

24th August 2017, 9:30 to 11 am

Panel 2: **Identity and Inclusion**

(**Discussant:** Sudeep Basu, **Chair:** Pradeep Bose)

The Production of a ‘Migrant’ versus the ‘Local’: The Case of a Right-Wing All-Male Organisation on the Margins of the City

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Extensive research on migration, migrants and the city has focused on the various vulnerabilities and violences faced by those who seek employment and refuge in urban centres, and how this in turn influences and shapes the city itself. However, the category of the ‘migrant’ is rarely questioned, and is often taken as a given. This paper argues that the idea of a ‘migrant’ is deliberately produced and mobilised to advance political agendas and is deeply influenced by class, caste, religion and regional biases. Who is a ‘migrant’ and who can claim to be a ‘local’, and in turn demand rights to the city, is a deeply political, strategic exercise. Furthermore, the production of the category of the migrant as ‘unclean’, ‘illiterate’, ‘encroacher’, ‘undeserving’, ‘criminal’ goes hand-in-hand with a regional right wing party’s ambitions of neoliberal city-building, convincingly packaged and sold as the right of the ‘local’ middle-class and lower-middle class, heterosexual male.

This paper unpacks and interrogates these produced, binary categories of ‘local’ and ‘migrant’, by studying sites of community organisation and the role of sport, religion, local social service, in fostering this sense of ‘local’ at the level of a neighbourhood. Today, about 49% of Mumbai’s population lives in slums, where people are forced to carve out life strategies in the face of state neglect, threat of evictions and market-friendly policies that limit possibilities for resistance and negotiation (Bhide 2017). These vulnerable informal settlements, mostly populated by religious minorities, dalits, migrants, are battlegrounds for mobilisations with conflicting interests, and as well as everyday resistance to state neglect. One route of mobilising is presented by right-wing organisations called the ‘mitra mandals’ (friends’ associations) that organise Hindu public festivals and sports events in working-class neighbourhoods. Mitra mandals are all-male associations, often sponsored by the xenophobic political party, Shiv Sena that propagates an aggressive brand of

regional nationalism. Membership to the mandal requires a commitment to the party's ideals, and an embodiment of the party's jingoistic, hyper-masculine principles. Central to its politics is its fight against the encroachment of the 'migrant other' on the city's limited informal housing and livelihood opportunities.

Based on year-long ethnographic fieldwork in a slum that was the site of one of India's largest Hindu-Muslim riots, the paper presents a thick description of the collective life of one such mitra mandal called Jai Jawan. Through the mandal, young men establish themselves as self-styled guardians of the neighbourhood and decide who can and cannot live or lay claims to the locality. Their sense of pride and belonging comes from defining themselves as original 'sons of the soil', and purpose, from their fight to safeguard their claims to city and culture against the Muslim and North Indian 'other'. These spaces, events, and institutions are keys to this understanding how these categories operate in everyday life. While participation in such religious, nationalist movements may provide young men an escape from everyday feelings of marginalisation, they seriously diminish possibilities of collective public action and justice that is inclusive in nature.