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Story Idea:

SUBJECT: FORCED MIGRATION AND DALITS: A CASE STUDY OF DELHI, NOIDA AND WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH

As a journalist I have been on the ground covering the forced migrations of tens of thousands of unorganized migrant workers from Delhi, especially to the Hindi heartland. The infinite injustice which they have suffered needs more intensive, graphic and meticulous documentation. Therefore, this project will focus on their daily struggle, occupational hazards, the political economy and sociology of their everyday life, the idea of 'free labour', working class and trade union rights, and their identity and social existence in a neo-liberal democracy.

Since almost 93 per cent of the work force in India is in the informal sector with virtually no rights, and almost half of them are Dalits and women, this study will focus on Dalits, especially in the metropolis of Delhi, the special economic zone of elite and industrial Noida, and certain flourishing towns and rural areas in western UP in the vicinity of Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur and Meerut.

Delhi: Almost 60 per cent of the working population in the capital of India comprise workers, mostly from UP and Bihar. They also constitute the vote bank of the Aam Aadmi Party, since significant work has been done in the educational and health sector by the AAP government in Delhi for the poor. The study will focus on the demographic and sociological shifts in two areas: Northeast Delhi which witnessed organized killings of mostly Muslims in recent times, and Trilokpuri in East Delhi, which had witnessed the massacre of Sikhs in 1984.

I have reported on both these riots as a journalist, and have also worked in the relief camps. The study will also focus on the fabric of social harmony, the cultural paradigms of migration, and the bitter fissures which have been created after the killings.

Noida: Hidden within super expressways and residential areas of the rich, there is a small ghetto called the Harijan Basti (Ambedkar Vihar) in Noida. As a chief minister, Mayawati had created this enclave for the Dalits. Currently, the 'basti' is a typical urban village, with a mix of people from the cow belt, and significantly, a huge population of Bengalis who work as domestic servants, pull rickshaws, sell vegetables, fish and chicken, and also have 'exclusive' shops selling Bengali delicacies, including 'mishti doi', Jharna ghee and Bengali sweets. Most of the Bengalis have arrived from Malda and have community relationships. Others are Indian citizens with roots in Bangladesh, or part of their family reside in that country. Interestingly, most of the Bengalis are from the Scheduled Castes. One of

the biggest festivals they celebrate is a three day collective celebration of the cult of Chaitanya, with dance and musical troupes from Bengal performing till the wee hours of the morning.

Western UP: This prosperous green revolution belt has always been a secular and pluralist terrain, with the population of the dominant agricultural communities among the Jats and Muslims, along with landless Dalits, living in harmony. Before the 2014 elections, riots were social engineered here, in a political zone where the BJP never had any electoral presence, this being a belt ruled by the Charan Singh phenomena. However, the BJP won heavily after it succeeded in isolating the Muslims amidst killings and communal polarization, including the fake propaganda of 'love jehad'. The state of Dalits, post the 2014 election and the communal fissures, will be the key area of study, and their economic and social relations with the other communities in a changed political scenario. This is also the area of a rising Bhim Army and Dalit assertion, especially in the area of education. I have reported on this area since many years, and this is also the area where I spent my childhood.

In conclusion, the study will take three different points of geographical reference to understand the phenomena of migration with Dalits in perspective, focusing also on women and the aspiring young, who are not ready to be oppressed any more by the dominant castes, or the upper caste bureaucracy and police. This will therefore also enter the political unconscious of aspirations of the subaltern castes.