Pedagogies of Gendered Citizenship: Identity Documents and the Urban Poor in Delhi

Tarangini Sriraman

Paper for European Conference on South Asian Studies, Zurich, 23-26 July 2014. (This paper revisits and recasts some of the arguments and ethnographic material of an article titled 'Enumeration as Pedagogic Process' published in SAMAJ, Dec. 2013)

On one of my meandering field trips in Govindpuri, I ran into Shweta, a domestic help who rents a house in a slum cluster where the word 'rent' is administratively and legally suspect owing to the squatter status of residents. She was wiry and she kept her body ramrod straight while she replied to my tentative questions on the identity cards she possessed or in this case, those that she did not. While claiming to possess no identity documents at all, she threw the words 'najayaz' (illegitimate), 'laawaris' (destitute), 'pardesi' (stranger) at me to contrast her situation from that of the 'gareeb nagarik' (poor citizens) who were citizens by dint of the documents they possessed. Her multiple efforts in the last few years to get identity cards came up against an implacable wall where every official, broker and political patron asked for 'proof'. She approached her employer, a *dalal* (middleman) and a politician for help in circumventing the necessary steps of procuring an identity card within a documentary process that she found fractal – where one proof was nested inside another. Owing to the intractable insistence on proofs, she found herself cut off from urban poor entitlements as an urban poor subject, a woman and a woman with few ties to her husband (who had left her many years ago). Her predicament can be compared with that of Radhika, a 13 year old girl whose father left the household after a bitter and protracted falling out with her mother. Radhika, also a resident of Govindpuri experienced the weight of her father's desertion in a symbolic yet deeply instrumental sense when she was asked to submit a family photograph for her school examination admit card. With her parents not legally separated, the visual entity of the male head of the family in the application form was an inescapable demonstration. At any rate, she did not wish to plead exemption by explaining the compromised social relation. Desperate, she looked around for ways to evade this unimaginative rule, and finally struck upon a possibility. She dusted out an old photograph where her father was smilingly present and unmistakably endorsing the family. Without a second thought, she attached this with her application form.

In this article which is set in a slum cluster in South Delhi, I would like to frame the piecemeal and commonplace attempts to procure identity documents, within a pedagogic process of enumeration. Female slum residents were especially seized with the necessity to improvise and conjure what I term 'piecemeal pedagogies' or those incremental practices which are embedded in the minute and bureaucratically routine aspects of the urban everyday. Piecemeal pedagogies covered a range of seemingly instinctive but carefully imbibed practices of invoking hierarchy, citing political affiliation, persuasively presenting documents, making veiled threats and bodily gestures. These rehearsed performances constituted political and social literacy (Gupta 2012: 179, Collins 2003: 4) of the kind that was indispensable in navigating the welfare space of the slum. These spaces were many: the ration office, the Fair Price shop, Delhi's housing authority offices, the police station, *mahila mandal* (women's council) meetings and informal gatherings in slum alleys. Slum residents' encounters with identity documents produce piecemeal pedagogies which open out to more substantial formulations of citizenship, gendered governance and patriarchal frameworks of bureaucratic institutions. This article makes these arguments in the light of the enumerative developments of the last two decades predating the project of issuing national identification numbers.

‘Pedagogy’ and ‘piecemeal pedagogy’ as an alternative to document fetishism

Radhika’s way out of the tricky exam rule and Shweta’s deep distrust of the word ‘proof’ may smack of the argument of ‘the document fetish’ that some scholars and authors have been known to make. Cohen in a recent workshop presentation reported various field respondents to construct the *Aadhaar* as a fetish where each interviewee deemed this card (or what appeared as a card) to simply give proof. Among the *Nangla Lab* stories archived by Sarai, slum residents of Nangla Machi locality in Delhi display a piercing wisdom about identity documents, which while it springs from painful everyday experiences with *sarkari* habits, also appears fetishistic. While a character turns every corner of the house into one for document safe-keeping and speaks of the tenderness with which she has tended her documents, another sheepishly admits to having tied his various documents over many years into differently coloured bags so as to be able to remember which one was where.[1] Akhil Gupta, Bakewell, Gordillo and Srivastava in articles on social relations and the materiality of documents speak variously of respondents having a ‘handheld’ idea of belonging based strictly on the documents they possessed or displaying certain habits of document safekeeping where they store their identity cards with other precious items oe where they produce cards to their interviewer unsolicited (Gupta 2012, Bakewell 2007, Gordillo 2006, Srivastava 2013). All these writers with the exception of Cohen, who alone is critical of investing too much in the argument of the fetish, regard their subjects to be the naïve recipients of a violent history of state processes where they are alienated from their citizenship. When poor subjects were systematically written out of the archive which imputes and delegates privileges of political and social right, they and successive generations responded by imbuing objects with value and power. The argument about fetishism was mainly that enumerated subjects as ‘producers’ were torn asunder from their link to their documents - not simply in their labouring capacity – but also as producers of state authority. This argument is inadequate in many senses. In his grander critique of poor subjects as alienated from citizenship processes – hence their tendency to view documents as ‘potent objects’ (Gordillo 2006: 163) of state power – he fails to recognize the processes of enumeration in the margins. Such processes at the local level are strewn with small and incremental advances, step-by-step accumulative processes, imaginative and resourceful mobilizations of paper. An abiding belief in the ‘piecemeal’ or the modest undertaking to utter (law), gather (paper), present (oneself, one’s body), invoke (hierarchy, authority), cite (rule, affiliation), summon (influence) is all-important in bureaucratic encounters with offices and officials. And the knowledge of how to do so was derived from daily learning experiences at various sites of welfare dissemination. This knowledge in turn opened out to grappling with dynamic social processes of gender, governance and urban belonging. This process also involves the formulation of a relationship between literacy and pedagogy, piecemeal and thick pedagogy in the struggles of urban poor women.

The term ‘pedagogy’ is commonly invoked to mobilize class consciousness, vis-à-vis social change, to reform classroom teaching, to humanize development and to challenge neo-liberal education policies and dominant knowledge formations nourishing the capitalist class (Freire 2005, Kumar 1997, Kelsh et al. 2010). While this paper does not discount the relevance of this mainstream literature, such as pedagogy’s ability to transform social relations, it is interested in teasing out the subterranean and informal contexts in which pedagogy reveals itself. By the construction, ‘pedagogic process’, I mean that the various encounters of urban poor residents with identification documents produce certain instrumental and thick forms of knowledge about the city. Instrumental forms of knowledge are

[1] http://nangla.freeflux.net/blog/archive/2009/03/22/this-word-evidence.html as accessed on 24 November 2010.

encapsulated in this paper by the term ‘piecemeal pedagogies’ or the common practice of educating oneself, one’s neighbours and fellow slum residents in and through handling documents. ‘Enumeration as pedagogic process’ gestures at urban poor encounters with ID documents as enabling piecemeal advances in the learning of tactics for wresting entitlements, recognising official hierarchies and employing appropriate vocabularies of power in bureaucratic offices. Beyond such tactics, the process of learning is much weightier in that it engenders the formation of thick knowledge about the city and produces gendered narratives of entitlement and access. This paper however presents document-based encounters immediately preceding the introduction of the Unique Identification (UID) project in India, i.e. in the 90s and the 2000s. While I study the Unique Identification initiative elsewhere vis-à-vis the urban poor in Delhi, this is not the focus of this paper. In the present research moment of (critical) euphoria around the *Aadhaar* numbers, many other quotidian encounters with identity documents – whether it is school admission, food distribution or housing surveys and allotment – which do not bear an explicit link to this project, remain underreported. It is these insignificant sites of enumeration that I wish to recuperate for this paper. The ethnographic work presented here will reflect the life of the ration card in slum spaces across the last two decades.

The field site

Govindpuri is the site of a slum cluster[2] in South Delhi consisting of three camps popularly and administratively termed Navjeevan, Nehru and Bhumiheen camp characterized by diverse ethnic groups and castes who migrated to Delhi from different parts of south, east and north India over the last four decades. The cluster was organically dependent on the neighbouring industrial area of Okhla and one which was an overbearing constant for the residents of the cluster. Many residents were employed in the various glass and steel factories, with garment exporters of this area, as domestic helps and as drivers or had to go there when the rationing office shifted to Okhla. Residents assert that the character of these camps is distinct in linguistic and regional terms – Navjeevan camp was chosen as a location by migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan to signal its difference from Bhumiheen camp which was predominantly inhabited by Bengalis both from West and erstwhile East Bengal. Nehru camp, on the other hand was tucked away in a corner of Navjeevan camp and was home to migrants from North India as well as those from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. A road was all that separated Bhumiheen from Navjeevan and Nehru camps. In caste terms, this cluster was predominantly inhabited by lower caste and backward class communities – 60 % of the families in the cluster came from lower-caste and backward class communities like Chamars, Bhangis, Valmikis, Jatavs, Kahars and Namasudras in the estimate of a local *pradhan* (unelected slum leader). This paper draws on qualitative interviews with 80 families spread across all three camps over the course of three years. I have changed the names of all respondents to protect them from any consequences of their published narratives.

This cluster underwent many phases of evolution such as the initial occupation of the barren wasteland that was Govindpuri in the early 70s, the flows of Bengali residents into the cluster after the 1975 war, the regional demarcation of camps in the 80s, the issue of a bundle of identity cards (ration cards, identity cards and number-bearing tokens) during V.P.Singh’s administration in the 90s, and the many DDA surveys in the late 90s and the 2000s. These surveys neatly classified potential beneficiaries into

[2] A slum cluster, officially called JJ cluster in Delhi (*Jhuggi Jhonpri*) is a group of squatter camps. Delhi Development Authority’s official figures of the total number of slums in Bhumiheen camp were recorded as 2500 spread across 29, 813 square metres, and 5000 in Navjeevan and Nehru camp put together across 45, 342 square metres, see Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) list of JJ clusters on their official website, www.delhishelterboard.in, accessed on 4 April 2013. For the purposes of resettlement, the DDA deems the number of people staying in all three camps to be numbering 1,05,900 and the total number of slums to be 8000. This number is heavily contested by the people in the cluster.

those moved into the cluster prior to 1990 and those that occupied government land after 1998 into different brackets of prospective resettlement – the means to substantiate the temporal fact of occupation was established through the documents issued in the 1990 initiative. This classification would potentially have had considerable consequences as it entailed differential entitlements in plot size (18 square metres for those in the prior to 90 bracket and 12.5 square metres for those in the 90 to 98 bracket). The plot scheme was however jettisoned in favour of an in-situ plan to relocate all three camps over two-three phases in built houses in nearby A-14 Kalkaji Extension and in Govindpuri itself, with the first phase anticipated to be finished within the next three years.[3] A project like this was conceived to acquiesce with the blueprint of the latest Delhi Master Plan which favours resettlement plans to involve mixed land use, the involvement of community-based organizations, NGOs and an invitation to the private sector to develop land.[4] With the exception of the last feature, the in-situ rehabilitation plan is to involve all the above. 'Land as a resource', it was believed, was best served through private sector investment and involvement – yet this wisdom was partially abandoned in favour of a fully government-funded and operated resettlement scheme for this cluster, a DDA official told me.[5] Construction work in A-14 Kalkaji Extension has been underway from January 2013; once it is completed, demolitions as well as relocation are to begin. An ex-MLA and Congress politician, Subhash Chopra, took credit for this resettlement plan's progressive move to ensure that the housing agency, in its survey, counted at least 30 per cent tenants too.[6] Many of those interviewed – tenants and landlords – reported that they were not part of the full survey involving biometric exercises of capturing the resident's fingerprints. Very few families interviewed actually believe that the relocation would happen citing that they have lost count of the number of times they were surveyed. Others simply said that in the last few years, no surveyor came to their homes. In this scheme of things, identity cards were immensely treasured – for though they were disbelieving, Govindpuri's residents could never stop fearing that, in the event of the actual transition and the move, they may not feature in – what was perceived to be the under-enumerated – figure of 8000 families (number of families to be relocated). The ration card was one such treasured document whose historical context I will briefly explain.

The historical context of the ration card in India

The ration card system in India may be traced to late colonial rule (1940s) when the rationing of miscellaneous items was introduced as a wartime measure to ensure cautionary spending, keep the cities from starving and buffer priority sections like soldiers, policemen, industrial and mill workers. Post-independence, socialist considerations and the imperative of austerity in a country weighed down by food deficit, the follies of continued dependence on imports and the creation of a central food procuring agency informed the sporadic re-introduction of rationing. The issue of ration cards was undergirded firmly by what were termed various control orders issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 which laid out definitions of cardholders, household, residential and commercial establishments as well as conditions of issue and cancellation (Sriraman 2013). In the 1960s, following the establishment of the Food and Civil Supplies Department, ration cards issued for the purposes of regulating the consumption of specified articles like wheat, rice and sugar became key markers of identity across various classes of subjects. The ration card emerged in post-independent India as a

[3] The first phase involves relocation to A-14 Kalkaji Extension where a community centre used to exist. It is in its place that the new multi-storied building complex housing the resettled residents is being constructed.
[4] 'Master Plan for Delhi 2021 as amended up to 15 October 2009', pp.21-22. I say 'partially' because DDA plans to sell the land that would be freed by relocation to private players.
[5] DDA official, 11 March 2014, interview by author.
[6] Local politician, Subhash Chopra, March 4, 2014, interview by author.

standard document of identification because it was sought by all classes well until the late 1990s because of the food security it extended but also because of the residential proof it furnished. As such, this document was used for purposes other than claiming rations with recorded evidence of squatters in Kerala and Tamil Nadu using it informally as a mortgage until they paid back their debts to moneylenders, friends, etc. (Gulati 1977, Mooij 1999). Some of the respondents I interviewed have also spoken of this document being used to bail out friends or relatives. Like the mortgage, the bail practice occurred at the margins of law and did not have the full sanction of legal authorities. These various official and non-official functions of the ration card were rendered legally unacceptable in 1999 and again in 2001 when orders were clearly passed stating that the ration card cannot be used for anything other than the withdrawal of rations[7]. The categories of Below the Poverty Line (BPL) and Above the Poverty Line (APL) were commonly from 1997 onwards (Dreze and Sen 2013: 191) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana in later years in ration cards as a means of targeting subsidies to selected beneficiaries across the country – a move that was celebrated and critiqued as a more market-friendly reform suited to a liberalized economy. In the mid-2000s, a full-fledged identification project took shape with a separate office and a Chairman heading it at the central level to issue unique identification (UID) numbers to every Indian resident. This project along with another termed the National Population Register (NPR) have been committed to collecting the biometric and demographic information of India's various national residents on the one hand and setting up linkages with various government departments on the other. In subsequent years, these numbers have been made indispensable in Delhi for availing various BPL welfare programs like gas connections, scholarships and food rations. Linkages between the Delhi Food and Supplies Department and the office of the UID Authority of India (UIDAI) are underway to experiment with cash transfer schemes that provide targeted subsidies to the urban poor. Even with the arrival of the *Aadhaar* project, the ration card is hardly obsolete for the poorer sections across India – the categories of this document like *Jhuggi Ration Card*, Resettlement Colony Card have multiplied in a place like Delhi. In recent times, the Food Security Bill has introduced its own variant of the ration card. The technologies for updating the ration card have been mercurial with the Delhi Food and Supplies Department undertaking biometric reviews of ration card holders and new applicants both connected and unconnected to the Aadhaar project. The narratives in this paper around the ration card have more to do with the practices around this document that predate the introduction of the *Aadhaar*.

Building blocks of pedagogy: Women's incremental mobilization of resources

Learning about what identity documents concede and withhold was indispensable for residents in the cluster. A common sight in this cluster were women walking briskly, clutching some *parchi* (paper) or the other, and headed towards the 'paper shrines' (Hull 2012) in their immediate vicinity or much further away – such as the ration office, the school, dispensary or a neighbour's house. Here, stories of denial, victory and perseverance in acquiring, renewing and altering a card would be exchanged. On one hot summer day, I stepped into Paroma's house, a popular destination for children owing to its use as an *anganwadi* (pre-school program for slum children run by the central government) centre in Navjeevan camp. She and her friend, another *anganwadi* teacher had wound up their tentative lessons for the day, and fed the children, one or two of whom lingered, their curiosity piqued by a stranger amongst their midst. Paroma's biography as a worker for the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* in rural Bihar, and later, her experience as a *balwadi* worker (this too was a pre-school program, but run more locally) and finally as an *anganwadi* worker had affinities with her ability to manoeuvre her way around the slum's paper shrines. In her case, the ability to work or even the necessity to be employed was not something she had

[7] See No.F.3(1)/99-F&S (P&C)/119, Specified Articles (Regulation of Distribution) Amendment Order, 1999 and Annexe to the Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001, *Gazette of India,* Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3 (i).

to strive for. Her father and her brother were not merely educated, they actively encouraged her to study and find a government job. Her passage from welfare jobs in a rural centre to its counterpart in the city, from a student to a government employee, from a mere resident of the slum to one who was tutor to slum children only eased her into networks of everyday access and entitlement. She and her friend, Rakhi told me about how they had, in the 90s and the 2000s, employed different strategies to get details in their cards changed, faced delay in getting cards made, confronted Fair Price Shop dealers (government-approved shopkeepers) to issue rations on time, and tracked down shifting ration card offices. In the face of these predicaments, it was important to educate each other about how to fill in application forms how to present applications with the right attitude, and how to exact responses in official and unofficial spaces. Years of presence in the slum as a low-level government worker constituted an important entry point into her entitlement struggles both for herself and for others. She talks of filling out ration and voter identity card forms for countless neighbours in hindi, going to the office herself to submit these forms rather than approach a middleman or a politician and accompanying women to ration offices to intimidate the dealer into weighing rations properly.

The ration card was a document that had many lives in the slum. It was an assurance of food security, it extended the tenuous promise of resettlement and it could be utilized right up till the year 1999 to bail out friends and relatives in jail. It was possible until the year 1999, for the ration card to be used to verify housing claims and to take somebody out on bail. Some of the women I interviewed narrated the process of acquiring the confidence and the know-how to cautiously enter the discriminatory and male-dominated world of bail, policemen and First Information Reports. In doing so, they often had to find the courage to transgress the presumptive urban boundaries of morality that was bound up with the forbidding hurly-burly of police stations and bail procedures. They had to step ‘out of bounds’ (Nair 2009: 88) to transgress circumscribed spaces in a gendered sense. Janaki Nair writes of the existence of a ‘matrix of gestures, markings, bodily controls and language’ (Nair 2009: 68) through which women are able to ease their bodies through urban spaces. In this matrix, women were made inconspicuous and hence safe by their ‘purposive’ uses of the infrastructure of public spaces. If gender is something that comes into play in certain cultural and social spaces and if certain ‘spatial arrangements’ lean intrinsically towards a male idiom and performativity of politics – police stations and jails would definitely count as one of them (Niranjana 2001, Nair 2009, Butler 1997).

The process of acquiring bail was hazardous for women in the cluster who had to demonstrate remarkable fortitude in unfamiliar and hostile environments where they were often harassed for bribes. Years of learning experience with bureaucratic officials at the same time prepared and unhinged women when they tried to apply the same in police stations. Rakhi, one of Paroma’s friends, told me how she once risked getting beaten up by policemen when she took her son-in-law out on bail. Knowing fully well that they would demand proof and especially her ration card, she took a whole stash of documents (V.P.Singh card, ration card, etc.) and rushed to the local police station. Even then, the police refused to let him off; maybe, they expected to be paid off. To quote Rakhi,

> I summoned all my courage and called up a lawyer I knew then and there in front of the police, and after calling him up, I told the police firmly that I would go, with my lawyer, to *Tees Hazari* court to apply for bail there. It was only then that they let him off on *kacchi zamanat* (loose or quasi-legal bail). They put a *mohur* (stamp) on his arm. The stamp will fade away in a few days.

Seemanthini Niranjana writes of how spaces shape bodily practices and discourses of femininity. In the “‘modes’ in which it inhabits space” as well as through certain body-space orientations,

the body is constitutive of the female, she writes (Niranjana 2001: 16). In many ways, the police station is spatialized around the meek bodily practices of women. To carry forward Niranjana's ideas, I ask, what does the intervening role of paper do to these bodily orientations and spatial politics? Rakhi knew she had to act against the police station's hegemonic spatial norm of bodily nervousness in a woman. Yet, she was able to be self-assured and even mildly intimidating in her bodily gestures because Rakhi discerned a new language of empowerment through the powerful idiom of paper, procedures and law. She could bring the weight of the normative right embodied in the document to bear on policemen and the spatialized gender bias of the *thana*.

The stamp in her narrative was a police inscription that contained details such as where her son-in-law stayed and the ration card number. Rakhi's ration card too was stamped indicating that she had exercised her entitlement to take someone out on bail and could no longer do so for anybody else. Another resident of the cluster explained that the difference between *kachchi zamanat* and *pukki zamanat* was that one was acquired from a *thana* (local police station) and the other from a court. Though the ration card was to be produced in both places, the bail in the latter case, was less flimsy and coarse – both in its legal form and assurance.

Rakhi and Sharda were associated with different welfare bodies at different points in time. Sharda had worked with a clinic as well as an NGO called Community and Sponsorship Plan (CASP) which had been active in the cluster in the 1980s and 90s. Rakhi was a balwadi teacher. To quote her,

> We balwadi teachers had fought a case to get our salaries increased in 1999. The case went on for a few years, but I learnt a thing or two about how to handle Court and *policewallahs* during this time, what tone and manner to use.

In her work describing the lessons that the feminist discourse around the terms 'public' and 'private' can lend to urban theory and the formalization debate, Varley writes of how the private sphere as the domain of the feminine and the domestic is coeval with its other explanation as the informal, the illegal and the illegitimate transaction. She argues that 'the relation between the legal and illegal can be understood as a variant of the public/private dichotomy' (Varley 2002: 450) to show how the private, non-legal sphere can be a site for many informal yet empowering arrangements such as sub-dividing land and sale of such land. Following Varley, it is possible to deem women to rely on familial and feminine roles, using them to mould the private (which here alludes to the 'illegal' or the marginal spaces of legality conjured by the *thana*) to their advantage. Sharda's enumeration struggles started when her husband, a tailor, refused to 'go out' to do paperwork necessary for them to get a ration card without which food rations would have been impossible. It was the familial that forced her to enter the world of paper. However, this was not the sole entry point. As a *balwadi* worker as well as a worker in Asha Clinic – a dispensary catering to women in the cluster – she was trained to help pregnant women, vaccinate children. Her job description of feeding children and tending to mothers and counselling them could easily be characterized as feminine. But it was work in this 'private' sphere of femininity and domesticity that trained her to take on forbidding male-dominated roles in the margins of law personified by the *thana*. Asha clinic taught her to take proofs and ask for signatures and cite law wherever she went, whether the homes of slum residents or municipal offices. She and other employees were able to channel this learning into handling not simply coarse policemen and marginal practices such as *kachchi zamanat* but also into compelling officials to process application forms. Piecemeal pedagogies accrued through

interlocked informal and formal processes – of familial necessity as well as institutional training provided by an NGO or a low-end government job like the *balwadi* (pre-school teaching) programme.

Stuart Corbridge and others cast the question of governance and empowerment in terms of 'sightings of the state' (Corbridge et al. 2005: 5). These authors speak of the perception of the state and its evocations in the accounts of lower-level government workers as well as of poor subjects whose encounters with local officials are widely disparate. Many of these analyses (Corbridge 2005, Gupta 2012) while they are incisive about the productive quality of the poor-state encounters in knowledge formations about an abstract entity like the state, are not very attentive to marginal subjects' grasp of the material dimensions of bureaucracies. The women I interviewed were not merely forming nuanced pictures of the state on entering the domain of bail procedures and legal entitlements. In urban poor spaces, while documents were symbolically and narratively valuable in their ability to conjure everyday properties of the state, they were also yielding of explanations about how bureaucracies are navigated in discrete ways. Years of immersion in processes around ID documents honed urban poor women's ability to comprehend the immediate material resources yielded by documents (such as the ration card's relationship with bail) and the means to marshal them. But it is paramount not to mistake the accumulated pedagogies of these women as a universal, undifferentiated experience of learning for all women in the slum – women who came from different locations, with different experiences of having lived and worked in cities, migrated with their husbands with or without work experience, subject to peculiar caste norms of patriarchy, etc.

Gender, Literacy, Social Institutions and Pedagogy

Ration cards and pensions were of immediate consequence to men as well as women. However, the men especially if they are daily-wage labourers often stated that they could not afford to go to these offices, forgoing the day's earnings. But this was not the only reason that women needed to familiarize themselves with the sites and protocols of bureaucratic operation. A few women spoke of how their husbands lost a limb or became enervated owing to years of strenuous work at construction sites and how, though they were at home, they could not find the strength to stand for long hours at offices to submit forms. Other men simply admitted to not 'going out that much' and pleaded illiteracy (they could not read or write Hindi or English) combined with a certain cynicism that officials favoured either those from their own castes or those with political affiliations. They depended on their educated sons and daughters or on their wives, who could draw on the pooled cultural resources of *mahila mandal* (women's council) meetings and other solidarities.

Women's access to bureaucracies was negotiated by their ability to confront social institutions. Some lower caste (Jatav), backward caste (Kahar/Rajput Kashyap) and other upper caste women (Brahmins) were prevented from going to such offices, as these were spaces where they had to rub shoulders with men, both literally and figuratively. Besides, offices which issued caste certificates, income certificates, ration cards and voter cards were perceived to be compromised by ambiguous political morality, whereby officials struck deals with *dalals* (brokers) and furtively secured commissions.[8] The gendered aspect of enumeration is complexly at work here. One woman belonging to a backward caste I spoke to,

[8] One respondent from the Jatav community told me that he had to file a Right to Information plea, make complaints to higher authorities and wait for three years before he could procure a caste certificate from the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) office. Shyamprasad, 11 April 2013, interviews by author.

was very diffident about speaking of the documents she owned, pointing repeatedly at her father-in-law and saying he was the right person to ask. Her father-in-law told me very emphatically that he would not countenance either his daughter or his daughter-in-law going to work as helps in middle-class homes or for that matter, dealing with unscrupulous and aggressive men in places like the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) office or the police station. When asked why he thought these spaces to not be appropriate for women, he told me how he himself had trouble acquiring certain documents - he had to pay a bribe of 5000 rupees to a *dalal* to procure an income and a caste certificate through official channels. 'Do you think I will trust my daughter-in-law who is nursing a one-year old to these predators (read middlemen)?'[9] An extremely litigious man and a well-known *pradhan* belonging to the SC Jatav community in the cluster who routinely filed Right to Information (RTI) appeals and who was approached by people from all over the neighbourhood expressed similar reservations about his daughter's ability to navigate bureaucratic networks. He distinguished between middle class women and those residing in urban poor spaces, between those belonging to a lower caste and more forward castes in terms of access to education and bureaucratic offices. According to him, if a middle-class woman wished to be litigious, she had the cultural capital of being able to rely on various moneyed men which was an asset needed in addition to being literate and if she was also upper caste, then her efforts would not be stymied by parochial bureaucrats who would otherwise dismiss her or mistreat her as they would recognize her caste-name.[10]His daughter who wanted to work in a beauty parlour was told sternly such work was out of the question. Something more innocuous like going to school was also not entertained by the litigious father. This man who was so very rights-conscious when it came to housing entitlement, the urban poor's right to free public toilets and food security was not invested in the normative political education of his daughter.

Pedagogies of approaching paperwork and bureaucratic procedures for entitlement were inextricably linked to literacies. In theorizing literacy, scholars have pointed out its 'relational', 'culturally variable' (Collins 2003: 4) aspects and its relationship with political power (Gupta 2012: 218). There is no single literacy but multiple literacies where class, caste, geographical location and knowledge of procedures of democracy all matter (ibid 224). Malini Ghose, reflecting on an initiative on women's literacy in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, remarks that the political context of struggles against landlords, forest contractors, water scarcity in the region and the need to confront local power structures had led rural women to seek both skill acquisition and literacy in the conventional sense of learning a language (Ghose 2002: 1616). Conventional literacy, that is, learning to read and write in a language, has various gradations like inscribing a signature, discerning words, comprehending textual meanings and communicating what one has read and understood. Conventional literacy reinforces but does not necessarily impede literacy in the latter sense. In some cases, I found that 'political literacy' (Gupta 2012: 220) preceded conventional literacy and even acted as a stimulus for conventional literacy. In other words, women who pursued conventional literacy did so because they were politically aware, for instance, of the operation of nominal citizenship in bureaucratic offices that presumes universal knowledge of form-filling. Political literacy denoted the centrality of self-taught piecemeal pedagogies in everyday battles. Political literacy also encapsulated these women's bitter struggles with patriarchal norms and prejudices to gain conventional literacy. Female slum residents often complained that the only gender-sensitive measure undertaken by the government was to pass orders that cash and food entitlements should be issued only to female heads of the household. No inroads were made by the

[9] Rajdeep Kashyap and his daughter-in-law, Ishita, a resident of Govindpuri slum cluster, New Delhi, interviews by author, 11 April 2013.

[10] Gangadhar, a resident of Govindpuri slum cluster, interview by author, 21 March 2013.

government into the heart of the family to buffer them against unequal social relations and make their citizenship more substantive.

Some women had received a modicum of formal schooling, lived in cities earlier, and had been employed in both governmental and non-governmental welfare bodies. They were, therefore, able to advise women from a situated context of deep knowledge about power structures and bureaucratic echelons. A few other women did not have the asset of even basic literacy until they married and settled down in the cluster. However, they enthusiastically enrolled themselves in adult literacy programs run by the welfare wing of a school in South Delhi and later sought to rope in others to join these programs. Rubina, a Muslim woman in the cluster had to hide her school-attendance from her husband who was not thrilled by the prospect of his wife disappearing in a bus to a far-off destination. He believed that the instrumental uses an education yielded such as enabling Rubina to fill forms and interact with officials to take advantage of urban poor-related welfare schemes were overrated. After all, he pointed out, even by Rubina's own admission, they have not had much success in getting a BPL card which expired in 2009 and not all of Rubina's ability to fill forms and coax officials has made much difference. But Rubina argues that it has been a while since her husband went to work – having lost his job as a construction worker – and ever since, he has lacked self-assurance required to be resourceful in pursuing matters of enumeration.[11] If she listened to him and stayed at home, she would not have had gotten her own daughter educated either and the family as a whole would have had to depend on mercenary middlemen to handle their various applications. She points out that her husband does not take note of all the documents that they *do possess* – election identity card and a bank passbook included.

I also spoke to 5 women who were affiliated to political parties in its lower cadres who were completely unlettered but were able to push applications through offices and handle police personnel by citing influence. Supriya was a Bengali woman from a relatively upper caste Khatri community who first worked with the Bharatiya Janata Party and later the Congress party. In her thirty years in the cluster, she has helped organize rallies for both parties, adjudicated domestic disputes and participated in crackdowns on gambling in the cluster. Though Supriya could not read or write, her access to police stations, ration card offices and ration shops was made easy by her political connections. She often sent women who faced ID document-related hurdles to meet the municipal councillor who was also her political superior. Armed with recommendation letters from the councillor or accompanied by Supriya, these women were sometimes lucky enough to get information about welfare schemes, if not their applications. The councillor once accompanied her to a ration shop where his men slapped the dealer and got him to issue rations regularly. When it came to filling forms, she relied on her daughter in whose education she was invested. She did not have much paper trouble in getting her daughter admitted both because municipal schools were obliging to party workers and because birth certificates were easy to obtain owing to the political proximity of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) office to councillors.[12]The relationship between literacy, pedagogy and social institutions can thus be fruitfully engaged to explain the gendered frameworks of citizenship implicit in patriarchal structures and bureaucratic networks.

Pedagogies of gendered citizenship

In her article, 'The global city', Saskia Sassen writes of the double-edged character of the city which attracts newer and newer 'forms of global corporate capital' (Sassen 2006: 174). While lower wage

---

[11] Rubina, a resident of Govindpuri slum cluster, interview by author, 16 May 2013.

[12] Supriya, a resident of Govindpuri slum cluster, Interview by author, 2 August 2013.

workers threaten to be rendered 'invisible and disempowered' (ibid 174), they, especially women, discover the space for pushing gendered boundaries and discovering their political subjectivity. The swelling numbers of women in the informal sector is nothing short of the 'feminization of the job supply' which in turn enables women to render streets and their immediate localities into political spaces in a way that the nation as a site can never be. In personal spaces, women are able to be more autonomous and enjoy much more control over decisions and wrest more assistance in managing the household. This kind of reasoning seems a little too facile even as it is overly hopeful about the gender implications of the urban proliferation of global capital in a grand sense. In a sense, Sassen is making out a case for gendered citizenship where global, capital and city all come together to create more inclusive spaces for women. But the visibility of women in the public space does not always translate into female-inclusive politics or female labour-saving practices in the household. Earning female members especially if they are functioning alongside men are still required to handle the burden of paperwork which is seen to be an extension of a woman's feminine role. At other times, they are expected to abstain from such work as it can be sexually compromising. Some families in the informal sector may actively prevent women from working and by extension from participating in crucial application processes. Caste as a factor could impinge in a gendered sense on those in the informal sector as much as those who are middle-class beneficiaries of globalization. The previous section indicated the ways in which female residents in the slum could at times successfully, and at other times, not so fruitfully translate their piecemeal learning gained in a context of social and economic marginality into more productive citizenship struggles.

Yet another function of ration cards in the slum was its validating role in housing allocations. It was demanded in survey after survey of housing authorities. Delhi's slums were no exception in this regard. The in-situ plan, though it was approved and implemented recently and specifically in Govindpuri, was predated by a more general plot scheme of allotting plots as a consequence of demolition. In 1990, when V.P.Singh issued ration cards and identity cards to slum dwellers, it became a norm for housing authorities to instinctively determine the date of occupation in the city on the basis of these cards. Ever since this year, Govindpuri's residents have been living in a suspended state of fear about their housing prospects. Women who were socially exposed – divorced, separated, forced to deal with their husbands' polygamy and others whose relations with their husband's female relatives had soured – often desired to get cards that unyoked them from documentary dependency. Mahima told me that she stayed on the first floor of a slum in Bhumiheen camp. Housing policy very clearly states that 'in the case of multi-storeyed *jhuggis* occupied by the same person or different persons for residential purpose', only those squatting on the ground floor will be counted.[13]Mahima who was aware of this rule, wished she had an identity document that did not merely count her as a member of her extended marital family. Her ration card was first issued in her father-in-law's name. When recently, a rule was passed that ration cards are to be made in the name of the woman head of household, she did not benefit from it because her sister-in-law – who resided in the ground floor of the house – was recorded as the female head[14]. While there were hints of tension between her and her sister-in-law, even without this debilitating factor, the promise of her document was tenuous. She has decided to get a voter identity card to mitigate her frailty on various counts of housing security and securing admission for her children in school. The ration

[13] Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, 'Present Policies and Strategies' as accessed in their website on 28 May 2014, http://delhishelterboard.in/main/?page_id=128. All housing authorities in Delhi share this wisdom – DDA which is the landowning agency in Govindpuri and which is in charge of implementing the contemporary in-situ project agrees with the precept.

[14] Her name is included in this card but not those of her children. This made using the card for school admission or getting rations for her immediate family difficult.

card was often not preferred as a testament of the time spent in the slum as it was renewed constantly. Vidya, a migrant from Tamil Nadu, told me about how she would guard the ID card (and not the ration card that was issued in 1990 by the V.P.Singh government) with her life because it was an insurance against harsh eviction by her husband's second wife who she feared.[15] She said in Tamil, *Enna ava veettulendu toratti utta na indhe card daan enakku edurkalatle udaviya irukkum* (If she chases me away, it is this card that will help me in the future). She explained that her husband alternated between staying with her in the slum she resided in and the second wife's house constructed behind the first. She was very keen to get the ID card made in her name as her husband's other wife had got one made in hers. In a *mahaul* (environment) where cards were nothing short of temporal signifiers which marked off urban citizenship on the basis of date of occupation, there were many other women who too desired to possess the right kind of cards.

Scholars across the board of social sciences have been invested in the emancipatory project of citizenship. Some of these analyses have been microscopic in their urban lens of citizenship while others have called into question the complex dialectical relationship between citizenship and identity documents in urban margins (Das 2012, Holston 2009, Anjaria 2011, Koster 2013). If in the poor neighbourhoods of Sao Paulo, residents made demonstrations of their 'insurgent citizenship' by 'law-talking' (talking about the law) (Holston 2009: 251) with officials, those in the slums of Noida, performatively engendered acts of 'emergent citizenship' (Das 2012) where slum residents displayed contingent relationship with commodities. In the latter case, slum residents preserved or manipulated urban materials and ID documents in the belief that they may serve some temporality in the future (ibid). If documents are vital in 'insurgent' and 'emergent' definitions of citizenship, they are so only when they are manifest as pedagogies of living and strategizing in the deeper sense of the term. Mahima and Vidya both rendered their piecemeal learning around identity cards into more gendered struggles of citizenship through the intricate linkages they drew between patriarchy and welfare policy.

Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a nuanced picture of enumeration and identification documents in a gender framework thereby critiquing the existing literature which has otherwise been somewhat skewed in favour of men (Bakewell 2007, Gordillo 2006, Koster 2013, Torpey 2000). I began this paper with two stories of a woman and a girl who sought to find ways around the intractable 'proof' of urban belonging structured around familial and residential stability. Their efforts though piecemeal were nothing short of an attempt to enfranchise themselves and to be counted as *dilli ki gareeb nagarik*. Their quest for proof and thereby entry into the city was fraught with a plenitude of factors like the administrative wrangling over the socio-economic definition of BPL, the bureaucratic investment in norms of stable urban residence and official indifference to patriarchally compromised women. But this paper is not just a lengthy remark on structural hurdles of a culturally imbued postcolonial bureau that impinge on documentary processes. It also records women relentlessly schooling themselves in the best means available to procure a document, lay claim to welfare benefits and to mobilise knowledge-resources. While piecemeal pedagogies of urban poor women are exciting in their routine presence around bureaucratic procedures and enumerative processes, they must be seen as an entry point into these women's thick engagements with and navigations of the city, social institutions, entitlement processes and material poofs.

Bibliography

[15]Not having met the second wife, I couldn't hear her version of the story.

(2010) *Master Plan for Delhi 2021 as amended up to 15 October 2009*, New Delhi: JBA Publishers.
Anjaria, Jonathan Shapiro (2011) 'Ordinary States: Everyday Corruption and the Politics of Space in Mumbai', *American Ethnologist*, 38 (1), pp. 58-72.
Bakewell, Oliver (2007) 'The Meaning and Use of Identity Papers: *Handheld* and *Heartfelt* Nationality in the Borderlands of North-West Zambia', *Working Papers,* Oxford: International Migration Institute.
Cohen, Lawrence (2013) 'The Fog of Welfare: Biometric Governance and its (Im)Materiality', Paper presented at the International Conference, *The Social and Culture Lives of Information*, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, November 14-16.
Collins, James (2003) *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power and Identity,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Corbridge, Stuart, Williams, Glynn, Srivastava, Manoj and Veron, Rene (2005) *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
Das, Veena (2012) 'Poverty and the Imagination of a Future: The Story of Urban Slums in Delhi, India', *Asia Colloquia Papers*, Lecture delivered at York University, 1 (4).
Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (2013) *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*, Princeton, N.J., London: Allen Lane.
Freire, Paulo (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* New York and London: Continuum.
Ghose, Malini (2002) 'Literacy, Power and Feminism', Economic and Political Weekly, 37(17), pp. 1615-1620.
Gordillo, Gaston (2006) 'The Crucible of Citizenship: ID-Paper Fetishism in the Argentinean Chaco', *American Ethnologist*, 33 (2), pp.162–76.
Gupta, Akhil (2012) *Red Tape : Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, Durham: Duke University Press.
Gulati, Leela (1977) 'Rationing in a Peri-Urban Community, Case Study of a Squatter Habitat', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 12 (2), pp. 501-506.
Holston, James (2009) 'Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries', *City & Society* 21(2) pp.245-267.
Hull, Matthew (2012) *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Kelsh, Deborah, Dave Hill and Macrine Sheila (2010) *Class in Education: Knowledge, Pedagogy, Subjectivity*, Oxon and New York: Routledge.
Koster, Martijn (2013) 'Fear and Intimacy: Citizenship in a Recife Slum, Brazil', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology,* URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2012.732955.
Kumar, Amitava (1997) *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies and the Public Sphere*, New York and London: New York University Press.
Mooij, Jos E. (1999) *Food Policy and the Indian State: The Public Distribution System in South India*, Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press.
Nair, Janaki (2009) 'The Body Politic: Gender and the Practice of Power in the City' in Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker (eds.), *Comparing Cities : the Middle East and South Asia*, New Delhi: OUP, pp.65-96.
Niranjana, Seemanthini (2001) *Gender and Space : Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Sassen, Saskia (2006) 'A Global City' in David Nugent and Joan Vincent (eds.) *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.
Sriraman, Tarangini (2013) 'Feeling the Rules: Documentary Practices of Rationing and the 'Signature' of the Official', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (CIS), 47 (3), pp.335-361.
Srivastava, Sanjay (2012) 'Duplicity, Intimacy, Community: An Ethnography of ID Cards, Permits and Other Fake Documents in Delhi', *Thesis Eleven*, 113(1), pp. 78-93.

Torpey, John (2000) *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, Cambridge (England), New York: Cambridge University Press.
University Press.
Varley, Ann (2002) 'Private or Public: Debating the Meaning of Tenure Legalization', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26 (3), pp. 449-461.