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International Research

University of Dayton

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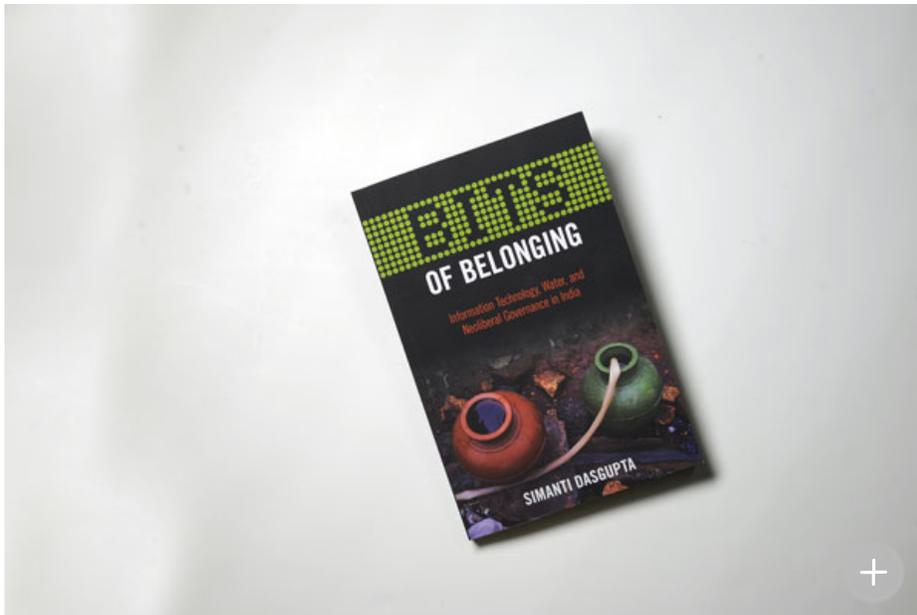
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Here for Our Students



Wednesday November 1, 2017

International Research

There's not an obvious connection between water and information technology? unless you ask Simanti Dasgupta.

Dasgupta, associate professor of anthropology, brings together the two otherwise unrelated domains to tell an important story she uncovered during nearly 20 months of fieldwork in Bangalore: the middle class has benefited from India's emergence as a global IT power while the urban poor have struggled to keep access to one of life's most basic necessities, water.

Dasgupta explores how this connection between water and IT "correspond to our thinking about citizenship, governance and belonging" in her book, *BITS of Belonging: Information Technology, Water, and Neoliberal Governance in India*.

"I did not want to tell a story simply of IT and the people in IT because it was a very upper-middle class story and that is not the entire story of the country," she said. "I wanted something more."

She began her research during graduate school at the New School for Social Research in New York City understanding the middle class in

India was well-positioned to take advantage of the country's economic policies, including its decision to lift trade barriers in 1991. But the idea for the book came into focus when the CEO of an IT company invited her to a citizens' meeting in Bangalore, which turned out to be about water privatization.

"There was a very important shift happening in water which paralleled very closely the software narrative," she said. "Notions such as accountability and transparency — the two main tenants of the neo-liberal market — were also being used for water privatization."

Her work demonstrates how neoliberalism — an ideology that gives more economic control to the private market and which ties citizenship to consumerism — is "a very class-based narrative," she said. "It's politics that disenfranchise the disenfranchised even further."

Water privatization was especially important in India because water has a religious connotation. It is sacred and life-giving. There is a god of water, she said. Water is also a public good, historically offered free to the urban poor.

"The middle class was okay with the water privatization because they had the means. But it was negatively affecting what they would call the urban poor, who historically received water for free," she said. "If you couldn't prove you owned the land in the slum, they would disconnect your water. There were public fountains all through the city which would be closed down."

The situation allowed Dasgupta to investigate who gets left out and who is included when market reforms take place. Ultimately, she shows the "economic shift" in India "produces new forms of social inequality while reinforcing older ones," according to her publisher, Temple University Press.

Dasgupta, who joined the University of Dayton faculty in 2009, is continuing her ethnographic work on the politics of citizenship and belonging now in Kolkata. She brings her international perspective on research to the classroom.

"Dr. Dasgupta integrates scholarship, teaching and service around her passion for advocating on behalf of marginalized peoples around the globe," said Leslie Picca, chair of the University's department of

National and international organizations recently recognized the University of Dayton's Division of Student Development for its community policing, alcohol prevention, residential learning and student training programs, and annual report.

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sociology, anthropology and social work. “She contributes immensely to the success of our students and to furthering the mission of the University to produce engaged citizens in a global world.

“Dasgupta is a highly engaging professor who challenges her students, and encourages them to think deeply and critically. She provides a transformative learning experience with the goal of shifting how students see the world.”

For more information, contact Meagan Pant, assistant director of news and communications, at 937-229-3256 or mpant1@udayton.edu.

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