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Surviving the City: Migration, Identity, and Everyday Life in Noida's Informal Settlements

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Abstract:

This study examines migration and daily life in Noida's informal settlements, with a particular emphasis on migrant workers' experiences and interactions with members of the upper class. The study, which is based on primary fieldwork with 100 respondents, looks at housing conditions, employment, and urban service accessibility. The results show that although migrant workers continue to be concentrated in informal employment and unstable housing, they play a vital role in the growth of the city. Migrants and members of higher society frequently interact daily, but social integration is still scarce. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive urban planning and shows that urban inequality in Noida is structural in nature.

Keywords: *Rural–urban migration; Informal settlements; Migrant labour; Urban inequality; Informality; Housing insecurity; Urban citizenship.*

I. Introduction:

In India, urbanization and rural-urban migration have been greatly accelerated by agrarian distress, decreasing rural livelihood options, and uneven regional development. Due to these structural pressures, rural households are forced to move to cities in search of alternate sources of income, frequently through seasonal or circular migration (*Deshingkar & Akter, 2009*). In order to meet the labor demands of manufacturing facilities, large-scale construction projects, and the unorganized service sector, Noida, a significant industrial and urban hub within the Delhi–NCR region, has seen a significant influx of migrant workers (*Census of India, 2011*).

However, most of the migrants are forced to live in informal settlements because of their irregular employment, low pay, limited access to formal housing, and lack of access to urban social services. Poor living conditions, insufficient basic services, and unstable tenure are characteristics of these settlements. Migrant workers continue to experience institutional, social, and economic

marginalization despite their vital role in maintaining infrastructure development and urban growth (Bremar, 2012).

The everyday lives of migrant communities are examined in *Surviving the City: Migration, Identity, and Everyday Life in Noida's Informal Settlements*, a study that takes an anthropological approach. It examines how migration affects identities, senses of belonging, and interactions with the urban state in addition to focusing on their daily routines, livelihood strategies, social networks, and coping mechanisms. The study emphasizes the paradoxes between migrants' contributions to the city and their ongoing exclusion from urban citizenship and rights by emphasizing lived experiences (Census of India, 2011; Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Bremar, 2012).

II. Objectives:

The research examines at identity and migration, how people survive in informal settlements, how easy it is to get essential services, and how COVID-19 affects migrant livelihoods.

III. Review of literature:

Informal settlements are generally recognized as structural results of market-driven urban development, state-led land acquisition, and rapid urbanization in Noida and the larger Delhi-NCR area. In addition to uprooting rural populations, the development of residential townships, industrial corridors, and infrastructure projects has created a steady need for migrant labor. Nevertheless, this expansion has taken place without sufficient planning for inclusive urban services for the workforce that supports it or affordable housing (Bremar, 2013; Chakravorty, 2017).

As a result, many migrant workers live in crowded and unsafe informal settlements and work in low-paying, unstable, and informal jobs. Limited legal recognition and unreliable documentation further exacerbate their socioeconomic vulnerability by limiting their access to public welfare programs, formal housing, healthcare, education, and other vital urban services. Cycles of poverty and precarity in the city are strengthened by this institutional exclusion (Dupont, 2011; Srivastava, 2012; UN-Habitat, 2016).

In the urban setting, kinship relationships, caste affiliations, and regional social networks are essential for facilitating migrants' access to jobs, housing, and social support. However, these networks have the potential to perpetuate internal hierarchies and disparities among migrants, resulting in unequal access to opportunities and resources. As a result, migrants experience a type of fragmented or partial urban citizenship in which they make substantial economic contributions to the city but are denied full civic rights and recognition. Gender and generational factors exacerbate this marginalisation, making women, children, and older migrants more vulnerable in informal urban settings (Bourdieu, 1999; Holston, 2008; Roy, 2009).

Overall, the research suggests that informality in Noida is a permanent and structural aspect of modern urban development rather than a passing or transitory phenomenon. Informality is constantly

created by labour markets, planning regimes, and governance procedures rather than vanishing with modernisation. By analysing the regular interactions between migrant workers, other urban residents, employers, and state institutions, the current study aims to fill in these gaps in the literature and provide an anthropological understanding of how informality, exclusion, and belonging are negotiated in day-to-day urban life.

IV. Methodology:

Study Area: The research was conducted in Noida (Delhi-NCR), which is an emerging urban-industrial city. The field study was done in the slums and the adjacent formal zones to comprehend the life of migrants and their coexistence in urban settings. The data was collected from zones including Sector 8, Sector 9, Harola, Nithari Village, Hosiery Complex (Phase I & II), Khora Colony, Sector 62, Sector 64, etc.

Research design: A qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory research design was employed to grasp the experiences of migrants and the views of higher society observers.

Sample Size: A total of 100 respondents were included for the study:

- 50 migrant workers living in informal settlements and working in the unorganized sector.
- 50 higher society observers, including employers, landlords, shopkeepers, and residents of formal housing areas.

Sampling Techniques: Purposive sampling was used for the selection of migrant participants, whereas convenience sampling was used for observers from higher society because of accessibility to the field and the mobility of migrants.

Sources of Data:

- Primary Data: Semi-structured interviews, observation of living and working conditions, and interactions during field visits.
- Secondary Data: Research articles, census data, government publications, and NGO publications on migration and urban poverty.

Tools and Techniques: Interview schedules, non-participant observation, and a field diary were used for data collection.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was employed to generate themes such as migration, livelihood, housing insecurity, access to services, and social relations. Simple tables and percentages were used to support the findings.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was sought from all participants. Anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and ethical treatment of sensitive information were ensured.

V. Analysis of the data:

A total of 100 respondents—50 of whom were migrant workers and 50 of whom were observers of higher society—from sectors 8, 9, Harola, Nithari Village, Khora Colony, and other surrounding

labour clusters provided primary data.

Table: 1

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents (N = 100)

Indicator	Migrants (N=50)	Higher Society (N=50)
Most prevalent age group	18–50 years (90%)	31–50 years (70%)
Average household size	4–6 individuals	3–4 members
Low or no formal education	62%	4%
Graduate or higher	8%	82%
Stable monthly income	12%	88%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

The two groups clearly show socioeconomic inequality. While respondents from higher society exhibit stable employment and financial stability, migrants exhibit low educational attainment and unstable income, which reflects structurally unequal urban development.

Table: 2

Migration Pattern and Reasons (Migrants N = 50)

Variable	Percentage
Origin: Jharkhand, Bihar, and Eastern Uttar Pradesh	86%
Migration as a result of unemployment / poverty	74%
Migration through networks of kin or contractors	68%
Migration that is seasonal or circular	54%
Maintaining communication with the native village	82%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

The main cause of migration to Noida is economic hardship. Mobility is shaped by networks of kinship and contractors, whereas long-term village ties suggest circular and unstable urban settlement.

Table: 3

Employment and Income Conditions (Migrants N = 50)

Indicator	Percentage
Employment in informal sector	88%
Irregular or daily-wage work	80%
Income ₹8,000–₹15,000/month	72%
No written job contract	92%
Unemployment during COVID-19	82%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

Migrant livelihoods are dominated by informal employment, which is characterised by irregular income and no contracts. During COVID-19, economic vulnerability increased, exposing the fragility of informal work.

Table: 4

Housing and Living Conditions (Migrants N = 50)

Indicator	Percentage
Kutcha/semi-pucca house	76%
Shared water and sanitation	84%
Fear of eviction	70%
Monsoon flooding	58%
No formal housing tenure	92%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

Most of the migrants are living in insecure housing conditions without legal tenure. Poor sanitation, environmental hazards, and the fear of eviction accentuate their marginal status in urban planning

Table: 5

Access to Services and Welfare (N = 100)

Indicator	Migrants	Higher Society
Government hospitals usage	74%	18%
Private healthcare usage	14%	82%
Children in government schools	62%	10%
Barriers in documentation	68%	4%
Welfare schemes awareness	36%	78%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

Service access represents the inequality of urban citizenship. Migrants depend on public services and experience difficulties in documentation, while higher society respondents find private facilities easily accessible.

Table: 6

Social Relations, Belonging and COVID-19 Impact (N = 100)

Indicator	Migrants	Higher Society
Sense of full belonging	22%	88%
Social distance experience	64%	18%
Daily interaction	90%	86%
COVID impact on livelihood	82%	24%

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

Interactions between groups occur daily but are hierarchical in nature. Migrants experience low levels of belonging, and the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected their livelihood.

Table: 7

Summary of Socio-Economic and Urban Experience (N=100)

Dimension	Migrant Respondents (N=50)	Higher Society Observers (N=50)	Interpretation
Nature of urban presence	Temporary, work-oriented	Permanent, residential	Class-based differences shaped city experiences
Reason for living in Noida	Livelihood survival	Employment, investment, lifestyle	Migration is distress-driven, not aspirational
Type of Employment	Informal, daily wage	Formal, salaried/professional	Formal urban life is maintained by informal work.
Stability in Income	Highly irregular	Largely stable	Economic insecurity is structurally concentrated
Housing condition	Informal, insecure	Planned, legally owned	Urban planning benefits selective groups
Fear of eviction	High (70%)	Nil	Legal recognition defines urban safety
Access to healthcare	Government hospitals	Private hospitals	Economic capacity shapes service access
Access to education	Government schools	Private institutions	Educational inequality reproduces class
Documentation & welfare	Limited access	Full access	Citizenship mediated by documents
Sense of belonging	Partial (22%)	Strong (88%)	Belonging is socially constructed
Daily interaction	High but functional	High but distant	Proximity ≠ social integration
COVID-19 impact	Severe livelihood loss	Service disruption	Crisis exposed urban inequality
Role in functioning of city	Essential labour	Service consumers/employers	Interdependence without equality
Future aspiration	Stability & education	Inclusive growth (conditional)	Shared future imagined unequally

Source: Survey Conducted during Research

The comparison shows that migrants are in a temporary and insecure urban space, while residents of higher society experience stability and security. Informal labour is responsible for sustaining formal urban life but does not guarantee inclusion.

Interpretation: The findings from the study show that the urban life of Noida is marked by dependence

without inclusion. Migrants are crucial to the smooth running of the city but are excluded from enjoying security in housing, stable employment, and the rights of urban citizenship. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted these structural inequalities.

VI. Discussion:

The findings of this research are in line with the existing literature on migration and urban informality in Noida and the Delhi-NCR region. Migrants continue to be at the heart of the functioning of the city while continuing to face insecurity in terms of employment, housing, and services. Migration to Noida is distress migration, supported by ties of kinship and contractors, and is often circular in nature rather than being permanent (*Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Srivastava, 2012*).

The prevalence of informal employment and insecure housing conditions confirms the idea that the planned city depends on migrant labour while excluding migrants from the benefits of urban citizenship (*Breman, 2013; Chakravorty, 2017*). Inequalities in access to services express the differentiated citizenship of the urban, where migrants are known as workers but not as urban residents (*Holston, 2008; Roy, 2009*).

However, despite regular interaction, the nature of social relations is functional and hierarchical. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the structural inequality in this regard, as migrants have suffered greatly in terms of loss of livelihood, whereas awareness among the residents of higher society has resulted in short-term relief. In conclusion, this study confirms that informality in Noida is a structurally produced condition and maintained through planning and governance and not being a temporary condition.

VII. Conclusion:

The significance of the study is that it highlights that the rapid urban growth of Noida depends on migrant labour, while at the same time the migrants face informal employment, insecure housing, fear of eviction, and limited access to welfare. While the residents of higher society experience stability, legal security, and full benefits access to urban services resulting in a functional but unequal relationship between the two groups.

Though there has been an increase in the awareness of the vulnerability of migrants post-COVID-19, it has largely been a short-term experience and has not resulted in long-term inclusion. The conclusion of the study is that the inequality in Noida is structural and not accidental, and there is a need for inclusive urban planning, safe housing, labour protection, and simplified documentation to include the migrant workers as rightful citizens of the urban space.

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