

Gendered Mobility: Deep Distributions in Urban Transport Systems in Delhi

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Abstract : Transportation as a sector is one of the most significant infrastructural elements of the 'urban.' The distinctness of an urban life in a city is marked by the dynamic movements that it enables within the city-space. Therefore it is important to study the public-transport systems that enable and foster mobility which characterizes the urban. It is also crucial to underscore the way one is examining the urban transport systems - either as an infrastructural unit in a strict physical-structural sense or as a structural unit which acts as a prism refracting multiple experiences depending on the location of the 'commuter.' In the proposed paper, the attempt is to uncover and investigate the assumption of the neuter-commuter by looking at urban transportation in the secondary sense i.e. as a structural unit which is experienced differently by different kinds of commuters, thus making transportation deeply distributed with various social structures and locations like class or gender which map onto the transport systems. To this end, the public-transit systems operating in Urban Delhi i.e. the Delhi Metros and the Delhi Transport Corporation run public-buses are looked at as case studies. The study is premised on the knowledge and data gained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include data and knowledge collected from fieldwork, the methodology for which has ranged from adopting 'mixed-methods' which is 'Qualitative-then-Quantitative' as well as borrowing ethnographic techniques. Apart from fieldwork, other primary sources looked at including Annual Reports and policy documents of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), Union and Delhi budgets, Economic Survey of Delhi, press releases, etc. Secondary sources include the vast array of literature available on the critical nodes that inform the research like gender, transport geographies, urban-space, etc. The study indicates a deeply-distributed urban transport system wherein the various social-structural locations or different kinds of commuters map onto the way these different commuters experience mobility or movement within the city space. Mobility or movement, therefore, becomes gendered or has class-based ramifications. The neuter-commuter assumption is thus challenged. Such an understanding enables us to challenge the anonymity which the 'urban' otherwise claims it provides over the rural. The rural is opposed to the urban wherein urban ushers a modern way of life, breaking ties of traditional social identities. A careful study of the transport systems through the traveling patterns and choices of the commuters, however, indicate that this does not hold true as even the same 'public-space' of the transport systems allocates different places to different kinds of commuters. The central argument made through the research done is therefore that infrastructure like urban-transport-systems has to be studied and examined as seen beyond just a physical structure. The various experiences of daily mobility of different kinds of commuters have to be taken into account in order to design and plan more inclusive transport systems.

Keywords : gender, infrastructure, mobility, urban-transport-systems

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