Urban infrastructures facilitate the unequal distribution of goods and services that constitute substantive citizenship for diverse urban and provincial populations. Nikhil Anand’s *Hydraulic City* examines one such system of the “distributions of life” (2017, 227): the water infrastructure of Mumbai, India. In this book, Anand develops his arguments around “hydraulic citizenship” (8)—the form of political belonging enabled by access to the municipal water system—and the ways that materialities of infrastructure, including its leakages, condition a politics of claims-making through which precarious populations incrementally emplace themselves in the city. During a time of debate about the possible privatization of Mumbai’s water delivery system, Anand conducted fieldwork in Mumbai’s settlement areas (officially designated as “slums”), where residents cobble together discrete connections to urban infrastructures in a processual, contingent accumulation of citizenship entitlements. Anand’s ethnographically rich and theoretically engaging text contributes to anthropological literatures on infrastructure, urbanism, and citizenship in the Global South and beyond.

One of the most arresting images that emerges from Anand’s text is that of Mumbai’s chaviwallas (or “key people”), who manually turn the valves that direct water to Mumbai’s high-rises and slum settlements (101). In his third chapter, Anand describes this and other forms of labor that the punctuated temporalities of Mumbai’s water system demand. To bring the schedule of water distribution into material being, the state-employed chaviwallas physically turn on and off each neighborhood’s water at appointed times. This materialized timetable structures the daily lives of settlement residents, particularly women, who are tasked both with collecting household water and using it for labors of maintenance and care. The limited time frames and irregularities of the water-distribution schedule force some women into the impossible choice between provisioning...
their homes with water or undertaking paid work as well as obliging some to rely on the tenuous sociality of sharing with neighbors who are themselves already thinly provisioned. A vividly textured account of everyday life in a Mumbai settlement, this chapter would be an appropriate standalone selection in an undergraduate ethnography course, or, in conversation with the writings of Elyachar (2010) and Fredericks (2018), in an advanced course on the gendering of infrastructural labor.

Moving toward a more explicit analysis of the politics of water, Anand’s fourth chapter describes the forms of intermediation that connect settlers to the water infrastructure. Community organizations and social workers link residents with NGOs and politicians who act as their conduits to water department engineers. These structures inculcate an awareness of the power of settlers’ votes, enabling them to engage in forms of “transactional” citizenship to demand water connections from city councilors and to protest the World Bank-backed project to privatize Mumbai’s water system (145). Although settlers experience the public-water-provisioning system as inadequate in many ways, they recognize that its porous, penetrable network of leaking pipes enables them to make substantive claims on water more easily than a fully transparent, “watertight” system would (187).

In chapter five, Anand describes negotiations between engineers and politicians around the “social leakage” of illegal water connections (182). Engineers tacitly sanction these unauthorized connections within the broad, permissive framework of uncertain volumes and incalculable flows that characterizes Mumbai’s vast, leaky water infrastructure (see also Anand 2015).

*Hydraulic City* contributes to the insight that, where technical systems and political power are weakest, mechanisms for distributing resources and services to poor urban residents rely on restrictive assumptions and value-laden idioms. Often, these idioms enroll the labor and further the marginality of women (as described in chapter three). However, moral narratives around sharing the responsibilities of urban life can also be the basis for denying services to those communities deemed to insufficiently perform presumably shared values, as in the case of the residents of Premnagar (chapter six; see also Anand 2011). Through the example of this primarily Muslim settlement, Anand elaborates on disconnection as a singular form of abjection, here enacted through the ways regional and religious prejudice mediate engineers’ selective (non-) deployment of their technical expertise.

While Redfield (2017) has recently drawn into question the fetishization of modernist infrastructures, Anand’s work indicates that, even in their gaps and partialities, large, public systems provide a crucial site of articulating political demands for those seeking to secure their foothold in the city. Through comparisons to Hurricane Katrina and the Flint, Michigan water crisis, Anand insists that these forms of politics are not an exceptional feature of the Global South. Although Anand resists overextending the capacity of “hydraulic citizenship”—leaving its similarities to and differences from other infrastructural citizenships as an open question—this book might be read alongside Rosalind Fredericks’s *Garbage Citizenship* (2018) and James Ferguson’s *Give a Man a Fish* (2015) as provocative rethinkings of the imbrications of labor and political belonging.

*Hydraulic City* provides a clearly written, ethnographically detailed entry point into scholarship on infrastructure and the materiality of politics. Although this reader would have liked to know more about some of the topics tantalizingly introduced in the interludes—including the engaged aspects of Anand’s ethnographic work and proposals to revitalize traditional water harvesting methods—the text’s coherent and well supported arguments make it a valuable contribution to graduate and undergraduate courses and conversations in anthropology, STS, South Asian studies, and other allied fields.

**Works Cited**


Anand, Nikhil. 2015. “Leaky States: Water Audits,
Ignorance, and the Politics of Infrastructure.”
