

# The Politics of Home Making: Migrant journeys and water encounters in a New City

by Lalitha Kamath and Radhika Raj

PANEL 11: Gender, Everyday Life and the Making of the Cityscape

While the new peripheral city of Vasai Virar dreams of competing with Mumbai and other metropolises in its worlding aspirations, electoral politics, processes of city building and state making revolve centrally around promises of access to water. Political posters assure 24-hour water supply, large dam projects are the centrepiece of election manifestos, and representations of beautified lakes, swimming pools, and a water park form prominent instances of the 'smart city' that Vasai Virar is going to become. Yet the materialisation of these promises is uncertain. Particularly in the remote, interior chawls being built on what were earlier paddy fields, the ordinary, everyday act of getting water remains a contested and violent domain. The paper follows 'migrant' women's struggles with the everyday act of accessing water, and argues for understanding it through the lens of home making. We locate women's agency in the largely invisible practices and politics of home making, but expand the term 'home' to encompass not just the four walls of the house but places created and nurtured through the commoning of spaces in and around homes.

Following Mahmood (2006) we conceptualize agency "not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create." Thus the paper closely attends to how the nature of women's agency has been enabled and created by the nested structures of subordination that 'migrant' women confront at the micro (*basti/gaon*) and macro (city) level and how it ultimately remains limited by it. We see women's water encounters as the site of their challenge to the (deliberate absence of the) state, where they demand the right to water and mark their claim to inhabit the city. This is also the realm where the socio-spatial politics of 'local' versus 'migrant', 'marathi manoos' versus 'bhaiyya', and municipal versus village are played out. Through their everyday act of collecting water, and the embodied consequences of control and suffering intrinsic to this struggle, women are agents of the politics of home making, and builders of everyday infrastructure that is key to nurturing viable places in this city that is yet to become.

The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork in an informal settlement in Vasai Virar, Makarandnagar, inhabited by people who have been evicted from Mumbai, but originally hail from eastern UP and Bihar.