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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Exclusionary Inclusion: How Caste & Capital Shape the Politics of Recognition, Formalization, & Infrastructural Reform in Urban India

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Live Stream Available @ www.icgc.umn.edu

“Exclusionary Inclusion,” explores the convergence of caste and capital logics in the context of urban India’s transforming infrastructural labor regimes of Solid-Waste-Management (SWM). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Indore, Chennai, Delhi, and Pune, India, I demonstrate that the patchwork extension of waged, contractual, and hierarchically organized employment relations that are typical of initiatives incorporating informal waste-collectors into formal waste-management systems ironically reinstitute racialized and gendered divisions of labor grounded in caste. Waste-picker “formalization” inaugurates an emerging mode of ‘exploitation-extraction’ that pivots around the figure of the informal-waste-collector, previously operating as informal, self-organized workers, now transformed into “worker-tenants.” Arrayed on an emerging rent-wage spectrum that takes the social form of an exclusionary inclusion, such worker-tenants are subject to hybrid relations of exploitation-plus-rent. I relate these outcomes to an elite-mediated politics of recognition ostensibly intended to mitigate the stigmatization of waste work. I argue that the caste-coded nature of this recognition politics combines with “economic formalization” to contribute to a novel & revivalist conception of infrastructural modernity now at work in urban India’s SWM landscapes. Premised as it is on the market-rationalized instrumentalization of labor regimes grounded in Brahmanical-patriarchy, I conclude with instances where these tendencies are meaningfully, if not totally, resisted.