Cities and the Urban Imperative

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This series introduces a holistic approach to studying cities, the urban experience, and its imaginations. It will grasp what is distinctive of the urban phenomenon in India, as also delineate the characteristic uniqueness of particular cities as they embrace change and create ways of experiencing modernities.

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The Embeddedness of Cost Recovery: Water Reforms and Associationism at Bangalore’s Fringes

Malini Ranganathan

As cities in India are continuously stretched and redrawn to encompass agricultural land, the responsibility for providing infrastructure in new peripheral settlements is increasingly being transferred from the state to the market, neighbourhood and household. In order to lobby for services and regularisation, there has been a surge in neighbourhood-level initiatives in the form of residents welfare associations (RWAs), party- and trade union-affiliated groups, and inter-neighbourhood federations. Despite the salience of peri-urbanisation for the trajectory of Indian cities, little social science research has investigated these new geographies, the nature of such neighbourhood associations and their class identities, and the types of claims they make on the state — particularly under a scenario of neoliberal reform and restructuring.

Since the turn of the millennium, Bangalore’s urban periphery — a collection of unauthorised settlements, villages and the offices of global corporations — has become the site for ambitious reform-oriented infrastructure projects. One project in particular, the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project (GBWASP), presents a moment of rupture in the history of state-led water supply in India. Whereas in the past, the state water board invested in new water

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1 In urban India, ‘regularisation’ refers to the process through which illegal or unauthorised settlements (i.e., not part of or conforming to the master plan) are brought under the purview of the local city administration. Regularisation is also a highly political process in which local-level and high-ranking politicians frequently intervene.
Malini Ranganathan

infrastructure through government loans and grants, this project transfers part of the financial burden of extending water to the periphery to residents themselves via the payment of a mandatory ‘beneficiary capital contribution’. The financial model of the project, shaped in part by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank, is now dubbed a ‘best practice’ in India’s water sector because it adopts a market-based approach (MoUD 2006; Vaidya and Vaidya 2008). That is, it initiates a move away from public funds to financing through commercial debt and the users themselves. Accounting for over 35 per cent of the project’s total budget, payments by residents represent a key terrain for claim making and negotiation over citizenship rights by RWAs in Greater Bangalore.

In this article, I investigate how neoliberal development projects and their programmatic goals play out in cities today, how they are contested and constituted through neighbourhood-level politics, and how the particular disjunctures between intent and effect engender new types of claims. My overarching argument is that the seemingly simple and straightforward economic calculations of ‘cost recovery’ carry a much deeper set of political, social and legal implications. We therefore have to understand how market-based reforms become embedded in a terrain of civic life and meaning, and importantly, are inscribed in particular spatial histories and politics in the places in which they unfold.

I focus on the role of RWAs in peri-urban Bangalore, whose strategies of mediating between residents, politicians and bureaucrats, I will argue, challenge existing theorisations of the middle class, associationism and civil society in India. I further contend that an understanding of the history of associational politics and socio-spatial relations in this context provides insight into why people consent to market-based reforms despite how costly it is to do so, as well as appropriate and rework the terms of the project to make claims on the city. It is ultimately engagement by associations

2 In 2006, the Government of India approved the establishment of a pooled financing development fund, which, according to C. Vaidya and H. Vaidya (2008: 1) — both closely connected with USAID — was ‘based on the success’ of municipal bond issuances in Karnataka (for GBWASP) and Tamil Nadu (for a sanitation-related project).
that allow market-based reforms to endure and take hold in cities today. This is not because, unlike how some have argued, there is a natural convergence between the politics of the middle class and the goals of market-based reforms *per se*. Rather, the stakes attached to participating in a ‘user pays’ project like GBWASP extend beyond water access to issues of tenure security and membership in the city — stakes that lie at the core of peri-urban struggles in contemporary India.

This research resonates with recent work that explores the interplay between the political economy of liberalisation and middle class politics (see for instance Fernandes 2006; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2008). However, I seek to move beyond broad-brush framings of liberalisation to an analysis of the particular workings of market-based reforms in the urban water sector. Such a situated analysis, I find, is a powerful way of underscoring the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in projects of reform, as well as the specific points of interaction and contention between reforms and a tremendously variegated, spatially differentiated urban middle-class politics.

The analysis draws on in-depth interviews conducted in 2007–08 with peripheral middle class RWAs and politicians, and the engineers, consultants and bureaucrats involved in the implementation of the project.3 My research was primarily concentrated in three of the eight erstwhile urban local bodies (ULBs) selected for the water project based on their high concentration of unauthorised layouts and diverse forms of associational activity: Bommanahalli lying at the southern edges of the city, Byatarayanapura to the north and KR Puram to the northeast.4 In what follows, I examine the type of development being witnessed at the urban fringe and the politics of the groups involved. Thereafter, I explain the rationale behind the cost recovery architecture of GBWASP, and further discuss how neighbourhood

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3 Interviews were carried out either entirely in Kannada or using a mixture of Kannada, Telegu, and English. Only a small proportion of interviews were carried out only in English, which provides some indication of the linguistic composition of Bangalore’s peripheral neighborhoods.

4 As of January 2007, these eight ULBs (Bommanahalli, Byataranapura, KR Puram, Mahadevapura, Yelahanka, Rajarajeshwarinagar, Dasarahalli, and Kengeri) became officially part of the Greater Bangalore City Corporation.
politics intersect with the project, and conversely, how the market-based reforms deployed through the project engender a particular set of claims related to urban resources.

The Making of Bangalore’s Periphery

Shades of State-sanctioned (Il)legality

Between 40–70 per cent of urban Indians live in settlements that fall outside the purview of formal planning institutions, mostly concentrated on the urban periphery (ALF 2003). This is not a surprising statistic given what we know about cities of the Global South. Caldeira’s (2000) research shows how illegal subdivisions (loteamentos) proliferated on the outskirts of Sao Paulo to the extent that they were four times the number of legal settlements by the 1990s. But what is perhaps more surprising, as discovered by AlSayyad and Roy (2004) in a comparative study of urban informality in the Middle East, South Asia and Latin America, is that such forms of housing are increasingly being demanded by middle class residents, in addition to the groups generally associated with illegal settlements at the periphery.

The growth of ‘revenue layouts’ — the term used to describe subdivisions of agricultural land developed into informal residential settlements — on Bangalore’s fringes from the 1960s, and especially rapidly from the 1990s onwards, are a clear example of this trend. Bangalore-based Alternative Law Forum (ALF 2003: 91–92) describes revenue layouts as:

the illegal settlements of the middle and upper middle class, (basically those upwardly mobile on the money ladder) as well those at the lower end. They access political patronage for services, can invest money in developmental processes and are more concerned about tenure security and access to basic services than the urban poor.

Today, 90 per cent of residential settlements on the outskirts of Bangalore are revenue layouts characterised by varying shades of legality. Typically, because the private developers involved do not obtain formal approval from the state-level master-planning agency, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), the layouts are considered ‘unauthorised’. However, revenue layouts may still be ‘authorised’ at the district level if they have been converted
from agricultural to residential land-use upon payment of a fee to the Deputy Commissioner, a process known colloquially as ‘DC conversion’. In other cases, the layout may be pending approval from the BDA, and in others still, the layout is neither ‘BDA-approved’ nor ‘DC-converted’, but the local municipal or village government provides tacit sanction for its existence (ALF 2003). These differing degrees of legality exist in part because of the varying interpretations and applications of land laws by multiple levels of the state.

In terms of socio-economic characteristics, and in line with the research of Kamath et al. (2008), I found that these peripheral layouts cater to a range of groups that can generally be classified as lower-middle class to middle class, although as ALF (2003) notes, a small proportion of the very poor and very wealthy also inhabit revenue layouts. Among my interviewees, occupations ranged from retirees of public sector industries such as Indian Telephone Industries and Bharat Electronics Limited — Bangalore’s pre-eminent industries from the 1950s–1980s — to lower-end service sector jobs (e.g. nursing or the technology industry), to working-class jobs in the garment industry.

Physically speaking, revenue layouts can be starkly differentiated from planned layouts. Unlike ‘planned’ layouts in the core city or in isolated pockets of the periphery, revenue layouts possess little grid-based planning. Residential and commercial buildings in revenue layouts often encroach on roads, making it difficult to locate an address, let alone lay a piped water network. Since no piped drainage facilities are provided, most houses have individual pit latrines and sewage is discharged in open drains or in empty plots (see Figure 6.1). Less than 10 per cent of households have access to piped water provided by the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB). Instead, many rely on tankers that truck groundwater

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5 It should be noted that compared to Mumbai and Kolkata, where 50–60 per cent of the population is considered to be poor, in Bangalore approximately 30 per cent of the population are officially classified as below poverty line. However, in terms of absolute numbers, slum and urban homeless populations are on the rise largely because of migration from rural areas and neighboring states. Of the 400 slums in the city, approximately 60 are on the periphery (personal communication with BWSSB, 2008). For a deeper understanding of urban poverty in Bangalore, see Schenk (2001) and Benjamin and Bhuvaneshwari (2001).
Figure 6.1: Two Adjacent Neighbourhoods in Peri-Urban Bangalore

Source: Photographs by author.

Note: On the left is a picture of a revenue layout and on the right, a BDA-approved layout.
into the city from private land, private and municipal borewells that are rapidly running dry, and purchased bottled water.⁶

Recognising the periphery’s dire water supply problems, and identifying it as a locus for current and future economic and population growth, in 1998, the state government announced plans to extend piped water supply from the river Cauvery to the outskirts. Today, surface water from the Cauvery accounts for the main source of supply by the water board (approximately 900 million litres per day today) to the city’s core areas. With all of its promises and perils, this project and its unprecedented payment model became the basis for a contentious set of debates, actions and reconfigurations between citizens and the state.

In the absence of quality drinking water or any other service for that matter, revenue layouts incrementally negotiate access to services over time, most commonly through the help of RWAs.⁷ The large membership, funds pooled by residents, and the clout and enthusiasm of their main organisers (usually older male retirees) are such that RWAs carry far more weight than individual household efforts. Moreover, residents in these areas live under constant threat of needing to pay ‘betterment fees’, periodic fees levied by the state and local governments with the promise of being regularised, and RWAs frequently become the focal point of struggles over these fees. As Roy (2003) argues in the case of Kolkata, the very regulatory ambiguity that enabled middle-class subdivisions to proliferate on the fringes of the city in the first place was also the reason why these areas continued to face multiple threats and uncertainties. I turn next to a discussion of the specific mechanisms through which services and regularisation are negotiated. This discussion will provide the context for understanding how and why a market-oriented project like GBWASP was perceived and renegotiated by residents and their associations.

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⁶ Some families spend up to Rs 2,000 per month on procuring water supply, a very significant proportion of the average income.

⁷ The incremental acquisition of infrastructure is procedurally the opposite of how planned layouts obtain services. While planned layouts are connected to roads, water, electricity, and sewer lines upfront — i.e. prior to home construction — revenue layouts must negotiate access to infrastructure and make improvements to their neighbourhoods over the span of several years.
The Politics of the Peri-Urban Middle Class

There is a growing literature on middle class associational life in urban India. Several studies suggest that the strategies and discourses of these associations are predicated on a politics of exclusion and the reproduction of distance from slum dwellers, street hawkers and other ‘unclean’ or poorer elements of the city (Baviskar 2002, 2003; Fernandes 2004; Anjaria 2006). Amita Baviskar (2003: 89) notes, for instance: ‘bourgeois desires for a clean and green Delhi have combined with commercial capital and the state to deny the poor their rights to the environment’. In John Harriss’ (2007: 2722) survey of RWAs in Chennai, he notes that such civic organisations are largely ‘of and for “consumer-citizen” subjects of the neoliberal state, and much of the activity that it sustains is directed at disciplining the urban poor’.

I find that such conceptualisations of middle class politics do not accurately reflect the priorities, aspirations and strategies of middle class associations in Greater Bangalore, stemming from the intense heterogeneity of the urban middle classes in India, as also noted by Satish Deshpande (2003). In much of the existing literature, the ‘middle class’ refers to the English-speaking, securely propertied elite — what has been referred to in some studies as the ‘new’ middle class. In reality, however, the actual middle middle class and lower middle class bear little cultural resemblance to the elite, as evidenced by the fact that ‘large segments of the middle class continue to rely on networks of political patronage, party connections and mobilisations, as well as ethnically based social movements’ (Fernandes 2006: 196). Moreover, the lower middle class groups living on Bangalore’s periphery do not distance themselves from the working class poor so much as they tend to identify with the common plight of residents living in Greater Bangalore. Very few of my interviewees revealed antagonisms directed at the poor or slums. On the other hand, frustration against the ‘IT brigade’ (see Rao 2005) and the ‘moneyed’ and ‘wasteful’ of Bangalore was evident both in my discussions with RWAs, and lower-level bureaucrats at the water utility and municipal offices who are also part of the lower middle class social grouping. This is particularly true with respect to water: the consumption disparities between the wealthy and poor in Bangalore are acute and were often criticised by the middle class groups that I interviewed.
Another area where my research departs from the existing literature is in understanding relationships with and demands on political parties and bureaucrats. In perhaps the most well-known theoretical treatment of relations between society and state in India, Partha Chatterjee recasts Gramsci’s (2000) ideas of civil and political society, and argues that the domain of civil society is, in reality, restricted to a small section of elite citizens who demand ‘the attention of governmental authorities as a matter of right, because they represent citizens who observe the law’ (Chatterjee 2004: 137). Further, making a turn towards Foucault, Chatterjee differentiates ‘civil society’ from ‘political society’ in that the latter is often treated as ‘populations’ that are ‘classifiable, describable, and enumerable’ (2001: 173) and the target of governmental welfare programs. Most often, the demands of political society are founded on a violation of the law. They thus consist of:

groups that on their part accept that their activities are illegal and contrary to good civic behaviour, but they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right. What happens then is a negotiation of these claims on a political terrain where, on the one hand, governmental agencies have a public obligation to look after the poor and underprivileged and, on the other, particular population groups receive attention from those agencies according to calculations of political expediency. (Chatterjee 2004: 40)

In a similar vein, Harriss (2005: 5), commenting on middle class associational politics in Indian cities — what he calls the ‘new politics’ of civil society — says the “new politics” in practice is strongly associated with a technocratic, rationalising modernism. It is about “problem-solving” rather than about democracy — which is indeed messy and often involves “dirty politics”.

I find that in such renderings of state–society relations, the middle class/elite are often mapped onto a law-abiding, rights-bearing, technocratic-oriented ‘civil society’ and the poor/vernacular subaltern classes onto the legally ambiguous, politically manipulable realm of ‘political society’. These portrayals leave little room for hybrid variations of the two, or groups that simply do not conform to either political or civil society. As I show below in the case of a large inter-RWA federation in south Bangalore, it is my contention that peri-urban RWAs demonstrate characteristics of both political and civil society. Using Harriss’ (2005) terminology, these groups
may be seen to engage in both the ‘new’ politics of civil society and the ‘old’ politics of party alliances and mass movements. This is because, while accepting that their settlements are illegal, they also make claims on the state, both as a matter of right (through payment of property tax, betterment fees and, as I found out, the beneficiary contribution) and through negotiating regularisation and access to services through deals with politicians and bureaucrats via RWAs. For instance, with respect to paying taxes, one Greater Bangalore RWA member told me:

Once the government allowed us to stay here, their minimum duty is to provide amenities such as streetlights, water, and roads. The municipality was also in need of revenue, so they started collecting taxes. We all paid taxes, since once you start paying taxes, you can start demanding things.

James Holston’s (2008) work on ‘insurgent’ citizenship describes a similar set of legitimation practices by the working class in Sao Paulo’s periphery. He finds that new forms of associational activity, civic behaviour and uses of the law emerged as the working class struggled to legalise their housing. These actions included payment of taxes and bills and the use of the courts to lay claim to their land. As I argue here, Greater Bangalore’s RWAs’ historic role in collecting and leveraging a variety of payments to assert the legality of their settlements and demonstrate that they form a legitimate part of the responsible citizenry, is one reason why consent for today’s neoliberal water reforms agenda can be explained.

Anthropological understandings of the ‘everyday state’ (Fuller and Harriss 2000) are particularly useful in understanding how RWAs perceive, come into contact with, and manipulate various layers of the bureaucracy. Ideas of the ‘everyday state’ remind us

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8 One clear example of this is the involvement of the Democratic Youth Forum of India (DYFI), a cadre-based group of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] in Bommanahalli’s civic issues. Organised under the banner of the Bommanahalli Nagarika Hitarakshana Vedike, or the Bommanahalli Citizen’s Welfare Platform, this group mobilises both working class and middle class residents in revenue layouts around compensation for rain and flood damage, ration cards and urban services.

that most people in India learn to experience the state and build a rapport through their meetings with particular lower and middle-level government officers, such as the revenue officer or assistant executive engineer (Corbridge et al. 2005: 19) and their *darshans* with local politicians.\(^\text{10}\) As Pranab Bardhan (1997) notes, most people approach their encounters with the bureaucracy with a mixture of deference, caution and guile, knowing that it is possible to ‘milk the cow’ and that disproportionate benefits go to those who have connections and the ability to ‘manipulate the milking process’ (Bardhan 1997: 190).

In the context of cities, Benjamin suggests through the notion of ‘politics by stealth’ that marginalised groups ‘work city systems, institutions and politics (Benjamin 2004: 183)’ on an everyday basis.

In Greater Bangalore, I witnessed the ‘everyday state’ in action at the local municipal offices and in the divisional offices of the BWSSB. These interactions often occurred through telephone conversations made in my presence or during face-to-face meetings with officers. In a two-hour interview with an RWA president who, interestingly, was also the ex-councilor (from the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP) for one of the largest wards in Bommanahalli, the BWSSB’s maintenance engineer was telephoned and put on speakerphone several times both to gain clarification on the payment structure under GBWASP, and as a way of flaunting the power equation between the RWA president and the engineer to my research assistant and I. When questioned about this, the president replied: ‘That is the power of pressure. We pressure the government officers to carry out works here. We never let them go!’\(^\text{11}\) Not only are the boundaries between state and society porous and flexible as seen through this example where an RWA president is able to leverage his political position for civic improvement, but the ‘power of pressure’ also works through both bureaucratic and electoral avenues. To further explore how these avenues are exploited, and why insights into the internal

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\(^\text{10}\) ‘Darshan’ literally meaning ‘sighting’ in Sanskrit and is most commonly used with reference to viewing a deity during worship at a Hindu temple (many Hindus believe the act of seeing confers a blessing). However, it was frequently used in conversations in Bangalore to suggest that the public sometimes treats politicians as if they were gods and, in turn, politicians behave as if they were, in fact, gods.

\(^\text{11}\) Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 8 July 2008.
workings of RWAs, their histories and their politics are critical for understanding how neoliberal water reforms play out in Bangalore, in the next section, I provide a case study of one south Bangalore RWA federation.

The Case of a South Bangalore Federation

This case study is of a middle class resident welfare federation that represents several revenue layouts in Bommanahalli and has fought for years for schools, road connectivity and water supply. Its mission statement is ‘to represent the resident welfare associations as also other associations affiliated to the Federation in matters relating to infrastructure, civic amenities, legal issues with civic authorities, service providers and the government, conduct cultural programs and festivals…etc’.\(^\text{12}\) Members of this Federation are resentful of their uncooperative gated apartment complex neighbours as revealed by their statements that the latter ‘destroyed the road and environment when they were being built’ and ‘should not be allowed to close off public thoroughfares or spaces’.\(^\text{13}\)

Because the Federation represents an influential number of approximately 200,000 people, politicians frequently court it for votes. In an interview with the RWA president, I was told that the Federation organised a large pre-election\(^\text{14}\) convention in 2008 in which all major party candidates\(^\text{15}\) were present. He described the event in his own words as:

> Just before the elections, we told the candidates that you are free to come to our layouts and canvas. We have grown to such a stature that candidates come to us and ask *us* to help *them* out. We are ourselves thinking of putting up a candidate for election! We don’t have any political ambition, none of us — at least not the present office bearers. But they really got scared. They came to talk to us and they even

\(^{12}\) Obtained from the mission statement of a south Bangalore resident welfare federation in July 2008.

\(^{13}\) Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 21 July 2008.

\(^{14}\) In May 2008, Bangalore held elections for seats in the state legislative assembly and legislative cabinet.

\(^{15}\) One from the Congress Party, one from Janata Dal (Secular), and one from the Bharatiya Janata Party.
offered us money. So we told all three candidates, if you don’t do whatever we ask for, you guys are going to get into trouble. That is why we are a *sangatana* [association]. We make sure we strengthen ourselves.16

When questioned specifically about the organisation’s stance on electoral politics and whether this is used as a strategy to obtain services, I was told:

See, for the past 14 years we have been living without sanitation, roads, water, and drainage. For people like us, when someone gets the work done, we vote for them. If tomorrow someone comes and does sanitary work here, we’ll vote for them. If MLA Krishnappa gets things done, he’ll win next term as well.17

When it comes to lobbying for improvements and demanding the attention of politicians, the sheer size of their organisation provides leverage with vote-seeking politicians — a facet that Chatterjee would contend belongs to ‘political society’. Moreover, the Federation fully recognises that deals must be struck with politicians. In one conversation, the RWA president tried to convince the local politician that there were many potential public works contracts in the neighbourhood, and that getting this work done would be mutually beneficial to both the politician and residents of the area — even if that meant embezzlement of city funds, which is unfortunately the norm rather than the exception in Bangalore, demonstrating that the revenue layout dwellers know how to manipulate city officials and politicians:

We told our MLA that he knows the situation in our area well; he knows that there is plenty of work to be done, so there are plenty of opportunities to make money! You understand what I’m saying, right? More work = more contracts = more money! So we openly told him: ‘There’s a lot of work to be done here (*sikkaapatte kelsa ide*). Your work will get done and our work too will get done (*nimduu kelsa aagatbe, namduu kelsa aagatbe*) — so, please, just do the work (*maadkodi ni*)!’18

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16 Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 9 July 2008.
17 Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 9 July 2008.
18 Ibid.
I found that although organisations like this one are aware of how to manipulate politicians, they are still wary of them as depicted by the president’s statement: ‘I use my connections to get the job done for our Federation. But we don’t entertain politicians in office bearer posts because the only intention of politicians is to win elections’.\(^\text{19}\)

In his research on discourses of corruption in rural India, Akhil Gupta (2006: 230) finds that perceptions of the competence of government shape and are shaped by popular accounts and mass media. The idea that politicians are corrupt and only want to win elections is almost commonsensical in Bangalore, yet revenue layout organisations are particularly skilled at accessing and communicating with politicians.

Importantly, exploiting political channels and threatening politicians are not the only tactics that this Federation uses. For instance, when asked to describe the reasons for engaging in activist work, one member spoke of how important it is to act with the government rather than against it, saying: ‘We have to work with the government not against it. We act as a catalyst between government and residents, and then the government takes us into confidence’.\(^\text{20}\)

For this organisation, claims of working with the government and serving as a ‘catalyst’ between the state and citizens is a strategic manoeuvre that provides some assurance that their demands for regularisation and services will be met. It is also the reason why this Federation organised consent by members about beneficiary capital payments under GBWASP.

In sum, the politics of Greater Bangalore’s associations have three important features that explain the nature of their involvement in and the stakes they attach to market-based water reforms in the city discussed next. First, departing from the findings of most studies on the urban middle class, they do not distance themselves from the poor so much as they commonly share resentment towards the ‘IT/BT’ sector, particularly around the latter’s ‘wasteful’ consumption of water. Second, because their illegal settlements are surrounded by constant regulatory ambiguity, many RWAs have leveraged taxes and betterment charges in order to negotiate regularisation

\(^{19}\) Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 18 September 2007.

\(^{20}\) Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 18 September 2007.
and services over time. Third, RWAs in Greater Bangalore exert pressure on the state through bureaucratic and political channels. Blurring the boundaries between civic activism, electoral politics and political party affiliation, I argue that these associations exhibit traits of both the ‘new’ and ‘old’ politics of civil society using Harriss’ language, or ‘civil’ and ‘political’ society using Chatterjee’s. These findings are significant in light of recent scholarship that points to the convergence of an anti-poor, consumer-oriented, technocratic middle class politics and projects of economic liberalisation and neoliberal spatial practices in Indian cities (Baviskar 2003; Fernandes 2004; Harriss 2005; 2007). By opening up the category of ‘middle class’ as I have done here, we see that the spatially peripheralised middle class in Bangalore use a different set of discourses and practices than that commonly portrayed in the literature. Moreover, although it is through revenue layout politics that market-based water reforms are shaped and take hold, it is not necessarily because of a natural convergence between the former and latter. A deeper and historically informed understanding of the types of struggles, anxieties and stances towards politicians and bureaucrats reveal that the reasons for participation in GBWASP are much more complex as I show in the next two sections.

**Turning Citizens into Stakeholders**

First announced in 1998, the Greater Bangalore Water and Sanitation Project (GBWASP), commonly known as the ‘Cauvery neeru (water) project’, involves the extension of piped water from the Cauvery to over 2 million people living on the outskirts of the city in eight different peripheral municipalities. For over 100 years, the city had depended on supplies piped in from reservoirs on the Arkavathy and Cauvery rivers.

The main difference between this and previous water projects, however, is the model for financing the distribution infrastructure — components such as feeder mains, pump houses, overhead tanks,

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21 These are Bommanahalli, Byataranapura, KR Puram, Mahadevapura, Yelahanka, Rajarajeshwarinagar, Dasarahalli, and Kengeri. In January 2007, these, along with 110 villages were merged to form the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, or the Greater Bangalore City Corporation.
and over 2,000 km of distribution pipelines. The project’s financing structure was designed by the Indo-USAID Finance Institutions and Reforms Expansion through Debt program, implemented by the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (KUIDFC, a special purpose vehicle for channeling domestic and international finance for infrastructure projects), and executed by the BWSSB. The cost of water distribution infrastructure was first estimated at around Rs 340.55 crores [US$ 80 million] of which 35 per cent is expected to come from citizens themselves, 22 per cent from grants from the state government, 14 per cent from a loan from the central government, and 29 per cent through market borrowings through municipal bonds. Subsequently, the project experienced cost escalations of over 30 per cent and was delayed for several months for reasons discussed at length in Ranganathan et al. (2009).

In line with recent trends reflecting a corporatisation of governance in Bangalore (Ghosh 2005; Kamath 2006; Nair 2005) and approaches in development agencies that uphold the citizen-as-client as the harbinger of accountability in service delivery (e.g., World Bank 2004), GBWASP deploys a language of ‘citizen-as-stakeholder’ (GoK 2005a). In this rhetoric, participatory governance is equated with financial contributions to new infrastructure from ‘beneficiary citizens’ (ibid.). The idea that once citizens contribute financially to assets, they will be enabled as more informed and powerful managers of those assets is currently popular among development agencies and citizen groups alike. This also mirrors thinking at the global level where, in the aftermath of the Latin American water privatisation experience, the World Bank has retreated from its earlier dogmatism on privatisation as the solution to a newfound pragmatism that concedes that cost recovery, financial innovation and public–private partnership in the water sector are just as critical. For instance, the World Bank’s World Development Report (2004) contends that the ‘short’ and more efficient route to holding providers of services accountable is through ‘client power’, which involves payment for services, whereas the ‘long’, less efficient and traditional route constitutes indirect and electoral avenues where citizens leverage politicians and bureaucrats to obtain services. What this framework fails to acknowledge, however, is that the short route of market exchange is embedded in and implicated in the long route as this research finds.
GBWASP is nevertheless justified along the ‘short route’ line of reasoning. After three revisions, the government finally settled on a system that categorised beneficiaries according to the area of their property (considered to be a proxy for income) and demanded financial contributions based on this scheme (see Table 6.1). In this scheme, the lowest block of below 600 sq. ft. is deemed exempt from payment, a decision taken following protests by pro-poor coalitions and the Campaign Against Water Privatisation decrying potential privatisation and the costliness of the capital contribution. The next block of between 601–1,200 sq. ft. must pay a one-time fee of Rs 5,000 (approximately US$ 125, or 20–60 per cent of the average monthly income for households in this area), the next block Rs 10,000 (approximately US$ 250), and so on. In addition to this fee structure, a monthly penalty of Rs 100–200 (US$ 2.50–5.00) for late payment must be paid starting 31 July 2005 in order to ‘enforce compliance’ (GoK 2005b).

Table 6.1: Water Charges (in Rupees) Per Dwelling Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Up to 600 sq. ft.</th>
<th>601–1200 sq. ft.</th>
<th>1201–2400 sq. ft.</th>
<th>&gt;2400 sq. ft.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>2,500 (now waived)</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>8 per sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalty per month</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (GoK 2005b).

22 In the first iteration of the beneficiary capital contribution structure, the government set the connection fee at Rs 8,500 for all households and Rs 17,000 for non-domestic users, regardless of income category. This was revised upwardly in 2004 to Rs 10,000–15,000 plus a Rs 5,000 in penalty for domestic connections depending on property size. Finally, following counsel by World Bank (2005) experts, discussions with local government and citizens, and criticisms by pro-poor alliances, the fee structure was revised as per Table 6.1.


24 The project implementers also included an institutionalised programme for citizen participation known as the Participatory Local Area Capital
The project also demands that certain documents be furnished before the payment is made, such as three copies of the building plan, the property registration number and a copy of the title or sale deed. As we learned in the preceding section, these were property documents that several revenue layout dwellers did not possess, which shows how fundamentally out of touch this water project is with the realities of organic urban settlement in India.

**Renegotiating Reforms**

The collection of beneficiary capital contributions commenced in March 2004 and grew steadily over a period of four years. By the end of 2007, approximately Rs 500 million (US$ 11 million) had been collected in Bommanahalli alone; across the eight peripheral municipalities participating in the project, the number is estimated to have crossed Rs 2 billion (US$ 50 million) (Ranganathan et al. 2009). The higher-than-expected payments by citizens mean that their overall contribution to the project’s capital costs is likely to be greater than 35 per cent, the proportion originally allocated to citizens. In some cases, the contribution amounted to a whole month’s household income, while in most cases, it comprised 10–30 per cent of monthly household income.

Several RWAs were involved in encouraging their members to contribute to the project and several more put pressure on water board engineers, their MLAs and the chair of the water board to modify the upfront terms of payment, remove the penalty requirement and prioritise water to their areas. RWAs also became the focal point for information dissemination — until then severely lacking because of the centralised decision-making processes of the implementing and executing agencies for the project. When questioned as to why

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25 Developers of new apartment buildings were also big contributors to this amount because they were required to pay the beneficiary contribution before their building plans were sanctioned.
they had embraced the terms of the project, despite the high costs: I was told by one RWA:

> We are the best taxpayers in this CMC [city municipal council] and also we feel that we are responsible citizens. We know that to get work done — to avail of services — we have to pay. These things don’t come free! So, immediately, when the government announced [the GBWASP] scheme, we paid and we told everyone else they must pay too.26

At first glance, such a statement about needing to pay for services that ‘don’t come free’ may suggest that associations are exhibiting a ‘shift from the identity of the middle class as workers to that of consumers’, which, in turn, ‘captures the politics of the new middle class in liberalizing India’ (Fernandes 2006: 189). A closer reading of associational discourses vis-à-vis GBWASP reveals, however, that this is not the entire story. I argue that discourses around ‘responsibility’ in this context are less related to consumerist sensibilities than they are to strategic forms of negotiation between citizens and the state entailing payment as claim making. Upfront payment for piped water supply as per the demands of the current neoliberal moment is thus part of an ongoing process that allows illegal revenue layout dwellers to fight for state recognition and material benefits on behalf of their members as reflected by this statement:

> We were involved in raising awareness and in educating the members about the Cauvery water scheme. We do the same not only for this scheme, but for any that the government announces. We told everyone that they must pay. See, if we all pay we can raise our voice in a better manner! That’s why we get involved.27

In revenue layouts that are frequently relegated to an illegal status by the state and that lack quality services, RWAs have historically collected and utilised property tax payments as a way to demand attention from municipal authorities and make claims related to regularisation and legality — in short, they ‘raise [their] voice’.

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26 Interview with Byatarayanapura RWA, 16 August 2008.
27 Interview with Bommanahalli RWA, 15 July 2008.
Today, payment for GBWASP is being added to the list of payments that are used to justify the legality of their settlements as this newspaper article reports:

I have paid development charges at Dasarahalli CMC for my property, [I am] paying property tax regularly...and [I have] paid beneficiary contribution for Cauvery water connection. But how fair is it to say that the property is illegal? 28

Thus, I argue that payment is not because residents are consciously acting via the *World Development Report's* (2004) ‘short route’ wherein customers become more emboldened as stakeholders, and service providers more responsive to stakeholder demands as a result of payment. In fact, as one particularly shrewd revenue layout resident put it:

There is no meaning in the word stakeholder in this Greater Bangalore water project. If they are calling us ‘stakeholder’, then that means we are on the same level as the government. But we are not on the same level. We cannot pay for the service *and* be a stakeholder! 29

Nor do I concur on this point with Foucauldian critiques that acts of payment are shaped by neoliberal projects of moral ‘responsibilisation’ — the self-management and self-regulation of individual behaviour based on ‘rational’ assessments of costs and benefits in line with the market logic (e.g. Rose 1999; Shamir 2008). Rather, my reading of participation by RWAs in GBWASP is Gramscian in that the claims and acts of revenue layout dwellers expose political agency beyond an internalised and morally driven market calculus. As Donald Moore (1998) reminds us through his analysis of resistance struggles in Zimbabwe, for Gramsci (2000: 337), conceptualising the agency of the subaltern subject — one that is formed in relation to and embedded in multiple fields of power — is critical.

In Greater Bangalore, I found that the reasons for participating in GBWASP are multiple and have shifted over time in response to the particular powers that revenue layout dwellers are forced

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to confront. That is, the terms of GBWASP were differentially and unevenly appropriated and made to work for revenue layout dwellers depending on the larger matrices of power in which they were circumscribed. For instance in 2007, the Greater Bangalore City Corporation was formed by merging the existing city with peripheral areas. Shortly after, in one fell swoop known as the Akrama Sakrama (meaning ‘make right what is wrong’) legislation to regularise unauthorised construction and development, revenue layout dwellers (who were the prime targets of the scheme) were mandated to pay exorbitantly high fees in order to be considered legitimate residents of the newly formed corporation. Interestingly, associations leveraged payment of the beneficiary contribution, in addition to historic payments of property taxes, betterment charges and conversion fees as a way to resist paying the Akrama Sakrama fees and, further, to make claims about the legitimacy of their settlements. As a result of protests and petitions filed by associations, the Karnataka High Court is currently holding the scheme in abeyance (Jacob 2008).

Another example demonstrating the agency of associations and how their appropriation of the project is their involvement in reworking the terms of payment. Owing to the history of unauthorised development described earlier, most residents did not possess the documentation necessary to be eligible for the project (e.g., title or sale deeds and sanctioned building plans). Faced with a flood of petitions from RWAs, a new chair of the water board appointed in 2007 waived the requirement of producing a title deed; to be eligible now, an ‘address proof’ (e.g., a bank statement) will suffice. Similar to what Gupta (2006: 130) observes with respect to how state-led development programmes often engender contestation — ‘...it is here that seizing on the fissures and ruptures, the contradictions in the policies, programs, institutions and discourses of ‘the state’ allows people to create possibilities for political action and activism’ — I find that GBWASP’s disjunctures, too, were seized upon by RWAs in order to renegotiate the project’s terms. The rhetoric of treating beneficiaries like ‘stakeholders’ who are purported to have a role in the ‘management of the assets created under the project’ (GoK 2005a) provided a particularly stark contrast — and hence a rallying point — when held against the poor information flow, untransparent decision-making structures and delayed delivery of water. In total, the project experienced delays of over three years
due to prolonged tendering processes and inaccurate or outdated engineering designs that did not account for growth rates and settlement patterns in the periphery. This prompted associations to leverage bureaucratic channels to question why residents had been forced to pay late penalties when water delivery itself was delayed and demand interest payments from the water board on their capital payments.

To avoid a growing stand-off and to restore some faith in the project that had been severely eroded by the end of 2007, the BWSSB took a decision to waive penalty payments altogether starting 1 January 2008 and further allowed payments to be staggered over 24 months rather than be paid as a lump-sum. In some areas, connections have been provided regardless of payment based on associational pressure on MLAs. One BWSSB maintenance engineer described this in his own words as:

> After this newly elected government what has happened is that it seems the city MLAs insisted that we give water first, then collect payment. Otherwise people were saying ‘We don’t know when you are giving the water. Why should we pay?’ Associations also put a lot of pressure on MLAs. So to change that scenario, [the MLAs] said: you give water for one month; you service the line. If they don’t pay, then we will think of other alternatives.30

According to the engineer, newly elected MLAs recognised that revenue layout residents had been an important source of votes and were eager to appear to be fulfilling the promises made during their campaigns. The ‘power of pressure’ — in this case, extending from the association to the MLA to the BWSSB — succeeded in convincing the water board to start supplying water for a short duration without upfront payments, and as such, also managed to restore some of the credibility the project had lost due to delays.

**Conclusion**

An assessment by one of India’s leading urban research institutes based in New Delhi states: ‘The innovative financing structure adopted in the GBWASP is path breaking and its success should pave the way

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30 Interview with maintenance engineer at BWSSB, 4 August 2008.
to many such initiatives in future from the ULBs...’ (NIUA 2005). As market-based models in India’s water sector are deemed ‘successful’, there is a need to understand their workings on the ground and their mutual imbrication with urban politics — particularly the politics of the periphery where water projects will be increasingly concentrated, and on which little social science research exists.

In this article, I have attempted to contribute to a theoretical and empirical understanding of peripheral urban geographies, and how particular claims of associations that inhabit tenuously legal settlements known as ‘revenue layouts’ shape and are shaped by neoliberal water reforms. The discussion reveals that in the contemporary Indian metropolis, where social and land relations are historically sedimented and water and land are intricately connected, the implications of ‘cost recovery’ reforms in the water arena extend well beyond that sector.

I argue broadly therefore that cost recovery reforms must be understood as being deeply implicated in civic life and meaning. That is, the stakes attached to water reforms in Greater Bangalore today and the calculations underlying participation by the middle class residents that are the target of these reforms cannot be understood outside of the history of socio-spatial relations, civic activism and associational politics in this area. Relegated to an illegal status by local planning authorities, revenue layout associations have historically made deals with politicians, put pressure on local bureaucrats and leveraged a host of payments to negotiate regularisation and assert the legitimacy of their settlements. These strategies — not sufficiently explained by the existing literature on the ‘new’ middle class nor ideas of neoliberal moral reponsibilisation — account for how and why associations are involved in participating in and renegotiating the terms of GBWASP. In effect, the interlocutor role that RWAs play succeed in sustaining the reforms agenda. This is not because of a natural convergence between the politics of middle class RWAs and the neoliberal agenda, as some have argued, but rather because the stakes attached to a project like GBWASP extend beyond water access to issues of tenure legality and the strategic deployment of ‘responsible’ citizenship. Such a Gramscian lens is useful for urban scholars attempting to analyse why and how particular types of neoliberal reforms are gaining traction in cities today.
References


