with the vision of a "modern" orderly city'.

But it is not only the desire for inhabiting the 'modern orderly city'. The poor who inhabit land they do not own are also recruited into the state's vision of legality. Vulnerable to eviction that can often be quick and violent, rehabilitation promises legal residence and freedom from the fear of being removed. It is this

In Search of Home 6

promise of rehabilitation that motivates the poor to give up homes within the city and move out into the peripheries, far from places of work and opportunity. This book examines the emergence of ‘rehabilitation housing’ as the new ghettos of urban poverty in the peripheries of Indian cities. Following the lives of 50 families in Laggere, it examines the politics of rehabilitation housing.¹² This ethnography throws light on those who facilitate rehabilitation – local politicians, slum leaders and local slum board officials – and what they stand to gain in the process. It examines the politics that unfolds within rehabilitation areas, as the poor struggle for services, deal with demolitions of dilapidated buildings and witness the densification of their neighbourhood, as new groups of evicted poor pour in. Suspended between a slum like life and desires for full citizenship, this book explores the citizenship of the poor.

I use the term ‘poor’ to encompass those in the margins of citizenship, the homeless in cities who are not on an equal footing as the propertied citizens of India. These are citizens who do not necessarily conform to the economic definition of ‘poverty’, who may or may not possess below poverty level (BPL) cards attesting their status below the poverty level. As my theoretical focus hovers around the relationship between ‘populations’ and the state, an income-based definition of poverty is eschewed for a more complex notion of the poor. One is therefore poor not because of how much one earns. One is poor because one lives in poorly built neighbourhoods; spends immense time and effort accessing even basic services; is constrained to make do with poor education and health facilities; has to travel far to obtain work and due to these increased hardships is often trapped in poverty, with children frequently inheriting poor lives and poor living.

The poor live in the ‘margins’, both literally and in terms of their relationship with the state. They are removed from slums and settlements within the city and relocated to the margins, to peripheries that are not just physically distant from the city but are also severely underserved and thus distant from more efficient forms of governance that enable better living in more central parts of the city. They are also at the margins of ‘governance’, in that they rely far more on local politics and have no access to upper echelons of government (Benjamin 2000). They are therefore marginalised in policies of land allocation in the city, resulting in lack of access to affordable land or housing. It is important here to mark the salience of margins as a space that is both the inevitable and ‘necessary entailment of the state’, as Das and Poole (2004: 4) point out. They suggest the idea of ‘margins as peripheries seen to form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialised into the law’, a space in which one can understand ‘specific technologies of power through which states attempt to “manage” or “pacify” populations

7 Introduction

through both force and the conversion of “unruly subjects” into lawful subjects of the state’. I find this notion of margins apt in understanding both the status of the urban poor and their relations with state – ‘agonistic relations’, as Roy proposes (I. Roy 2018).

In this book, I examine the tensions between governmental control and the resistance poor groups put up, all the while paying attention to blurring boundaries between them. This book captures the interplay of disciplinary and other tactics used by the state and the creative ways in which the poor escape the control of the state. I must be clear here that this book is neither a sombre recounting of the disciplining of the urban poor nor a celebration of the resistance of the poor. It is instead an effort to chronicle stories from the field that speak of both power and resistance, while recognising the limits to both. It is through the prism of citizenship, law and the politics of the poor that I examine the relations between the state and the poor.

Citizenship, law and home

Academic literature on citizenship of the poor can be organised broadly into two categories – the letter of the law that defines the contours of citizenship (formal or substantive citizenship) and citizenship practices, that is, what citizens do to claim/reclaim citizenship. This book examines both these aspects of citizenship, looking at how the law structures the citizenship of the poor and examining how citizenship practices of the poor in turn shape the manner in which law comes to take life on the ground. There are of course vital links between the two; the letter of the law structures the domain of practices but the law may also be subverted on the field, through normative practices that take on the aura of law. The domain of citizenship practices includes not only practices of and around law, but is a broader realm of political practices. This part of the chapter deals with law and citizenship, and the following part will examine practices of citizenship.

Marshall defines citizenship as ‘a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community’, with equal membership in terms of rights and duties that are not universally accepted, but driven by ‘an image of an ideal citizenship’ which they aspire to achieve and measure their protest against (Marshall 1950). While the content of citizenship is not universal, aspirations for what should be an ideal citizenship are important to the project of developing citizenship. One way of looking at citizenship is to examine laws and the rights they provide and those they deny. Legal residence within a territory determines citizenship in most parts of the world. But what about those who do not reside legally? The urban poor in India, unable to afford legal housing, live ‘illegally’, squatting on land

they do not own, and are treated as encroachers, breaking the law. Chatterjee calls this group populations who unlike rights bearing citizens are no more than targets of state policies (2004: 34). He distinguishes between citizens who have rights and subjects who possess entitlements. He argues that the propertied have rights and are therefore ‘proper citizens’ who are legally entitled to compensation in case of dispossession of property. While those who do not have such rights may still have entitlements, they may not be considered eligible for a compensation but are entitled to support to rebuild their homes or find alternative livelihoods (Chatterjee 2004a: 69). Housing is therefore a core determinant of citizenship.

India does not recognise the right to housing, despite having ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1979 (HLRN 2016: 1). The HLRN in its report to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the third periodic review pointed out that despite India’s commitments to provide ‘Housing for All’ by 2022, it has promoted homelessness, forced evictions, land grabbing/alienation and displacement. This lack of right to housing goes hand in hand with the lack of a right to property (Wahi 2015).¹³ The Indian state therefore possesses enormous power to acquire land, even of those who possess full legal titles. The poor who possess a wide array of tenures ranging from illegal occupation to state-recognised occupation, are therefore even more vulnerable to lose their homes.

Even as the state fails to redistribute land equitably to provide for affordable housing for the poor, it criminalises homelessness. State responsibility is thereby shifted to the individual citizen. Laws criminalise poverty by penalising the poor for encroachment. Various judgments of the Supreme Court have further illegalised the poor, transforming the state’s failure into the personal failure of the poor (Ramanathan 2006). Foucault’s observation is apt that

it would be hypocritical or naïve to believe that law was made for all, in the name of all; that it would be prudent to recognise that it was made for the few and that it was brought to bear upon others; that in principle it applies to all citizens, but that it is addressed principally to the most numerous and least enlightened classes;...

This allows us to understand how the poor are at the receiving end of the law.

The only recourse the poor can have is to make claims of the state. Unlike rights that are enforceable, claims are not, and therefore the state may or may not respond to the claims of the poor. The Directive Principles of State Policy under Part IV of the Constitution provide for a set of non-enforceable state responsibilities, notably Article 39(a), which provides that the state will direct policy towards securing for Indian citizens the right to an adequate means of

9 Introduction

livelihood and the distribution of ownership and control over material resources of the community to serve common good. It is this directive that has been used to frame policies of housing for the poor. These directives are, as Anupama Roy puts it, ‘reminders or directives for law-making to usher in conditions in which the rights enumerated in the previous section (fundamental rights) become more meaningful’ (2010: 19). Though all citizens are affected by laws against encroachment, the homeless poor are disproportionately affected, precisely because their very survival now depends on the largesse of the state. While propertied citizens can demand services from the state by virtue of owning property and paying taxes, the poor are relegated to negotiating their survival and thus are embroiled in relations of dependency with the state. Citizenship, whose fundamental goal is the attainment of equality, is thus inherently unequal as certain citizens become rights holders while others become claimants.

James Holston (2011), examining the citizenship of the poor in Sao Paulo, Brazil, suggests that, while some inequalities are meant to flatten the field, such as affirmative action for marginalised groups, most inequalities serve to add privilege to privilege. Anupama Roy (2010), analysing citizenship in India, suggests that citizenship may ultimately unfurl as an ‘exclusive category, limiting membership through specific rules identifying members and outsiders’, and so ‘even as citizenship makes claims to being a horizontal camaraderie of equal members, in actual practice, it embodies a range of graded and differential categories and corresponding lived experiences of citizenship’. She notes that ‘citizenship is inextricably tied with the processes of state formation, intertwined with governmentality’ that vitalises and affirms state power as the state produces ‘constitutive outsiders’ such as the ‘inadequate or deficient citizens’.

Examining the plight of migrants to cities, and the conflict between the middle-class propertied citizens of India and the slum-dwelling/squatting poor, Roy points out that ownership of land or property remains integral to citizenship even today, reflecting the archaic principle of property ownership as an entitlement to citizenship. She points to the creation of ‘residual citizens’, migrants from other parts of the country, ‘cast outside the “elite” domain of civil society for being deficient in the acumen, capacity, and skills of citizenship’. She notes that they are depoliticised by the state that either criminalises them or treats them as targets of welfare. She notes that residual citizens are both excluded and simultaneously included on differential terms, leading to a precarious existence, ‘subject to perpetual relocation’ and ‘kept in a state of deferred and suspended citizenship’ (Anupama Roy 2010: 26–27). This analysis of ‘residual citizenship’ derives from the status provided to citizens by law and the state and therefore rejoins

other analysis of urban poor illegalities as emerging from the state's exclusion of populations and groups that are not considered citizens (Ramanathan 2006; Bhan 2009, 2013).

These debates on citizenship in terms of status have largely used a binary approach to citizenship, between citizens and subjects/populations (Chatterjee 2004) and insiders and outsiders (Anupama Roy 2010). This book reveals a different experience of citizenship – of in-betweenness, between these two positions of insiders and outsiders. It fleshes out a status that is neither that of a full citizen nor that of an outsider. Within a continuum of property rights, the rehabilitated poor are neither 'illegal' nor completely legal citizens but with a promise of citizenship that never materialises – with citizenship therefore in limbo. It details how this state of limbo is produced by the state, through the combined effect of regulations governing rehabilitation housing, bureaucratic actions and inactions, and corruption. Further, it details why such limbo is produced, what the state stands to gain by suspending citizenship and how the poor respond and use limbo to their advantage.

Practices of citizenship and the politics of the poor

While law structures citizenship, how citizens respond to law, in turn, shapes how law comes to be enforced. At the first instance, subversion of laws and the resort to illegalities are modes of defying laws. Law is inherently unequal in that it seeks to protect a few from those on the fringes. It is this inescapable character of the formal law that incites the poor to adopt strategies of stealth rather than outright protest. Overt forms of protest against displacement that took place in the 1980s and 1990s in India are now few and far between with a general decline in the mobilisational capacity of political organisations (Gudavarthy 2012). The evasion of law and the resort to illegalities thus have to be understood in this context. Sociologists and anthropologists studying urban poor practices of and around law have focused on the use of illegalities as a mode of resistance to laws. While some focus exclusively on law and citizenship (Eckert 2004, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2002; Benda-Beckmann, Benda-Beckmann and Eckert 2009; Holston 2009, 2011; Holston and Appadurai 1996), others examine the broader array of political practices of the poor, within which illegalities is an important mode of resistance (Chatterjee 2011, 2004, 2003, 2012; Gudavarthy 2012; Das 2011; Das and Walton 2015; Das and Randeria 2015; Bayat 2010, 2000, 1997b).

Examining the politics of the poor, Chatterjee (2004) distinguishes between the use of the legal sphere by civil society in making demands from the state and obtaining access to its resources and the use of illegal means by subjects. The poor illegally squatting on land and illegally tapping electricity and water, with