

The Political Economy of Migrant Labor: Emerging Strategies in new Settlements .

Globalization has greatly accelerated the movement of goods, services and labor. The easy access to mobile labor is not only global in scope. We see its direct impact in the national, regional and local surroundings, specifically in big cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore. The drive for market and growing investment in big cities, particularly by service sector companies, have created new opportunities especially for low skilled workers. At the same time, the rural distress and agrarian crisis has motivated the low caste low class rural population to see these cities as an opportunity for earning as well as better living. Thus, cities have become points of intersection between the in-flow of migrant labor and a variety of emerging livelihoods. As a result, a large part of labor force of such cities is provided by migrants from other states and regions adding to the growth of the informal sector. However, there are other sides to this reality. Given the temporary and insecure nature of their jobs, most of the informal labor are often left without decent means of living, and have no options but to go back to villages during crisis like the pandemic. Most of these migrant labor work for very low income and in extremely harsh conditions. They perform a range of menial jobs. ranging from construction work, manual scavenging, sweeping, *beldari* and *dihari* (manual labor on daily basis), working as security guards, driver and self-employe petty enterprises, like selling vegetables and running a small stall to sell things. Seen together, such professions together comprise a certain layer of informal political economy, which is a key object of enquiry in this paper. I plan to do a case study of Kusumpur Pahadi, an informal settlement based on informal economy in south Delhi, witnessing rapid growth of migrant low caste and low class population.

Based on field work the paper will map certain things as follows: We look at the diversity of occupation among residents of the area, and their average monthly earnings. This will give us an empirical picture of the economic vulnerability of the whole settlement, as well as, a sense of who are less, more and the most vulnerable in such heterogeneous settlements in a graded sense, based on occupational segregation and earning members per family. Secondly, we will document the various strategies devised by migrants, given the low income and underpaid work they engage. A common strategy, for instance, is to learn multiple skills and combine different kinds of work in different shifts of the day to meet the basic needs for the family. At the same time, we will try to generate a sense of their management of finance and household expenditure, what and how they prioritize in the monthly budget, with respect to needs like food, housing, illness, raising children, and accessing civic amenities denied to them. Lastly, the latest researches reveal how their problems worsened during extraordinary crises such as the Pandemic. A relatively less examined aspect is the impact of emerging climate induced adverse changes such as heatwaves, that have become frequent in cities like Delhi. While pandemics spell restrictions on mobility and job loss, the seasonal heat waves increasingly produce a daily crisis of amenities like water, drainage, toilet and ailments, that not only impact their economy but also their politics and

perception of the state. We look at how it means comparing different kinds of crises and different strategies in response.