Waste Management in the Nilgiris and Beyond

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Abstract
In the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, the solid waste management system is slow and imperfect, and the waste has huge consequences for the way that humans and other species interact with each other and their environments. Waste, studied through three lenses --environments and health, work and livelihood, and governance--can shed light on the changes taking place in the Nilgiris. To start to understand the processes and systems in place for different types and contexts in solid waste management, we asked: What are the gaps in the waste management system? Why do these gaps exist? Using mixed methods, we traced the differences between organic waste, recyclable materials, and biomedical waste in a small city and a nearby rural Panchayat. We examined the Solid Waste Management (SWM) systems of this area considering gender and community, housing inequalities, and employment safety. We also looked at the economic importance of SWM as a source of livelihood in a largely, but not completely, informal system across different geographies in the state of Tamil Nadu, from the villages and towns of the Nilgiris, into the urban areas of the Kongu Nadu in the foothills and the plains. This paper also argues that there are important considerations for the governance of waste management in an increasingly neoliberal context.