

Gender, caste and street vending in Mumbai: a situated intersectional geography

ABSTRACT

My doctoral project engages with gendered negotiations of street vending spaces and networks, state responses to urban informality, and the co-constitution of gender, caste, and urban space in Mumbai by focusing on the everyday lives of women street vendors in the city. Drawing upon an intersectional feminist geography perspective, my research uncovers the power relations that determine how vending spaces are constructed, inhabited, and governed in Mumbai. My study is based on 10-months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mumbai covering a number of key actors in the vending network—from market vendors to labour unions, and from municipal officials to non-governmental organisations. My primary fieldsite was Dadar Market in central Mumbai, along with some time spent in Dharavi with a women's labour union. My fieldwork also included two trips to Delhi to visit a women's weekly market organised by a women's informal trade union association, and two months of archival research in Mumbai. Looking at the everyday socio-spatial experiences of women vendors, I argue, opens up a portal that allows us to critique current urban policy paradigms in Mumbai, address knowledge gaps on the co-production of urban spatialities through caste-gender, and shift attention to the political and epistemological exclusions of women and caste minorities in India. To do this theoretically, I build upon feminist and anti-caste geographical approaches to urban informality that are attentive to the situated lives of urban inhabitants and the postcolonial context of the city. Finally, my work contributes to the larger conversation on street vending as a spatial practice, the intersectional moorings of urban inhabitation, and the production of informal street geographies in Southern cities.

Keywords: *street vending, caste, gender, intersectionality, feminist geography, Mumbai*

SAANCHI SAXENA

Doctoral candidate

Interuniversity Department of Regional & Urban Studies and Planning,

Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy

saanchi.saxena@polito.it