

# **Marginality and Urban Inequality- Livelihood and Aspirations of Low-Wage Migrant Workers in NCR-Delhi<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*The experience and opportunities available in cities vary tremendously, especially when it comes to migrants. The question that arises is, "What results in this difference?" And more importantly, does this inequality further aggravate the precarious and vulnerable conditions of migrants, especially low-wage workers? The paper addresses the issue of inequality experienced by low-wage migrant workers living in NCR-Delhi, in the context of available amenities, education, health services, and the social lives of these workers. The paper touches upon the key issue of marginalization of low-wage migrant workers that has further aggravated the urban inequality. An attempt is made to point out the receding role of the State in coming to the rescue of these workers. Conversely, it is civil society that progressively works towards the upliftment of the low wage migrant workers that enables them to fulfill their aspirations.*

**Keywords:** *Accommodation, Inequality, Marginality, Aspirations, Migration.*

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<sup>1</sup> NCR- National Capital Territory includes the districts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh bordering Delhi, the capital of India.

## **Introduction**

An important aspect of a world that is changing quickly is migration, which brings with it challenges, new opportunities, and hopes. Moving to work has always been a route to success for millions of Indians, both within and outside of their country. Migration as a process contributes to the growth of urban space. However, the processes of becoming urban are not equal for all inhabitants, nor are their roles in producing and transforming urban space (Brogger 2019). Migrants, identified as outsiders and left to fend for themselves in a system that has no hope of improvement, have been the recipients of urban inequality (Alan Gilbert and Peter Ward 1984). Urban expansion has been both horizontal and vertical, leading to the formation of networks, corridors, and hierarchies (Davis 2006). The most manifest hierarchies are no longer only between locals and migrants but also among migrants, depending on their experience of urbanity. One of the criteria of differentiation among migrants is the capacity to earn, some get absorbed in the urban space and are able to earn relatively well. However, a large number fail to get a decent work that would give them high earnings. The experience of urban inequality is structured around the income of migrants. It is the low-wage migrants who face marginalization and exclusion from social, cultural, and political life. Marginality in urban space is today more structured, segmented, and exclusionary. It no longer implies the separation of the poor from the mainstream; rather, it is now embedded in the structures of social exclusion that limit our opportunities for survival as human beings. Low-wage migrants remain invisible to the official machinery and are eventually erased from development policies. Marginalities can be conceptualized as a forerunner to inequalities in terms of disadvantage and vulnerability (Mehretu et al. 2000).

The exclusion is the outcome of their vulnerable working conditions that puts them into the lower margins of the economy. Their poor economic status gets them labelled as second-class citizens by the local authorities and community. The two statuses merge to make their livelihood in the city vulnerable and precarious- one, their status as outsiders and second, as poor people. They face massive problems in their day-to-day lives because of the lack of belongingness to the city. The administrative mechanism makes it difficult for them to acquire the documents needed to become a legal citizen. Their non-citizenship due to lack of documentary proof denies them access to the social security programs and measures initiated by the state government. Without documentary proof of being a citizen, the workers are unable to receive rations at subsidized rates and LPG connection, unable to get their children admitted in private school under the EWS scheme, and not able to take medical treatment in government dispensaries/hospitals and other financial help for daughter's marriage or old age pension, etc. These conditions continue to be dismal because of the apathy of the government and impunity enjoyed by transnational corporations. The structural inequality experienced by urban low-wage migrants is not the fault of the urban poor but reflects the larger structural conditions and constraints of contemporary capitalism and neoliberal schemes and policies (Gmelch & Kuppinger 2018).

The experience and opportunities available in cities vary tremendously, especially when it comes to low-wage migrants. The question that arises is, "What results in this difference?" And more importantly, does this inequality further aggravate the precarious and vulnerable conditions of low-wage migrants? In an attempt to answer these questions, this paper points out how urban inequality has emerged from low-wage migrants' limited or no access to amenities, educational and health facilities, and the organization of urban space. It traverses through the experience of inequality, manifestations (lack

of service, health care, and transportation) of urban structures. This paper focuses on grappling with two conditions of marginality experienced by low-wage migrants: first, marginalization from state policies and the communities in which they live and work, and second, gender and class-based inequality among the low-wage migrants themselves. The paper explores the contestations emerging out of the twin process of marginalization and explores the strategies through which low-wage migrants structure their livelihood and aspirations in urban space. It becomes evident that marginality is thus socially constructed by dominant social groups to maintain political control, social exclusion, and economic exploitation (Netshikulwe et al., 2022). The findings of the paper are based on a study carried out for a period of two years (2015-2017) in NCR, Delhi. The study was earlier conceptualized using qualitative and quantitative research tools. A total of 500 samples were selected which were further divided into two groups according to the method of data collection. In the first group, the life histories of 200 workers were collected using qualitative methods, which included interviews, observation and FGD. In the second category, quantitative data was collected from 300 workers using an interview schedule and questionnaire.

### ***1. Living conditions in the city***

A description of the living conditions of low-wage migrants highlights their congested living standards with no or limited access to basic facilities and the complete absence of a government health and education system. To get a clear picture of the living conditions of the workers it is necessary to explore their accommodations, availability, and access to basic facilities and system of health and education for children and families.

#### ***1.1. Types of living accommodation***

Workers live in two types of workers- owned & rented accommodation.

i. ***Owned accommodations-*** Workers are owners of these accommodations, which are main room sets, 'jhuggis', or slums. These are 'kutchha'-type dwellings made of low-quality materials, like bricks and mud, and have higher chances of breaking. They are classified as such in official documents.

ii. ***Rented accommodation-*** These are 'pucca' buildings constructed specifically for rental purposes. These dwellings are made of better-quality concrete materials using bricks, iron rods, cement, etc. Workers live on rent; that is, they pay a monthly rental to the landlords that range from five hundred rupees to four thousand rupees per month depending on the type of rented accommodation.

A large percentage of low-wage migrants live in rented accommodation as they do not have the purchasing power to own a house or 'jhuggi' in the city. Renting out rooms to workers is a lucrative business for landlords, who mostly come from Jat and Yadav communities that earlier owned large agricultural lands but, with the growth of industries, constructed buildings to be put on rent. These landlords are known as 'maliks' and have a special status in worker's colonies; they are both respected and feared by workers.

### ***1.1.1. Types of rented accommodations***

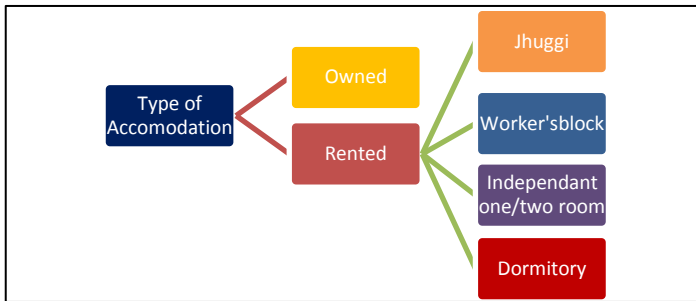
i. ***'Jhuggi'***- These are 'kutchha' dwellings and are like small huts. In an area of 100 square meters, there are more than 500 jhuggis, extremely crowded, in narrow passages that are full of dirt and filth. The monthly rent of one 'jhuggi' ranges from Rs 500 to Rs 800. These are taken on rent by unskilled, casual workers whose income is very low, who have no fixed jobs, and who live in the city with their families. Multi-storeyed buildings: These are a series of rooms constructed in multi-storeyed buildings in which 15 to 20 workers share a room, which is like a hall stacked with the belongings of

workers. They have no beds or other furniture and sleep on the ground. The toilet is on a shared basis, not cleaned regularly, and is dirty. These rooms have no windows and are dark even in the daytime. There is no ventilation, and many blocks do not have ceiling fans, so it becomes very suffocating in the summer when the temperature is around 45 degrees. The rent of these rooms ranges from Rs 1000 to Rs 2000, depending on the number of workers sharing a room. Most of the workers who live here are either unmarried or live without their families. These rooms are rented mostly by young male workers.

*ii. Independent one or two-room set-* These are separate dwellings again constructed by the landlord to earn a high income. These dwellings have one or two rooms with separate kitchen and bathroom facilities. The rents range from Rs. 2500 to Rs. 4000 per month, higher than the 'jhuggi' and rooms in multi-storeyed buildings. These are taken on rent by skilled workers who earn a good monthly income and also live with their families. However, there is not much difference in the conditions—they are equally congested, unhygienic, and dirty.

*iii. Dormitory* – These accommodations are provided by employers near or in the vicinity of the factory. The employer gets a series of rooms constructed in a row with one toilet on each floor, to be used by 20 to 30 workers on a shared basis. Similarly, a few rooms are used for cooking food on a shared basis. These rooms have no furniture and no gas connection; some have ceiling fans and tube lights. These rooms are provided to workers who work in the factory without any cost. However, it should not be assumed that it is a welfare measure for workers; rather, it is a strategy to keep the workers under control and easily available to do extra overtime work during the peak production period. The conditions in these dormitories are pathetic, despite the provision of a proper dormitory

for workers as part of the codes of conduct of many of the international brands.



**Figure 1- Type of Accommodation**

A large number of workers who live in multi-story are young, unmarried, or without families. This is followed by those who live in an independent one- or two-room set, and a small number live in a 'jhuggi'. The number of workers living in dormitories is the lowest because it is not a common feature in India. The choice of living accommodations is dependent on the monthly income of workers; those who earn more live in independent rooms, then in multi-story buildings, and those with the lowest income live in jhuggis.

The payment of rent is virtually a nightmare for these workers because each landlord fixes a date, like the 7th or 10th of the month, for payment beyond which they charge a fine on a per-day basis. Here again, we see the functioning of a vicious circle of vulnerability. The employer does not pay wages on time, so the worker is unable to pay rent on time. Fines are levied for non-payment, and they accumulate to an amount that is beyond the paying capacity of workers. For fear of being thrown out and having to search for a new room, the workers take a loan from the landlords and thereby get indebted and fall prey to exploitation by landlords.

### 1.2. Availability of basic amenities: Water and electricity

In addition to degraded living conditions combined with constant exploitation by the landlord, it is seen that the workers have very little access to basic amenities (refer to Figure1). The condition is so bad that it narrates the everyday struggle to get water, electricity, LPG (gas connection), etc. There is no supply of water because the government has not authorized water pipelines, as most of the areas are inhabited by low-wage migrants, and most live in unauthorized colonies. Women bring water from houses that have a water connection and store it, or else line up to collect water when the water tanks come for supply. Water is a substance necessary for survival, but in these workers' residential areas, water becomes a cause of conflict and violence. Women are seen fighting with each other when they gather to collect water. It creates bitterness and unhealthy social relationships among women and their families. Many of them share this with their husbands when they return from work, and this aggravates the frustration and anxiety of male workers who come back home after 10 hours of work. It often leads to arguments and domestic violence.

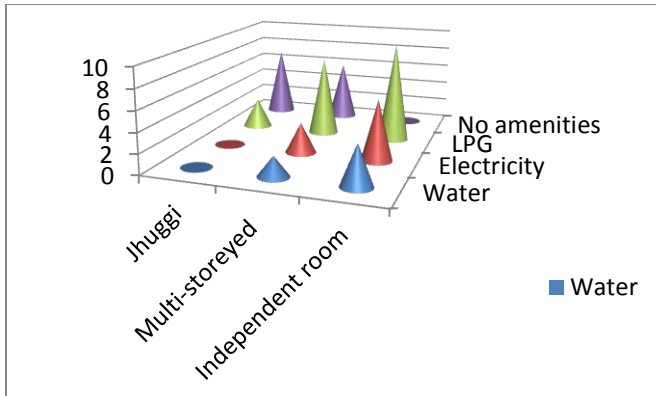


Figure 2 – Availability of Basic Amenities



For use of electricity workers depend on using it illegally, in many rooms, there are no meters installed, and they use them illegally by connecting wires from the main line across the buildings. There is a high degree of electricity theft and no payment for its usage. Some landlords have meters installed in the building, but they charge extra from the tenants; the charges are higher than government rates. Tenants do not complain because if they did, they would be asked to vacate the room, and also because they do not have much knowledge, so they are made to believe what the landlord tells them. Also, electricity supply to these areas is erratic, with power cuts lasting 8–10 hours being a regular feature. So it is those residing in jhuggis and multi-story buildings who have no access to these amenities.

Since workers do not have identity proof like voter's ID, residence proof or bank account, they are unable to take LPG (gas) connection for cooking food. They use kerosene stoves or buy LPG cylinders at exorbitant prices from local shops. They buy the cylinder at double the rate at which it is available, for example, one of the workers told that he paid Rs 1400 per month to buy LPG when it was available for Rs 700 only. The purchase of kerosene and LPG adds to monthly expenses. In the jhuggi, it was observed that some of the households used wood (collected from roads and garbage shops) to cook food.

### ***1.3 Availability of toilet and sewage facilities***

The availability of toilet and sewage conditions is pathetic due to the ignorance and neglect by the state and local authorities, ignorance by landlords, overcrowding, and congestion. In terms of the use of toilet facilities, not all households have separate facilities, and negligible households have a toilet constructed in the house. There are three ways to use toilets.

- i. **Shared toilets:** one toilet on one floor of a multi-story building used by 10 to 20 workers on a sharing basis. No cleanliness by anyone except for workers themselves remains dirty and stinky.

- ii. **Mobile toilets** are in the form of a vehicle that is provided by the private sector, like Sulabh International. It is located in one corner of the colony and is used by all residents.
- iii. **Separate toilets in the house:** Very few households, mainly those in independent room dwellings, have constructed separate toilets for use by the family, but it is a negligible number—around 12 households only.

The women face a lot of hardship in using shared public toilets and also suffer from many health-related problems because of using dirty toilets. There is no sewage system; drains are blocked with water and waste, and many of them also stink.

#### ***1.4 Access to health and education services***

In recent years, NCR-Delhi has witnessed several private clinics and several quack doctors with fake degrees. Such medical practitioners are able to do business in slums and residential colonies of migrant workers due to inability to access private medical services. For a normal illness like a cold, cough, or viral fever, extra workers go to these quacks. These fake doctors prescribe routine medicines like antibiotics, painkillers, paracetamol, etc. or put them on glucose and charge them from Rs 50 to Rs 200 for one visit, and they also have to buy medicines. When their illness is prolonged or someone suffers from a chronic disease, workers go to ESI dispensaries or government hospitals in Delhi. The women are without any medical attention; they continue to suffer pain until it becomes unbearable. Pregnant women go to quack doctors for prenatal checkups, but no one advises them about nutrition or medical care needed during pregnancy, at the time of childbirth, or after delivery. Most of them deliver the baby in the house with the support of old women, and only those with complications go to the private hospital. These hospitals fleece them of money and sometimes do not even provide proper medical treatment.

Women workers face another problem, and that is the risk to their children's health because of the absence of any state-supported childcare facilities. Most women leave their job when the child is born and return only after one year. However, a large number of women, because of financial constraints, have to go back to work, maybe after three or six months of delivery. There are a few daycare centres run by NGOs or by some women, but they charge fees and also do not provide milk or food to the children. Women find sending their small kids to daycare to be expensive, so most of them are left unattended under the care of younger siblings. The plight of women faced in terms of non-access to basic health services is evident from the following case study:

**Case study**

Reena Devi, wife of Mohan Singh works as a semi-skilled worker in a factory located in Udyog Vihar. She stays in Kapeshera with her mother-in-law, husband and 2-year-old daughter. When she was pregnant with her first child she started facing problems in the ninth month. She went to Dr Tyagi –a quack doctor- the board outside his small one-room clinic does not mention any registration number. He gave her some pain-killer and charges Rs 50, after four days she started to experience severe pain in her abdomen. Her husband took her to the private hospital in Gurgaon where she was given treatment for Rs 25000/-. He had to borrow money from his friends and relatives. The baby was delivered and she was discharged after 05days. However, when she returned home, she again started having pain. Her financial condition was bad with the newborn baby and loan, so she did not tell anyone nor did she go to any doctor. Even after two years, the pain arises irregularly and she continues to bear it.

***1.5. Constructions of hierarchy resulting from access to basic amenities***

In terms of access to basic facilities, a hierarchy of workers can be constructed. Skilled workers living in independent one/two rooms

earning above Rs7000 monthly wage Skilled workers living in multi-storeyed buildings earning above Rs 7000 monthly wage Semi-skilled workers living in independent one/two rooms earning above Rs 5000 monthly wage Semi-Skilled workers living in multi-storeyed buildings earning above Rs 5000 monthly wage Unskilled workers living in multi-storeyed earning above Rs 5000 monthly wage Unskilled workers living in 'jhuggi' earning above Rs 5000 monthly wage Unskilled workers living in 'jhuggi' earning below Rs 5000 monthly wage. This hierarchy structures the experience of urban inequality and impacts the ability to fulfill their aspirations.

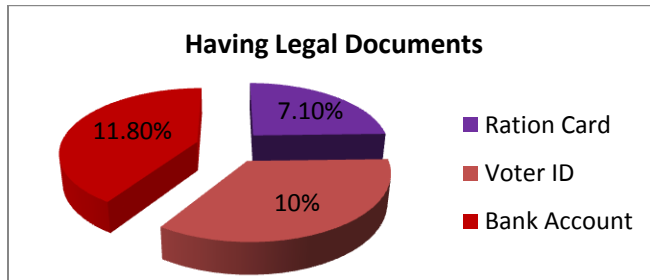
## ***2. Status & identity- Low-wage migrant workers as second-class citizens***

It is important to look at the status and identity of migrant workers because of the level of marginalization and exclusion from social, cultural and political life. This exclusion is the outcome of their vulnerable working conditions that puts them into the lower margins of the economy. Their poor economic status gets them labelled as second-class citizens by the local authorities and community. The two statuses merge to make their livelihood in the city- on their status as outsiders and second as poor people. They face massive problems in their day-to-day lives because of the lack of belongingness to the city.

Since low-wage migrants are not permanent inhabitants of urban space, they do not have the required documentary evidence to prove their identity as belonging to the city. Data has been collected on the number of migrant workers having access to the three legal documents which are required to have citizenship & hence access to facilities and financial support from the government.

1. The ration card is supposed to be the de facto identity proof, as it is the document required for all other purposes like opening a bank account, applying for voter ID, etc.

2. A voter ID is an important document because it not only grants the right to vote but also becomes proof of residence. The problem with getting the voter-id card is that most workers have registered with the state election commission and hence are not able to get another id.
3. A BPL card is a document required to get subsidized rations as well as access to other government welfare programs.



**Figure 3- Access to Legal Document**

Only 7.1% of workers have a ration card, 10% have voter ID and 11.8% have bank accounts. It means only 12% of workers have acquired one of the three documents and the remaining 71.1% are without any proof and thus remain undocumented and outside the legal and political system. Workers face several problems in acquiring these documents. Some of them are:

- a) ***Mobility of the worker to the village and back*** - One of the compulsory requirements for obtaining these documents is residence in the city for a long time, five years for obtaining a voter's ID. This is not possible as migrant workers are on the move to the village and back to the city. The causal nature of their job, accompanied by their attachment to land and relatives, makes them mobile, and hence they are unable to show residence and become ineligible.

- b) ***Lack of residence proof*** - Workers live in rented accommodation, mostly on a sharing basis, and their landlords refuse to give them residence proof. There are several reasons for not cooperating with low-wage migrants: exploitation, negative perception, and frequent landlord changes.
- c) ***Illiteracy and lack of awareness*** - The majority of low-wage migrants, as seen from the study's data, are not educated. They do not know the correct procedure for applying for legal documents. Further, there is a lack of awareness among workers about various schemes and programmes of the government and civil society. A large number of NGOs are working in Gurgaon for the welfare of migrant workers, and they can assist them in doing the necessary documentation. But workers are unaware of them and due to lack of time from busy work schedules do not take their help.
- d) ***Corruption and inefficiency of state government and local authority officials*** – Many officials in local authorities function with their biases and are unwilling to accept the documentation provided by some low-wage migrants. These officials take advantage of their illiteracy and ask for bribes from them so that their work is done.

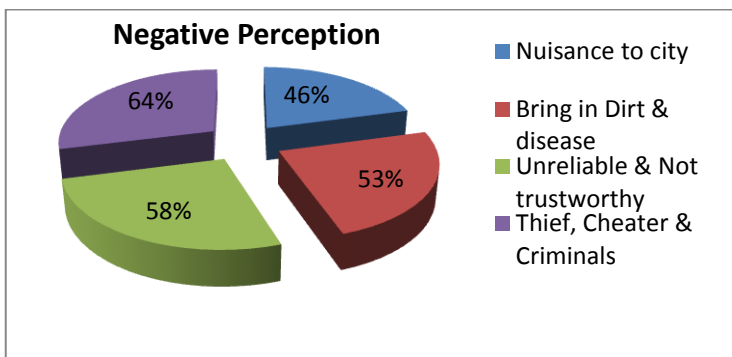
### ***2.1. Struggles of everyday life***

Low-wage migrants face several problems in their everyday lives because of their inability to prove their identity. Some of the problems faced by them were shared in the interview and FGDs.

- i. ***A feeling of hatred due to misconceptions***- The low-wage migrants are looked down upon by the local community and are considered outsiders and encroachers. The local community accuses them of eating up resources and being a burden on the state. They are also labelled as criminals and social miscreants

and accused of diluting the local culture. In Delhi NCR, more than 85% of the population is low-wage migrants; it is the working class or industrial workers who are considered low-wage migrants, while those in the middle and upper classes assume themselves to be the original inhabitants. So the culture of the city is that of the middle-upper class, and workers are seen as intruders who would add filth and dilute the culture.

Data were collected from 200 respondents (managers, supervisors, landlords, shopkeepers and neighbours) on what they think about migrant workers in the city. Most of the responses were in the form of negative perceptions as mentioned below:



**Figure 4: Negative Perception of Migrants**

- ii. *Discrimination faced on a regional basis and place of birth*—with a high percentage of workers from Bihar, the local inhabitants used the term "*Bihari*" as a slang language. Anyone seen as violating laws or rules or cheating people is called a "*Bihari*," irrespective of the place of birth. The term is used derogatorily as symbolic of all who come from Bihar as criminals and miscreants. Jat and Yadav's landlords refuse to keep workers from Bihar as tenants.

**Case study**

Ram Narayan is a tailor who works in the garment factory for the past five years. He narrated his experience of not being able to find rented accommodation in Gurgaon because he was from Bihar. Landlords refused to give rent on the ground that would keep it dirty. After three months of hunting for the room, he finally got a room for a rent of Rs 2000 by telling a lie that he was from West Bengal.

- iii. **Gender discrimination** - Urban space is gendered, and thus, when it comes to women low-wage migrants, they have to face double vulnerability: one on account of being migrant workers, and two because being a woman means suffering from violence in the domestic sphere as well as in public space. They are sexually assaulted by men in the locality, by officials, employers, and landlords. They suffer not only physical and verbal abuse but also emotional, psychological, and financial violence.

Due to extreme poverty and vulnerability, many migrant women are pushed into prostitution and the sex trade. presence of public and private institutions To have a holistic understanding of the living conditions of urban low-wage migrants' subjective experience of urban inequality, it is important to look at the main institutions that should, in reality, protect and prevent workers from exploitation but, in a neoliberal economy, they rather repress due to malfunctioning or conniving with TNCs. In this section, the three main institutions are examined, and it is found that, whereas the state as a public institution has failed to regulate the living conditions of workers who are neglected due to their lack of identity as citizens, civil society is playing a crucial role in empowering this marginalized and exploited lot.



### **2.3. Access and organization of urban space**

In the above section, the data, figures, and narratives suggest that workers have no access to basic facilities, and no institution, public or private, has been of much help to them. In this section, I look into the denial of urban space in terms of exclusion from plans and development programs. Here, the urban space is organized at two levels:

i. ***The bipolar division between local and low-wage migrants-*** As stated earlier, it is only the working class that is identified as low-wage migrants, though more than 90% of the population are low-wage migrants. Those working as engineers, bureaucrats, teachers, and other similar well-paid occupations assume themselves to be locals or original inhabitants, and this assumption is part of the design and planning of the city. The workers are not only labelled as low-wage migrants but are given the identity of outsiders and are therefore fit to be located on the periphery. They not only work under precarious conditions but also live a life of denial and neglect. This bipolar distinction is part of the geographical map of the city, where you see the overcrowded, congested workers' residences on the border, and as you move towards the centre, images of high-rising glass buildings, malls, and multiplexes become common. The malls and multiplexes are points of consumption in the capitalist system of production. The urban space is designed according to the taste and needs of middle-class consumers, who are at the forefront of spreading neo-liberal urbanism. This has led to the "politics of forgetting the marginalized groups" (Fernandez, 2004).

ii. ***The class division between the middle class and the working class-*** The geographical division gets manifested in the economic division between the middle class and the working class, and the city is accordingly planned and organized. Here we see that there is not

only an inter-class division but also an intra-class divide based on working in different types of factories and earning different incomes.

The entire process of urbanization in India has been progressing in a manner to allow the easy entry of a neo-liberal economy where the state becomes only a symbolic institution and loses its functional power. At the beginning of industrialization, with the setting up of urban areas, cities were regarded as melting pots where differences and inequality sprang up. But in modern cities, traditional forms of inequality based on caste, class, and gender have been strengthened by new forms specifically based on economic and cultural differences.

#### ***2.4. Social life of low wage migrants in the city***

The social life in the residences of the workers is nonexistent because workers do not have time after work—regular plus overtime—to involve any form of social interaction. Women who do not work are seen sitting in groups and chatting. There is no park or community centre because, as stated above, it is an unauthorized area and outside of any state-directed planning. The places where workers are seen interacting are the tea stalls outside the factory when they move out during lunch or at the end of the day. The other places are the local market and streets. The most important point and place of interaction are when workers across sectors and industries get together at a time of protest or strike. The workers come to the city with a lot of hopes for improving their lifestyle and fulfilling their aspirations. However, they fail to do so, and often there is a backlash; rather than improving living standards, there is deterioration, due to which they are compelled to forget their aspirations.

### ***3. Functioning of public and private Institutions***

To have a holistic understanding of the living conditions of low wage migrant worker's experience of urban inequality, it is important to

look at the role of State that should, in reality, protect and prevent workers from exploitation, but in a neoliberal economy, they rather repress the precarious conditions of migrants either due to malfunctioning or conniving with TNCs. In recent years, the plights of workers have further deteriorated because they are not on the development agenda of neoliberal State. The ambiguity of the State is explained by its absence, and this again reflects the paradox of the city. Though it is present in the form of labour inspectors, who are state officials assigned with the task of regulating the working conditions in the factories, but it becomes invisible when it comes to protecting and ensuring decent living conditions.

Scholars have argued that the planning of the city is in line with the history of its genesis, and thus a dominant role is played by the private sector (Nail 2015). The impunity of the State has led to the development of two distinct gated communities. On one side is the community of workers living a decaying and degrading life on the periphery, and on the other hand is the community of the urban middle class living in the centre, rising and urbanizing. In the division of geographical space, only one side is romanticized in the media, and the other side remains completely invisible, hiding the toils of the workers who help in making the millennium city.

### ***3.1. Market and civil society***

The market is an important institution as it reflects the living standards of the people as well as their purchasing power. It also becomes a relevant junction to understand the intersection of economy and social structure. In urban areas that cater to both locals and low-wage migrants, there are two types of markets: the local market and the posh market. The former stocks goods and utilities for the consumption of residents. There are shops selling groceries, clothes, fruits and vegetables, and so on. There are many shops selling chicken, meat, and fish because it is one of the preferred foods

eaten by a large population of the working class, mostly immigrants. These shops, which cater to the workers, are open late in the night as most of the workers return home only after 9 p.m. In contrast to these local shops, there are a large number of markets catering to the middle and upper classes of the adjoining area. The term used by workers in everyday language for these markets is "posh market" because they are meant only for rich people.

Due to the worsening of the civic conditions and the presence of inhuman treatment to the workers, a large number of civil societies sprang up in the last ten years. There are several INGOs, NGOs, collective groups, research organizations, etc. working with workers and making attempts to improve both the living and working conditions. The rise of these organizations is symptomatic of the state retreating from its welfare activities and aligning with TNCs. The review of the functioning of some of these organizations indicates that though much is being done to improve the conditions of the workers, not much has been done. It is interesting to mention here the dual nature of privatization in India- both as a protector and working for welfare (civil society) and as exploiters (TNCs & private firms).

A plethora of organisations and individuals working towards the improvement of conditions have cropped up in NCR-Delhi. However, not much has changed over the past few years. According to Tathagata Chatterjee (2013), one of the reasons for the failure of civil society is the growing nexus between middle-class consumers, politicians, and business houses in their vision to develop a fully urbanised modern city. Though these groups work to improve the worker's life, their ultimate goal is to design the urban space according to models of development. As a result, the working class has not been able to evolve trust in civil society, and they continue to look upon the state as the saviour. It is the middle class that turns towards civil society, as it has become disenchanted with vote-bank politics and looks out for a non-political path for development.

It is a sad story that despite a plethora of organizations and individuals working towards the improvement of the conditions, not much has changed over the past few years. According to Tathagata Chatterjee (2015), one of the reasons for the failure of civil society is the growing nexus between middle-class consumers, politicians, and business houses in their vision to develop a fully urbanized modern city. Though these groups work to improve the worker's life, their ultimate goal is to design the urban space according to models of development. As a result, the working class has not been able to evolve the trust of civil society, and they continue to look upon the state as the saviour. It is the middle class that turns towards civil society, as it has become disenchanted with vote-bank politics and looks out for a non-political path for development.

## **Conclusion**

From the above analysis, it can be said that the living and working conditions of migrants living on the margins of cities are like the "chicken or egg" problem; in other words, it is difficult to determine the sequence of the vulnerable position: are they vulnerable because they are migrants, or are they migrants because of vulnerability? Low-wage migrants move to urban spaces like NCR-Delhi with the aspirations to earn and improve their standard of living, however living their lives on the margin and exclude from urban space their aspirations remain unfulfilled. "Freedom, camaraderie, and possibility" (Sethi 2012) become utopian for thousands of low-wage migrants living in and making cities. The COVID-19 crisis upended the lives of low-wage migrants in the NCR and showcased to the world the widespread institutional disparities and inequality in which they continue to survive.

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