

24th August 2017, 11:00 to 1 pm

Panel 3: Urban Governance

(Discussant: Amit Prakash, Chair:)

Citizenship, urban governance and access to civic services: Delhi Municipal Elections 2017

Rumki Basu (Professor of Public Administration, Jamia Milia Islamia, Dept. of Political Science, Delhi) & Moitree Dey (Assistant Professor, Matasundari College for Women, University of Delhi)

Delhi is among the most populous cities of the world with a population of 18 million, its projected population growth will make it among the first three by 2025. New Delhi's "planned" landscape covering only 2% of Delhi's population is governed by a non-elected municipal body (New Delhi Municipal Council)

Municipal governance of the state of Delhi is divided by three statutory urban bodies: the NDMC, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Delhi Cantonment Board. The MCD governed part of Delhi covers the largest area – 1397.3 km. It has the onerous task of providing civic services to urban villages, resettlement colonies, "regularized" as well as "unauthorized" colonies, besides slum settlements. MCD is an autonomous body that governs 8 out of the 11 Districts of Delhi. It is among the largest municipal bodies in the world providing civic services to more than an estimated population of 11 million citizens in the capital city. Recently the MCD has been trifurcated into 3 smaller Municipal Corporations – North Delhi Municipal Corporation, South Delhi Municipal Corporation and the East Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Under MCD jurisdiction, posh planned colonies like Vasant Vihar and Defence Colony coexist with middle income level housing complexes (massive townships like Dwarka and Rohini included) where MCD provides basic services – road maintenance, garbage removal, street lighting, community parks, primary schools and health clinics. Water and electricity is the responsibility of Delhi Jal Board and Delhi Vidyut Board working directly under the State Government of Delhi. In early 2015, the Aam Aadmi Party government slashed the power tariff to half and provided 20,000 litres of free water for all residents.

The “unplanned” part of the city under MCD jurisdiction has the “majority” of city votes. That is the reason why the seven members of Parliament, 70 members of Delhi legislative assembly and 272 municipal councilors – (elected representatives) indulge existing voters with their own brand of “appeasement politics” by routinely promising them clean drinking water, 24 hour electricity, clean sewerage and “regularization”. It is only employment possibilities in the city of Delhi that prod on the “migrant residents” of these colonies to live in sub-human conditions.

The unplanned part of the city – (housing 75% of the city residents) include 500 slums and their 3 million population living in resettlement colonies, over 1000 unauthorized colonies and 135 urban villages. Political parties have seen to it that they receive immunity from demolition, get a minimum supply of drinking water, a modicum of sewage disposal, food subsidies and an election voting card. The second group consists of over 1000 unauthorized colonies. The occupants bought agricultural land privately, (an illegal transaction) since converting or subdividing agricultural land required approvals that were never obtained. Without sale deeds or building plans, shoddy structures, deficient sewerage systems and rudimentary basic amenities, these slums have been shunned by the municipal system but many such colonies get “regularized”.

The third large group comprises 135 urban villages. Spread all over Delhi and interspersed among planned residential and commercial complexes, these villages are precariously built structures standing amidst electric wires, shoddy hutments and garbage. Ironically the elected Municipal Corporation of Delhi which is the custodian of public health and safety, exempted all urban villages from paying property tax or following any building regulations.

These are the grim present realities of Delhi’s demographic changes in the last three decades, in the backdrop of which Delhi’s urban development seems extremely problematic. Both Delhi’s frenzied expansion or the politics of “appeasement” practiced by successive elected governments of Delhi leaves the task of the Municipal Corporation (MCD) extremely challenging in providing uniform civic services. Furthermore the Delhi Master Plan is hampered by the fact that water, power, roads, public transport and land are controlled by other parastatals of line departments of Central and State governments making coordination difficult. The three municipal corporations of Delhi are responsible only for solid waste management, maintenance of public spaces and some basic repairs and maintenance of other services such as roads, street lighting and drainage systems while many other functions have been outsourced to other bodies.

In this backdrop the recently concluded civic polls of April 2017 has thrown up 2 major models of urban governance. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) want the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act 1958 to be amended for different reasons. BJP wants grants to MCD to come directly from the Centre's Urban Development Ministry with "power" and "water supply" to be given back to MCD as was the situation before 1988. They want to tap new sources of revenue by increased taxation or better collection of the main source of revenue, the House property tax. BJP stands for better urban governance in "regular" colonies for tax paying citizens, thereby espousing a "differentiated" model of urban citizenship. AAP focused on a model of "universal" urban citizenship based on a minimum common standard of citizen entitlements for all in matters of water, electricity, sanitation and the right to in situ development irrespective of the legality or otherwise of their housing status. They want the revival of Resident Welfare Associations, government schools and clinics in MCD areas. They are in favour of abolishing House tax and improving urban governance without levying any fresh taxes.

The focus of this research paper will be as under:

- To study the implications of the changing demographic profile of Delhi, the different urban needs of its residents and its changing implications for urban governance.
- To study the statutory difference between the "planned" and the "unplanned" housing structures under MCD jurisdiction in terms of their impact on resident entitlements under municipal governance.
- To study the role of the judiciary in defining the rights of each category of "urban" citizen since all evictions from "unauthorized" colonies have been carried out by the executive under court orders.

To study the new ideas that have been floated in the manifestoes of BJP and AAP in terms of citizenship and civic services in urban governance given the irreversible demographic profile of a city which has only 25% of its residents living in "planned" colonies entitled to "civic" services as defined under the Municipal Corporation Act of Delhi. the marginalized castes.