

PhD Abstract
Nipesh Palat Narayanan

In/formal Urbanism: Cases Drawn from Delhi

This thesis attempts to critically engage with urbanization processes through the lens of informality. That is, urban informality as an enduring concept that defines, describes, and delineates urban development. Using case studies from Delhi, it theorizes informality as a practice and seeks to understand its complex social and power dynamics. The research, based on secondary archival and primary qualitative data, shows the role of informality in the production of space, the everyday politics and reasoning of those who are involved in such practices. This thesis develops on how urban informality forms a critical lens in understanding the urbanization process in India rather than understanding informality via the urbanization process. It is broken down into three components, each of which yields a different scale to the analysis.

The first component explores the discursive construction of slums in the Indian parliamentary debates. The slum is a contested settlement category, which provides a very specific illustration of urban informality's contested notions. This section analyses the debates related to slums from the upper house (*Rajya Sabha*) of the Indian Parliament over a period of 61 years from 1953 until 2014. Using a Foucauldian framework of governmentality and biopolitics, this part outlines the historical progression of the debates, the rationale around conceptualization of slums, and how they transformed into actions via policy and/or legislation. This section analyses the discursive transformation of the notion of slums from a political subject to a technical object and in the process, how the state makes itself indispensable to deal with urban informality.

The second component investigates the role of urban informality in producing the city. It takes the informal dumpling (*momos*) manufacturing-and-selling sector in Delhi's Chirag Dilli settlement as a case study. Building on a Lefebvrian conceptualization of space, it illustrates how this particular informal cottage industry contributes to the social production of the city as well as of the physical settlement in which it is located. The results show, first, how the built form of the

inhabited settlement gets co-produced with newer living patterns and building typologies. Second, they demonstrate the contribution of informality to the production of the city. Thus, taking an alternate narrative to the state or the conflict with the state being the primary agent in the production of the city.

The third component of the research aims to understand how informality is being produced, and why the same actors oscillate between formal and informal practices. In this regard, a study of water supply management and solid waste management in and around the slum settlement of Jagdamba Camp is taken as a case study. This part of the thesis theorizes informality as a practice using Bourdieu and demonstrates through the case study that the production of informality is a highly varied and nuanced process. It takes the urban infrastructure as a medium to understand social and political aspects of the society. The results argue that informality as a practice is not completely dependent on the habitus of the actors, but on the rules of the field in which these actors operate. This opens the analytical possibility to understand how and why the same actors practice both formality and informality in different fields.

The three components are the core chapters of this thesis-by-article. They come together in understanding the urbanization process via informality rather than using formal urbanization to understand informality. The first part outlines the larger historical development of informality resulting in various state legislations. The following two components outline how the people cope, adapt, and influence these legislations resulting in a distinct urbanization process. The overall results are framed using perspectives from southern theory and show how informal practices are universal, but these practices get differentially connoted and acted upon.