

Childcare Support and Democratization in Contemporary India

—Efforts to Improve the Child-rearing Environment in a Delhi Slum—

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Place of fieldwork: India

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Research Background

In post-developmental states worldwide, top-down models of development have been considered by both governments and the market. India too has been promoting public–private partnerships, especially since 2000; at the same time, it has also been encouraging sociopolitical participation by the people. In slum areas, inhabitants who faced difficulties in getting equal chances in life began to call for improvements in the school system or infrastructure. That is, various actors, such as administrative officers, guardians, companies, NGOs, and politicians, began to consider support for childcare as part of their interests. It is important that the voice of these actors is heard in the decision-making process, as this can lead to a reappraisal of the democratization of governance. How, then, can they make their voices heard by the various stakeholders?

Research Purpose and Aim

Governance of childcare is formed by a network consisting of actors such as the government, private actors, non-government organizations, and relatives. The purpose of my research is to investigate the way in which slum dwellers demanded changes to the childcare network, along with changes to their own needs. I focus on the network that slum dwellers in a Delhi slum in India use to deal with issues around childcare. Through this study, I examine ways of activating the sociopolitical agency of slum dwellers through various relationships. My research is unlike most previous research, which focused on particular mechanisms and actors, such as participation in a civil society, autonomy of a community, and local leaders.

Results and Achievements through Fieldwork

Data analyzed here were collected through a field survey in northeast Delhi, between June 2014 and February 2015. I interviewed slum dwellers and other stakeholders, and observed their child rearing.

The slum dwellers associated, interacted, and negotiated with stakeholders depending on what the issues were—such as the administration of a preschool, reservation for the economically weaker section, etc. For instance, in 2014, some slum dwellers faced a problem with the domestic water supply in their alley. Water was supplied through a hand pump installed by the government, but the pump broke in January. At the first meeting held in their alley, they decided that two women should approach the waterworks department directly; the department, however, did nothing.

Therefore, at the next meeting, they decided to use the network between an illiterate woman and a local NGO, since Rally had been participating in the women's group meeting. The NGO staff advised, and offered their support in sending a letter detailing the residents' demands to the department. Unfortunately, even after sending this letter, the government did not change its attitude. The residents then asked a man whether they could utilize his relationship with a local politician, because the man had become a party member after the 2013 elections. As a result of this negotiation, the government began the construction of a new pump.

In this way, these relationships—the intimate relationship within the community, the civil society-based relationship between a woman and an NGO, and the political relationship between a party member and a local politician—were connected and accumulated, depending on the issue. Most previous research has focused on particular mechanisms and actors. My study, however, shows the agency of slum dwellers dealing with childcare issues through these relationships. Slum dwellers have often been marginalized in several systems and policies. However, they connect these systems, policies, and relationships in hybrid, and attempt to make their voices heard during the decision-making process.



Supplementary food for preschool children



With main members of slum dwellers' community

Implications and Impact on Future Research

In the future, I will investigate the ways in which these relationships accumulated and are maintained in slum areas, and how they can be used as a resource. Research should also examine the condition of improving their capacity of negotiation by focusing on conflict among slum dwellers and outsiders.



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