

Crisis, Vulnerabilities and Multiple Subjectivities: A Case Study of Migrant Labour in Delhi

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Abstract

The paper looks at the population of low caste urban poor in a settlement named Kusumpur Pahadi in South Delhi. More specifically, I focus on the daily wage migrant laborers and their experiences of different kinds of crises, such as the pandemic and climate-induced adverse changes such as heatwaves. The paper asks questions like whether the state and central governments met their expectations or not, in terms of the assistance they needed to tide over the crisis. The paper also documents the ingeniousness and the various new strategies invented by this segment of urban poor to cope and survive.

The above questions are addressed with the help of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and group interviews conducted across 60 residents of Kusumpur Pahadi settlement, who vary in terms of caste, class, income, gender, age, and the state they migrated from. The paper concludes by noting the presence of a minimal form of governmentality, that practically amounts to abandonment by the state. The paper traces a heterogeneity in the population under study, not only in terms of their identities and perspectives but also with regard to their multiple ways of politics and their manner of networking with the local actors, parties, and associations—sometimes as individuals, and at other times as collectives under different and changing identities. This illustrates the role of multiple subjectivities operating among the population.

Keywords: - Migrant labor, Beldari, Pandemic, Heatwave, Dihari Majdoor, Subjectivity, Governmentality, Vulnerability, Political Society, Trade unions, Precarity.

History and Growth of the settlement

Most of the old residents of Kusumpur Pahadi settlement trace its origin to the late 1970s. They say there was nothing except dense forests of the Aravalli mountains with ridges, stones, and *Kikad* trees. The presence of large rocks made it appropriate for digging up the place for construction material. It made the place economically significant and set off a trade of building materials with places like Badarpur. The activities involved breaking up big rocks from the mountains by using dynamite, which turned them into smaller stones (*Rhode*). As an elderly shopkeeper who migrated back then from Haryana informed, the

materials thus converted, such as stones, rocks, *kankad*, and soil were transported to different places. Such production/construction activities provided the early avenues to start businesses in the area, beginning with a few tea stalls. These stalls were used by construction laborers, contractors, drivers, and others who visited the place. These tea stall owners are now the biggest shopkeepers in the settlement, with shops of both retail and wholesale facilities. The construction process also attracted labourers from parts of Rajasthan, who belong to the Od, Raigar, Khatik, and Bhairwa caste groups, and some migrants (Balmiki, Khatik) of Haryana.

Another old story about the growth of the settlement comes from the Gujjar community. Although they admit the arrival of labourers from Rajasthan as early settlers, they also claim that they are the earliest settlers of the place. They were engaged in cattle rearing and milk business as these uninhabited open fields were suitable for grazing and pasture (see image 1). However, despite the advantage of grazing lands, they left the place with the rapid growth of population and especially the low caste since the late 1990s, who they referred as 'Bhangi' or 'uncivilized'. Many moved to other places except 5-7 families.



(Image-1 depicts the open area, which is generally used by cattle and animals for Grazing.)

An interesting history came up in the ten in-depth interviews with elder residents of the settlement who have been around for the last 40 years. According to them, the place had no facilities of water, electricity, road, shops, and bazaars in the settlement, which was largely a barren area. The residents had to go to the CBI colony in Vasant Vihar in front of the Priya cinema (now PVR), Indirapuram, and Jharkhand Bhawan (no less than 2 km from the settlement) to get water.¹ Some of the youths of the settlement illegally hooked into electricity connections from the Air India colony.² Those who accessed such connections provided other residents with the same, against a sum of money like 50 rupees. This practice also gave rise to what residents described as the electricity mafia. After a certain period, private contractors/*thekedar* provided regular electricity supply. However, since 2000, the locally elected MLA arranged for permanent electricity. Gradually, shops and pucca houses came up in the settlement, with the early tea stall owners running the shops, and frequent fires in the jhuggis providing the main reason to convert to brick and cement buildings.

Significantly, the local leaders and older residents who have been Pradhan and agents of different political parties, such as Sunahari Lal, Anup Pradhan, Manilal, and Suresh, informed that this settlement was originally known as a village. An elected representative Satya Prakash Rana got it notified as a slum in the year 1994, so that it gets civic amenities and other developments extended to slums, which were beyond the claims of a Gram Sabha at that point. Most of the residents were, however, not aware of this shift and change. Later when the Urban development department in the 2000s shifted its authority to the DDA, the latter started speculating about demolitions and evictions in the area. Consequently, various residents and local shopkeepers took to the court filing cases to restore the village status, which is still ongoing. They provided multiple pieces of evidence like Khasra³ (image 2) of the village, minutes of gram sabha meetings, and documents that referred to the settlement as village, with similar documents still in the possession of some of the older residents.

¹ This settlement is surrounded by these locations within a radius of 2km other than the Jharkhand Bhawan there is also a Mizoram Bhawan.

² Air India colony is situated just adjacent to the north side of the settlement. It is basically a government residential locality that houses those families whose members are employed in the service of Air India.

³ . It is a Persian term, which means the plot number or survey number is given to a particular piece of land in villages. The document states the settlement as a village and still with Sunahari Lal .

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खतोनी / KHATONI

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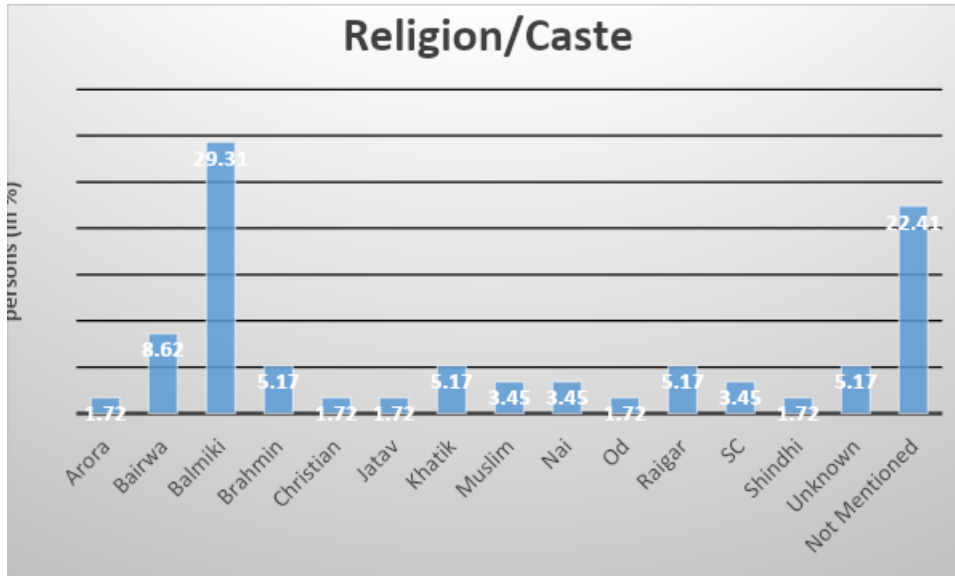
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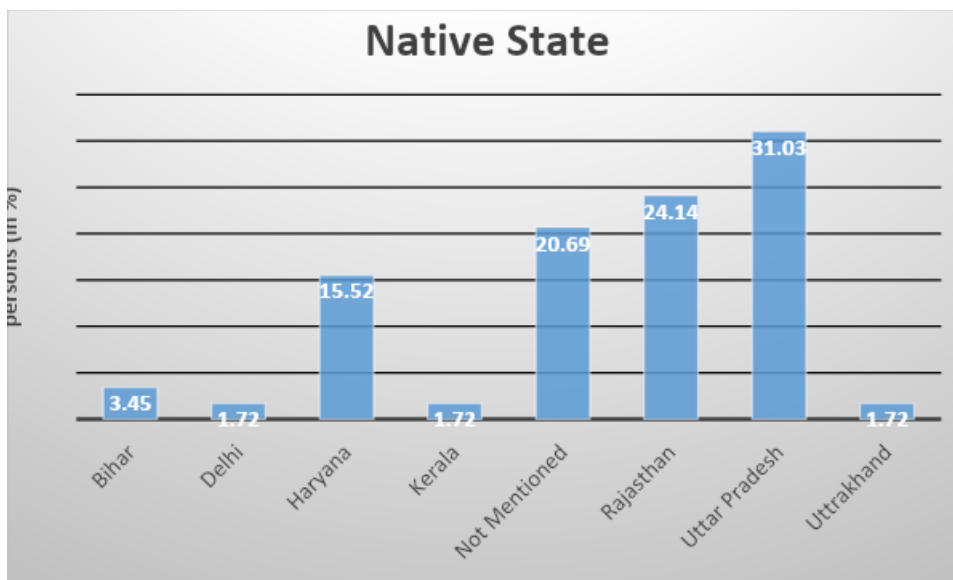
(Image-2 shows the Khasra, the residents were given when they bought the land)

A current picture of the settlement

The settlement houses, according to the residents, approximately 1 lakh population, and is divided into 5 different Blocks A, B, C, D, and E. Migrants belonging to UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Haryana account for the major share of the total population, while in other parts of the settlement houses a significant number of people from Kerala, Tamil Nādu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, MP, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, with very few from Nepal as well (Table 1 depicts). It is thus extremely heterogeneous in terms of regional and linguistic identities. In terms of caste, however, most of them are low caste Dalits, such as Valmiki, Khatik, Bairwa, Raigar, Od, Koli, and Ravidas, with very rare instances of upper caste Pandits, Arora (Punjab), Shindi, and 5-6 families of Gujjars. Earlier the Blocks were ghettoized in terms of caste and region, but with the rapid increase in the population, no complete segregation of blocks could be sustained on a caste and region basis. Rather it has the mixed presence of population from different castes and regions within the same block.



(Graph-1 shows presence of multiple caste, religion, and castewise distribution in percentage)



(Table 2 shows state-wise population distribution in percentage)

The present settlement has no regular supply of water. There are only two major sources of water i.e., water tanker and Borewell, with around 15 borewells and 7 DUSIB (Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board) toilet facilities.⁴ There is an open space within the settlement which has one mohalla clinic, one ASHA dispensary, and around 15 private clinics, one community hall, and a Delhi government-run library and Aganwadi center. The present settlement witnesses a large number of shops throughout the major roads in the settlement with the

⁴ DUSIB regulates and functions under the control of the GOVT. of NCT of Delhi. It functions through the latest act, DUSIB Act, 2010. This act empowers to notify areas such as slums where services are missing and improve. Apart from this it also looks after the civic amenities of the JJ cluster.

presence of the largest number of around 20-25 meat shops and medical shops, followed by 15-20 vegetable stalls and seasonal food stalls.

The settlement also has a few 2 gymnasiums, owned by families of the Valmiki community and numerous temples. There are around 10 major ones for each community, specific to their castes, such as 1 temple for the Khatik community, 3 for the Valmiki groups, 1 temple known as Madrasi Mandir located near those populations who belong to Tamil Nādu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh and adjoining regions, and one each for Raigar and Bairwa community. Though temples exist for a specific community, everyone in the settlement or of that locality can go and worship there. They also have their own deities to worship, for instance, the Rajasthani worship Baba Ramdev and Balmikis of UP and Haryana worship Ravidas, and their *isht-Devi such* as ‘Papdadevi’. These community-specific temples often become centers of their religious and cultural activities, such as marriage ceremonies other than prominent festivals Like Holi, Diwali, and Dussehra. Recently, such temples have also arranged facilities for those going on *Kawad* yatra, indicating the adoption of larger Hindu practices. The temples are run through collective funding, particularly from their communities and other voluntary contributions.

Given that the majority of the settlement houses labouring populations, working in the informal sector, trade unions such as AICTU, CITU, and left parties/organizations such as AIDWA, and AIPWA are also fairly active here.⁵ There are community associations such as the *Kusumpur Ekta Manch*, which is fighting for regaining the status of the village for Kusumpur Pahadi, and the *Mahila Samiti*, that try to mobilize the residents against the anti-labour laws, inform them about their rights at the workplace, and also facilitate in accessing government resources and welfare schemes such as Rations and various pensions schemes. These associations have played a big role in accessing and initiating facilities of rations and Tankers. Other than these political associations and groups, there are some NGOs working, like Rotary club, Vikas Samiti, and alike.

The Distress during the COVID pandemic

The majority of the settlements have migrant populations who stay as rentees. Many of them, particularly, those who came in the last 5-10 years had to return to their home state, as restrictions in the lockdown and the resultant loss of work caused heavy distress. Since they could not afford to continue their stay without

⁵ The full form of AICTU is All India Central Council Trade Union. It is trade union wing of CPI-ML. CITU is centre of India trade unions part of CPIM. Kusumpur Ekta Manch is joint Programme and initiative by the residents to fight for village status.

money for food and rent a majority of them returned to their villages. Many of these migrants had their own shops like barber shops, and food stalls which were closed down by the order of local police, leaving them with no alternative but to leave for home. This in turn had serious effect on the economy of those who thought of staying on in the settlement with different shops in their own jhuggis. Since an estimated population of 10,000 went back, those who stayed on could not earn as much with a smaller number of customer base. Thus many shops were either shut down or have been on permanently decline, with their earnings steadily going down since the population that left found no incentive to return.

The impact of the pandemic was also felt by those who owned their jhuggis. The earnings from rent was earlier complimented with jobs which they lost in the pandemic. These included mostly women like Savitri Devi, Sushma, Munni and others like them who work as sweepers and caretakers in Kothis (apartments). Among my respondents there was Shushma Devi, who used to work in a school as sanitation worker. She had to leave as the school was closed in the pandemic. She has been looking for jobs since two years now and even went back to her old school but they refused to absorb her. A majority of women residents, like Shusheela Devi, and Anita, who work as sweepers and guards in schools, colleges, and malls, have similar stories. Most residents said that they did not get any help from their employers during the pandemic where they used to work, and neither did they take proper precautions. Having lost their livelihoods, some of these residents started putting up stalls of petty retail items within the settlement to make a living. Below is a chart showing the range of occupations of the population in the settlement.

Occupation	Percent
Unemployed	10.34
Labour/Worker	44.83
Multiple Job	12.07
Shopkeepers/Grocery Shopkeepers	8.62
Lost job during Covid	3.44
Vendors/ Small Shopkeepers including vegetable sellers	18.97
Others	5.17
Total	100

(Table -1 shows occupational segregation in percentage)

Those who work as laborers in construction sites such as *Dihari* Majdoor, especially from the Raigar caste, who perform *beldari*, have similar narratives of suffering in the post-lockdown days due to massive unemployment. Consequently, they must work now at very meagre wages. While they earned around 800 rupees per day before the pandemic, they are now forced to do the

same work for about 300-500 rupees per day. If we take the inflation into account, the drastic decline in their real income is not too difficult to imagine.

Local and Central Government assistance

The residents were getting the support of rations from the Delhi government during the pandemic and their ration was doubled by the central government for a limited period. The local AAP volunteers and agents also talked about distributing food items as well as masks and gloves but the crisis was too serious for such assistance to mitigate the distress. The residents were expecting some direct cash benefits as announced by both the state and the center-level state. But according to them, nothing tangible was delivered. However, one of the residents, a local activist Soniya Ji (AIDWA), informed that those with zero bank balance accounts did receive 300 rupees, although only for 3 months.⁶ According to the local clinics, doctors as well as residents, the settlement did not witness a massive covid outbreak and the Mohalla clinic was functional and working more than the normal times as directed by the CM Kejriwal for general health-related issues.

Residents of the settlement say that there has been a sharp rise in country liquor consumption among the residents since the lockdown. As unemployed men took to drinking to cope with their frustration, another section saw this as an opportunity to make a living and opened up *thekas* of liquor in the area.

The impact of Heatwaves: Problems and coping mechanisms

The impact of Climate change has become apparent in recent years, especially among the vulnerable and distressed sections. One of the recent examples of climate-induced adverse changes, especially in north India, is the phenomenon of heatwaves. The recently recorded steady temperatures in north India have been more than 40-degree celsius. Due to crowded population, more industries, and high energy use and emissions of pollution, mega cities like Delhi are suffering immensely. The effects are very disturbing and cause discomfort of all kinds to populations. However, some can still afford the luxury of modern equipment like a Freezer, AC, and advanced cooler. There are many who cannot afford these facilities. The crisis of heatwaves differs in the scale of its impact given the inequalities arising out of the varied cast, classes, income, and locations. Where the higher class, middle class, and even to some extent lower

⁶ All India Democratic Women's Association, a women's wing of CPIM is present in the settlement. it looks after the rights and welfare of the poor residents.

class populations have uncomfortable experience during the summer, they find an opportunity to spend vacations in hill stations. But those living in the margins and ghettoized location in precarious conditions, working outdoors as daily wage laborers, like van/rickshaw pullers, drivers, sanitation workers, construction site workers face altogether a different experience and range of issues (Baviskar, 2022).

There are some emerging works on the climate issues and specifically on the heatwaves such as 'The Social Experience of Heat ' by Baviskar and 'Vulnerability assessment of urban expansion and modeling green spaces to build heatwaves risk resiliency in Karachi' by Arshad, which discusses the larger problems and experiences of a city and region. However, so far most of the existing literature does not talk about it as an economic crisis for certain sections nor document the differing effects of such a crisis at different socio-economic levels.

The responses from my fieldwork show that it creates more vulnerabilities, and increases the level of exploitation, and distress among the migrant labor, specifically daily wage earners living in ghettoized slums. It has not only affected their economy by restricting their work opportunities but also forced the rentee migrants to return home. Those residents who own their jhuggis and stayed on the face a huge crisis of civic amenities, especially the crisis of water, with various related health issues, like Diarrhoea, Typhoid, and skin diseases among the children, and issues of Blood pressure, Epilepsy, and suffocation among the elders. In a nutshell, the heatwave experience of the urban poor does indicate that it would be a worthwhile question to figure out how it impacts their politics.

Problems and challenges

The houses in settlements such as Kusumpur are not really well built and properly planned. Most of the houses are cemented and bricked but they lack sufficient windows and ventilation. The thickness of the walls is also not in keeping with the extremities of the weather and with low-quality materials used to build them. There are around 100 houses that are not even *pucca*, whose floors are still not cemented with no proper roofs. These settlements have grown on their own with no special care and therefore are not climate-friendly. Given the ghettoization and closely built houses with a very dense population, basic appliances such as fans, cooler, and even AC are not sufficient to relieve them. Given the average size of the room of 70 sq. meters, which houses around 3-5 people on average, it is natural to feel uneasy in extreme hot conditions. The way out is even worse, that involves stepping outdoors. Due to the fear of exceeding the electricity meter above 2 units, they use electrical appliances very judiciously and, in many cases, people avoid using AC which a few of them

sometimes receive from their employers' houses where they work as sweeper and caretaker.

Water Crisis

The estimate of population in Kusumpur varies widely. While the 2011 census mentions 17,000, the Rotary Club, an NGO working in the settlement through a project titled 'Kusumpur Pahari integrated development project, mentions more than 2 lakh migrant families, while the local AAP volunteers and officials put it at around nearly 1 lakh. A Rajasthani migrant worker named Rajendra who belongs to the Bairwa community argues that this settlement votes in large numbers but remains deprived of basic facilities like water and roads. Talking to the residents in the months of May and June, when the heat was at a peak, the crisis and shortage of water was too evident to overlook.

There are only two sources of water in the settlement. These are water tankers which supply drinking water through tankers from Delhi Jal Board (see image 4) and the other is Borewell at every 1 KM distance. The Borewell provides very hard and salty water which is of no use other than cleaning houses and toilets. But given the scarcity of water, the residents have to use it for all kinds of purpose other than drinking and cooking. There are around 15 borewells among which most do not work due to a sharp decline in water level in the summers. Therefore, most of the residents depend on the water tanker which comes every day but the residents can use it on a rotation basis. Each resident receives their quota of water i.e. around 300-500 litres per week said a local AAP volunteer. There are around 20 households that depend on a single tanker and around 10-15 tanker arrives on a daily basis. Their daily use involves drinking and cooking while washing, cleaning, and other uses depend on borewell water. During the summer their daily requirement increases by double as many of them bathe multiple times, wash cloth frequently, and especially need water for the cooler. Most of the families in the locality use a cooler which needs around 50 litres of water a day. Using borewell water can make the cooler non-functional, said a resident, because of the hardness of the water. The water crisis is thus very acute and the tankers start coming early in the morning when everyone gets busy storing water. As per my observation, water storage is a very difficult task in the settlement for various reasons. Firstly, there is no fixed time for the tanker to arrive which causes uncertainty in daily routine. In case it arrives late in the morning many get delayed in their work. Sometimes the residents have to wait the whole day skipping other important work. This process also engages children as the elderly Sunita pointed out to me how children ranging from 8 to 18 keep running after the tanker and queue at the borewell. Borewells and Tankers are only available on the main road used to access the settlement. This makes it difficult for those living inside the settlement to access them (see image 5). The local AAP volunteer, Akash,

involved in managing water tankers, says, a lot of water gets wasted in the frantic storage process (see image 4).



(Image-4 Residents storing their quota of water from the water tanker)

Moreover, the residents are told the water is free. But the driver of the tanker charges around 100 rupees and denies water if residents are unable to pay. Jyoti Gomes, an elderly woman from West Bengal, told me how she was denied water twice since she could not pay after losing her job in the pandemic. In addition to this, there is preferential treatment for those associated with parties and dominant figures in the locality who receive water without restrictions. On various occasions, there has been a spate of conflicts like verbal abuse, and heated arguments among the residents owing to the differential water distribution.



(Image-5 How residents carry the water to their home from the main road)

Since water is one of the major issues of the settlement, before every election, be it the local, Vidhan Sabha, or parliamentary, leaders and parties promise to

provide regular supply of water which is never fulfilled. Before the last elections poll, AAP started the work with pipes getting laid but status quo returned after the elections. Residents are reportedly told since the settlement is based on high land it is difficult to provide supply water through pipelines. But the question arises how does the Air India colony, which is situated at the same elevation in the same area, have regular water supply facilities?

Toilet and Sewer line Problem

Only a very few residents have the facilities of their own toilets which also causes more problems than relief due to lack of water. With no proper sewer or discharge facilities they have to throw out the waste by themselves which causes diseases in the summers. Only 3 are functional out of the 7 DUSIB toilets, but those using them have to carry their own water. The residents use it for bathing, washing, and defecation purposes.

There is no proper drainage system in the settlement. Most of the sewer lines are open and as a result, various germs, insects, and flies spread around. Moreover, in the summer and during heat waves it smells throughout the area which causes illness and stench. It becomes even worse in the rainy season when the water overflows on the road. The improper planning causes drain water to often move inside their houses.

Due to no MCD election for the past few months, there is no functioning councillor at the moment. Hence, sanitation workers are not working due to lack of supervision, and this results in the massive storage of waste.

Illness

In-depth interviews were conducted with 5 doctors of Kusumpur, including 2 from the Mohalla clinic, and 3 private clinics, to know the heat waves' impact on the health of the residents. Responses revealed various kind of illness common among the residents, especially the children, like Fever, loose motions, vomiting, Diarrhoea, cough & cold, various skin problems *fode, funsi*, boils and rashes, stomach ache, as well as severe Typhoid and Scabies. According to the doctors, the main reason for such diseases is the consumption of unhygienic water, general unhygienic conditions, lack of nutrition, and proper diet. Dr. Chandrashekar highlighted that due to financial constraints the patients also miss some important medicines which cause the diseases to become severe.

Among elders, due to heat waves, their issues of BP get severe, they continuously get heatstroke and also get fits and suffer from suffocation. Moreover, they get tired early in summer in comparison to winter.

For mild health issues, the residents are dependent mostly on the Mohalla clinic, Asha dispensaries, local clinics, and medical shops, and for severe health crises like Dengue, Typhoid, fungus in the body, Diabetes, and BP-related issues they go to Safdarjung and Moti Bagh hospital.

Some of the inhabitants who are more vulnerable and deprived also keep animals to meet their livelihood needs. One finds pigs with the Valmiki community, others have hens, goats, ducks, and especially donkeys for carrying loads against money. Only the Gujjar community keeps cattle with 10-15 of them in each family's shed. Their milk is directly sold to sweet shops. Due to the massive heatwave, the pigs and hens frequently die and 80% of the pigs in the settlement have died so far. The recent development of enclosing the forest areas by a wall (built by the current MP, Ramesh Biduri, according to residents) has further discouraged them from keeping domestic animals. The new wall restricts the animals from accessing the open field for grazing (see image 6). This has added to their difficulties since they supplemented their earnings through trading animals. For example, depending on the size they sell the pigs at 800, 1000, and 1400 rupees. The hens are ducks and are used for especially eggs and sometimes meat. The goats are traded with mutton shops for between 600 and 1200 rupees. The loss in rearing these animals thus directly impacts their livelihood.



(Image-6: The wall which is built by the MP to separate the locality and enclose the forest areas)

Food Habits

One common strategy used by the residents to cope with the heat is to decrease their food intake and increase their water consumption in the summer. The residents prefer light food that are less spicy and simple, such as *Dal-Chawal*, and using curd and *chhach* in their diet. They also prefer green vegetables like *Torai*, and *Ghiya*, as they cannot afford *Lauki*, and *baigan* given the high prices. A vegetable seller named Laal Mohammad who is a migrant from Faizabad, UP, informed me during an interview that no vegetable is selling for less than 30 rupees/kg and there are some like tomatoes that cost 80 rupees per kg. Even when the residents want to improve their food habits given the onslaught of inflation they cannot afford it with their meagre earnings. Similarly, the prices of fruits are also very high with bad quality of supply reaching the settlement. The residents prefer to have cucumber, watermelon, and mango and include these in the salad in their diet. But according to the interviews conducted, only 10-15 respondents out of 60 were found to take fruits every week. The rest took them rarely, at most twice a month. Thus, their usual food during the summer is Dal, Chawal, Roti, and low-cost vegetables only. A migrant from Haryana was also found using raw mangos as vegetable to protect from heatwaves. It was a local practice in her village. Some residents also tried to eat freshly cooked food, unlike in the winter to avoid illness. They said they learnt some of these good habits from their employers.

A large number depends on *Sattu* (especially the migrants of Bihar), *Nimbu paani*, *curd*, *Chaach*, cold water, and sometimes orange and *mausambi* juice to protect themselves from the heatwaves.

The rise in Electricity Bill

Despite there being subsidies on electricity bills by the Delhi state government. Around 30 residents out of 60 respondents admitted having to pay electricity bills ranging between 700 to 2000 rupees per month in the summers while nothing during the winter and rainy season of the year. Many residents protect themselves from the heat with the help of a basic Fan and Cooler only, and there are very few who use AC. Most residents get these appliances from places where they work as sweepers, housekeepers, and guards. The fear of high electricity bills always prevents them from using these gadgets for a longer duration than when they are absolutely essential.

Coping and protecting mechanisms

Given the vulnerability, the heatwave tends to push these people into more precarity. There are still no proper mechanisms to resist these emerging climate-

induced crises in India. While most residents of this settlement think this phenomenon is purely natural and the government cannot be held responsible. In fact, residents who majorly suffered in the recent pandemic argue that '*karona se to theek-i hai na garmi*'. They meant to say that at least they were able to earn something in the absence of the pandemic.

The most common method they use is to protect themselves through cloth by covering themselves properly. Women who work in apartments as sweepers and construction laborers use wet cloth while returning from work. At home they depend on electric appliances like fans and cooler. But the frequency of electricity cuts is also high during the summer. Generally, it goes off for an hour once or twice a week. But in summers, the residents inform, it goes off for more than twice a day and no less than for an hour, which forces them to step outdoors most of the time.

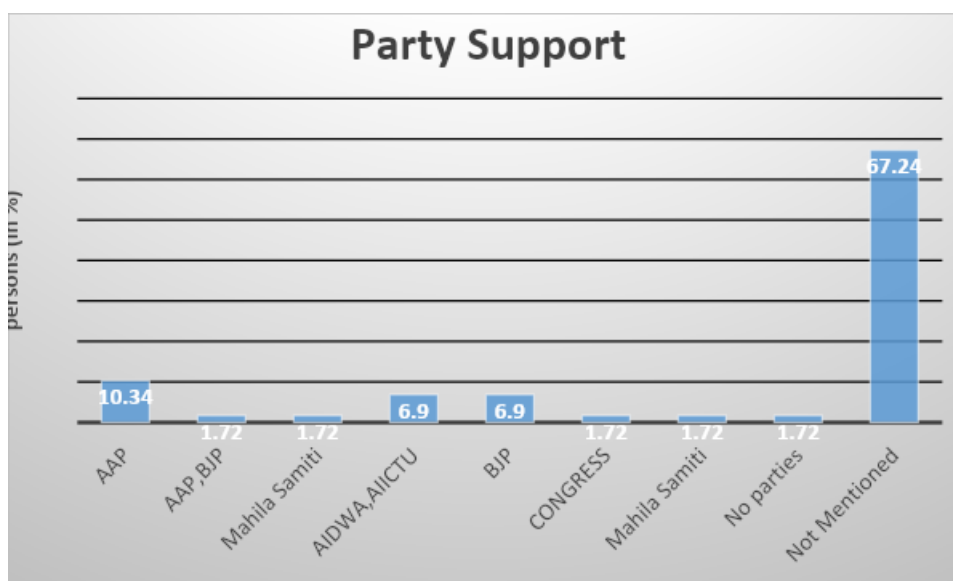
Given the settlement is very ghettoized and congested, most of the respondents argue that living with 3-5 people in one room of around 70 sq. ft. size on average makes it more difficult for them to survive such massive heatwaves.

Impact on their Earning and Livelihood

Despite various odds, residents of the settlement say they have to work to live and survive with their families. Many of them during the interviews say every year there is a sharp rise in the heat than the previous year and this year it was a prolonged heatwave. The residents underline that the heatwave is not favourable for work. Many of them are drivers, and helpers in restaurants, or casual and construction labour, and have to commute daily. This means they experience more heat than the usual residents of Delhi. For instance, Arvind, a driver told me how he experienced not only the natural heatwave but also the heat of the vehicle engine. Similarly, another resident, Kamal, who works in a hotel, says "*Din bhar Bhatti ke samne khade rahna padta hai*". A lot of work like construction activities, loading, and helping gets suspended/halted due to the heat wave's effects which hurt the earnings of these people. A large number of residents who run stalls (Rhedi) say that in winter and non-summer time, they can put up stalls at 10 a.m. and in different shifts earn around 1200-1500 rupees per day. However, in summer their earning is reduced to less than 1000 rupees per day because they can only put up the stalls in the evenings. Moreover, due to getting sick, especially heatstroke, cough & cold, fever, and nausea, very often they skip going to work, that in turn results in their retrenchment and non-payment of wages. Then again, heatwaves and the resultant illness in the households add extra expense to their limited income. Besides the decline in productivity and earning, there is a rise in expense and physical suffering in the summers.

Political participation

There are mainly 3 segments of politics and each seems to intersect the other. One, for instance, is that of the temples and the communitarian social mobilization around them, usually led by pradhans of each group or community. As it was evident from the field responses, the presence of a community-specific separate temple, functions as a base of mobilization. For instance, Gopal Singh Bairwa, president of the Bairwa community temple, is also a local leader of the BJP. The relatively elites in the settlement are recruited in different parties who operate especially during the elections, and constitute another sphere of politics. They work as party agents and help them to mobilize support and vote mainly during the elections without lending everyday assistance on the ground. The third is the influence of trade unions and related organizations that focus on labor rights, with their own support base, like among the safai karamachari. All spheres of politics are elaborated in detail below.



(Graph- 4 shows party-wise support distribution in percentage)

Generally, major political parties operating is AAP, BJP and to some extent, Congress (Refer to table 4). They were able to mobilize voters and their support not majorly through electoral gimmicks but rather through their elite agents in the settlement. These political parties have multiple agents in the settlement belonging to different castes and mostly are economically dominant and keep changing their sides sensing the winning environment. Such agents are influential among the residents and therefore able to generate votes and support. There is a very slight difference between these actors/agents and the

party volunteers. Generally, such recruited actors/agents are known as Dalals, they are also known as 'Netaji' and 'Bada babu'. There is no evidence indicating such agents/actors are active in helping the residents except during the elections. Nevertheless, there are some local councillors and party volunteers of AAP who help in arranging the water tanker and maintaining cleanliness.

There are some residents who are connected with the trade union wing of communist parties like AIICTU (CPI-ML) and AIDWA (CPIM) as these left parties help them in claiming their labor and rights from their employees and also raise voices in case they are retrenched suddenly. Around 80% of the sanitation workers and mess helpers of the JNU constitute around 100 residents of the settlement. Also, there are some other daily wage labourer who work in schools and academic campuses. The nature of the job is contractual and their salaries are often deferred for more than 4 months. They are also deprived of Arrears, PF, and leaves. Thus, there is a section that sees trade unions as their voice. They become not only members but also mobilize other residents for larger protests and demonstrations. They believe such activities help them to access and claim government-led subsidies like ration cards, pensions, cash transfers, and other benefits. Interestingly, these parties do not participate in state and parliament elections but generate an anti-BJP discourse and do contest MCD and Pradhan elections. Soniya Ji was a candidate in the last Pradhan elections and came second with a margin of only 250 votes. Similarly, Urmila Chauhan, President of AIICTU- a trade union wing of CPI-ML is a probable candidate for upcoming MCD elections from the Lado Sarai ward. The leaders of such organizations have popularity and wield a certain influence but at the same time, they fail to convince people in the major elections. The local agents/actors see them with hostility since they lead protests and demonstrations against the major political parties. These organizations and associations work throughout the year on specific issues that affect the residents directly like the price rise of essential commodities, changes in labour laws, etc. But such actions do not translate into a larger legitimacy. Both Soniya and Urmila admit a sharp decline in the participation in union activities, protests, and demonstrations and membership in recent times.

Out of all my respondents, not a single one claimed that any of the mainstream electoral parties and even government officials came to their help during these crises. None of them said any major scheme and policies directly helped them to survive the crisis, except for the Ration and water tanker facilities. Many in fact spoke of irregularities and failures in pension and direct cash transfer schemes.

Critical Appraisal

Generally, those households with less number of earning members are more vulnerable in the settlement. The economically well-off members in the settlement are those who have been in the Government sanitation department and who occupy residential spaces right next to the main road (there are two major roads one adjacent to Jharkhand Bhawan behind the Chinmaya school and the other between the Chinmaya and MCD primary school), a prime location that enables them to open various kinds of shops and other businesses. To cope with the crises of various kinds, like the pandemic and growing heatwaves, for example, in the absence of substantial state and local government assistance, they devise their own strategies. The residents, especially daily wage laborers, more often than not, learn multiple skills and engage in multiple jobs and work multiple shifts so that they do not remain unemployed. Such practices of the migrant population illustrate new kinds of responses emerging from the grassroots level. This can perhaps be seen as consistent with Samaddar's efforts to conceptualize practices of the urban poor as 'biopolitics from the below' (Samaddar, 2021). Solidarity among the neighborhood becomes instrumental in addressing major health crises.

The Settlement is very heterogeneous in terms of the relative mobility some of them managed to achieve. For instance, those with bigger incomes and well-developed houses are settled on the roadside and form the mainstream of the settlement. This indicates that these residents have better opportunities and access to the resources that enable them to become dominant as well as the influential class of the settlement, the majority of which seems to be very weak in all respects, like health and income. Also, being alongside the road gives them access to meeting important people, hosting prominent leaders, becoming part of associations, and making use of new opportunities.

Several residents of the settlement own refrigerators, even washing machines, AC, and cars, besides coolers and television, which indicate relative mobility of the residents. However, this has no contribution from the state. There is no evidence that indicates that these or other residents of this settlement achieved some upward mobility as a result of state assistance and policies. Nevertheless, the free ration facilities from the government during the pandemic seem to have provided some basic respite to them.

The narrative, both in regard to the exceptional crisis of the pandemic and the everyday difficulty of coping with the heat, shows a basic level of governmentality, where the benefits and schemes provided by the government are duly insufficient to overcome the challenges and address the needs of the people (Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 2004). The access to water and electricity, the money received in bank accounts through momentary policies, and the presence of a handful of toilets can be seen as what a political

society often as a moral group bargain and negotiate with the state in critical circumstances (Chatterjee, *Lineages Of Political Society*, 2011). But the prolonged absence of sewage facilities, decent housing, lack of nutrition, proper jobs, and the consequent precariousness of life with the permanent out-migration of many residents- all testifies to a practical abandonment by the state. However, in such a background, it is their own devised strategies and ingeniousness to learn multiple ways and clever use of resources, like energy and water, which keeps the existing population alive and tides over the crisis. More research is required to map possible sources of assistance, like credit and help in seeking a livelihood. The politics of the place is, like the population, fragmented into different spheres and directions. For instance, if they consolidate as a religion in one election, depending on the scale and the appeal of mobilization, shift in another direction in the next. It varies from different perspectives or identities. They network with the local influential agents/actors as individuals and protest against low wages or work conditions as a collective underclass. Thus, the population reflects multiple subjectivities, which will be substantiated with more research in the coming days

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