

Class, Caste, and Production of City Space in India*

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Abstract

In this paper, we show how space is produced through social cleavages like class and caste by focusing on the Indian context. Existing publicly available sources of secondary data impose severe limitations on any attempt to meaningfully incorporate space into analyses of Indian cities. We therefore rely on a spatially representative sample survey that we designed and administered in the cities of Hyderabad and Mumbai. This survey overcomes some of the limitations of existing publicly available data on Indian cities. We develop a class-analytic framework that groups inhabitants of cities into different classes and that incorporates some prominent features of cities in the developing world, most notably, informality. We also document different notions of city space based upon residence, work, and commuting. We conduct an inequality decomposition analysis of the data from Hyderabad to show that class, caste, and space explain a substantial proportion of income inequality. While urban inequalities are stark and rising, we show that spatial co-existence of various groups (e.g. castes, classes, formal and informal production) is also pronounced. We believe that this is an interesting insight and call this co-existence “Grayness”. Using an index that we developed, we show that Grayness is much greater for Indian cities as compared to American cities. Rather than being just a facet of cities, we show that Grayness has positive implications for development. We provide some explanations for our findings on Grayness, and also argue that neoliberalism is eroding it.

Preliminary. Please do not cite. Comments are welcome.

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