

Insecure Toilets, Secure Women: Examining the Museology of Sanitation Justice at Sulabh International Toilet Museum in Delhi, India

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Abstract

Sanitation inadequacies are a crucial barrier to human health, economic security, and gendered equity worldwide yet raising awareness among diverse stakeholders remains difficult and fragmentary. This article examines the unexpected ways Sulabh International Toilet Museum in Delhi, India is legible to a group of women who live in a nearby informal "slum" community with toilet insecurity. Using ethnographic participant observation, it illuminates the ways initiatives aimed at advocating for sanitation improvements can reach, resonate, and provoke engagement with those experiencing complex sanitation issues. It demonstrates the capacity of inclusive frameworks for museum curation as a microcosm for broader conversations about the equitable integration of sanitation in a gendered South Asian context.

Keywords: Informal Settlements, Water, Sanitation, Gender, Sulabh International, Anthropology of Museums

Introduction

Peals of laughter emanate from the back and front row seats in our borrowed white Maruti Suzuki as Nilutha describes various gaffes her junior colleague and friend Arvi made in her first days of leading the *aganwadi* across from the community's public toilet bank in the *basti* where they live. Arvi, wedged in the middle row and wiping tears of laughter with her sari's *pullao* catches her breath, takes her dear friend's hand and exclaims how good it is to have a ladies day out for a change. The seven ladies suck their teeth in agreement, squeeze one another's hands and shoulders, and murmur mutual admiration. They beam at one another momentarily before the next joke is cracked and eyes turn from