

The Governing Logic of the Gated Enclaves during COVID-19: For Whom ?

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Introduction

Rapheeja Bibi (38),¹ a native of Cooch Behar in West Bengal, arrived with her husband Aslam (41)² in the National Capital Region³ in 2013. After several changes of jobs and residences within the region, she reached Noida⁴ in 2015 to seek help from her maternal uncle, a mason in a busy neighbourhood of Noida; the ongoing construction work at the numerous big construction sites in this neighbourhood provided higher chances of employment to informal labourers. While Rapheeja's uncle used his goodwill to secure Aslam a job at the construction site of a high-rise apartment complex, Rapheeja found herself a source of income by working as a domestic help in several middle-class and upper-middle-class households within the gated societies of the neighbourhood. Finding a job and getting paid for her labour gave Rapheeja a sense of security and aspiration for the good life that big cities offer. She could now save enough capital from consolidating her house and farmland back 'home'⁵ and secure regular education for her three children she had left behind with their grandparents in her village. Rapheeja now resides as a tenant in a room in the rooms of a *basti* (shanty settlement) in one of the busiest new sectors of Noida.⁶ Her neighbours in this settlement comprise migrants from eastern and north-eastern states of India who, like her, came to the metropolis to find a regular source of income in exchange for their labour. Like Rapheeja, most women in this settlement are employed as domestic help in residential households and small shops in the vicinity. Men, on the other hand, are mainly employed as labourers in the construction sites nearby. Finding this scenario to be a natural extension of the gendered division of labour, Rapheeja says:

“It is obvious that women go out for some hours to do work in these flats and return to attend to our household chores. We try to return to our rooms in time before it gets too dark and cook for our families. I have my husband here, but for many of my neighbours, they have to look after their entire families — their children are here too. We have to maintain our rooms as well; else we risk

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losing them if the owner is not satisfied with our living style during his⁷ periodic visits... It is too much work, but we can manage, not the men. Some men with a little education are working as security guards or food delivery persons. Their job is more difficult and for longer hours, so women stay at home looking after everything ...”

Rapheeja aspired to have a good life in the city while simultaneously consolidating their capital in their native place through better and improved incomes. With no networks or social capital in the city, and a name that was easily identifiable with her religion, finding a job was not easy for Rapheeja. She claims that it was common for Muslims to adopt non-Muslim names to find employment. Another resident from the same *basti*, Fatima (29), a native of Kokrajhar in Assam, learnt that it was challenging to find work as a domestic help unless one had a non-Muslim name. She states:

“Finding a job in houses where only didi(s)⁸ or bhaiya(s)⁹ stayed was easier than working for families ... I was eventually made to understand by those already working there that with my Mohammedan name, it won't be easy to get jobs for cleaning and laundry in these societies that have mostly Hindu residents ... It is only because of my lower salary and sometimes changed names¹⁰ that I managed to find jobs ... even then many Hindu households would want a Brahmin as a cook. The cook job pays much higher than the cleaning work. I had to work harder compared to say Lalita (the cook at one of the households where Fatima works)¹¹ to gain my employers' trust and sustain the job over the years.”

Their jobs at construction sites and later on as maids had helped Rapheeja and Fatima survive in the concrete jungle of Noida since 2015 until the unfathomable difficulties brought on by the onset of the COVID-19 crisis derailed their lives. The devastation caused by the COVID-19 crisis foreground the discussion in this paper. I discuss the scenario unfolding due to the pandemic as emblematic of the inequalities resting on the intersecting dynamics of class, religion and gendered relations in the country today. Positioned through both the employer's lens as 'the wage-provider' and the domestic help's lens as 'the service provider' in the gated communities of Noida, the narratives used in the study draw from broader ongoing research on the city's gated enclaves since late 2019. The messages circulating on social media groups—accessed, regulated, and utilised by resident groups of the housing societies—reveal the renewed social practices and regulations adopted by many employers towards their domestic helps during the initial period of lockdown due to COVID-19. These interactions also facilitate a discussion on the governing practices adopted by the self-regulating administrative bodies of housing societies such as the Residential Welfare Association (RWA) or/and the Apartment Owners Association (AOA)¹². Methodologically, an intersectional analysis would help dissect how the various social categories of the study participants shaped

or gave rise to the discriminatory measures adopted by these housing societies against specific groups of people. Although the basic governing strictures may have been operating in the housing societies since their inception, these have emerged as much more stringent in the wake of the pandemic crisis — exercised and operationalised by the AOAs not only at the macro level but also at the micro-household level.

Navigating Mobility: Boon and Bane

The study of migration phenomenon for a better life has mainly been dominated by a masculinist discourse whereby women have always been recorded as dependants in the family or migrating primarily due to marriage. This is underlined by the fact that there is a dearth of literature locating the narratives of women migrants as domestic helps in middle and upper middle-class household structures in urban India. Mazumdar and Neetha (2020) discuss the struggle of paid domestic workers to secure their rights as per the Minimum Wage Schedule, under the Minimum Wages Act 1948, in the country, but not enough attention has been paid so far to analyse the situation from the perspective of a woman employed as a casual labourer in urban households.

This paper captures the stories of domestic helps from the Muslim community who have not signed up with any of the formal agencies that provide such services to potential customers. They neither have access to secure payments nor other aspects of safe labour that many of these agencies facilitate through a contract between the employer and the service provider. The women whose narratives are articulated here have to depend on their self-acknowledged networks of the native place, and on a neighbourhood that operates either based on religion or a sense of camaraderie commonly referred to as ‘sisterhood’ in the shanty settlements.

Fatima recounts the process through which she gained entry into one of the apartments in a neighbourhood gated society that exercises strict protocols for screening outsiders’ entry. The channel of ‘sisterhood’ is useful to newcomers to get access to opportunities, become familiar with the local culture and surroundings, and ultimately get recruited in a new household. Her neighbour Noor Jahan, a woman in her 50s, introduced Fatima to her employers when the former had to take leave of absence for several weeks. Fatima made her way through this ‘rite of passage’ facilitated by her ‘sister’ from the *basti*. She says:

“The substitution business always works. I was introduced to the employer through their trusted servant, whose shoes I could fill.... Sometimes, many women are unable to return in good time for various reasons. The substitutes then continue to work in the house and strengthen their chances of getting retained for longer. Eventually, we get more work through our employers.... It is not easy, but we have to keep our provider happy with our work; only then they might recommend us to a few of their friends who might be looking for

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help too.... I usually avoid taking leaves unless I am sick, and I don't travel to my hometown to see my folks. Because if I go, I know there will be someone else ready to replace me. Many women are eyeing each others' houses.... The moment I go home, my employment will be snatched away from me."

Despite the job's replaceable and transient nature, Fatima gives credit to her job for whatever sense of agency she had, both at home and in the city as a migrant. The precarious nature of her job was accentuated during the pandemic due to various mobility restrictions and the mandatory observance of social distancing, which forced her and most other domestic helps to go on long leaves. It led to Fatima losing her job in several houses where she worked as domestic help for several years. Furthermore, many unsupportive patrons declined to pay wages for the leave she was compelled to take—which she thought was very unfair, considering that it was the management of the housing complex that had barred entry to all outsiders, even though she had been willing to take the risk and come to work. Over multiple phone conversations, Fatima maintained that staying at home was a luxury that most families in her shanty settlement area could not afford. She was sure that all her neighbours tacitly believed that endangering one's life was better than the alternative—the disastrous state of joblessness. Juxtaposing the vulnerable state of the informal labourers willing to compromise on their safety for their jobs, with the moral subjectivities of the employers debating whether the domestic helps should get paid for the forced-leave period, helps us visualise the intersecting power dynamics at play here.

Many of Fatima's neighbours have vacated their rooms and moved in with their relatives to save on rent. For the first time since she arrived here, Fatima has come to realise that this big city had never really welcomed her and that she never belonged here. The inability to pay house-rent and afford basic services like electricity and water supply forced many of Fatima's neighbours to leave for their hometowns in West Bengal and Assam via the Shramik Special train services.¹³ Though both Rapheeja and Fatima were certain that they could not afford to travel back to their homes now,¹⁴ their admiration for those who could go back echoed in the few conversations, I had with them.

According to Rapheeja, it was better to continue to linger in the city and wait for things to get normal than to face their families back home empty-handed in such a situation. She said:

"My neighbours have gone back home because they have big lands there, they will do some farming and come back when things get better ... what will we do going back? Farming is not sustainable; it will not get us much money for the entire family, I don't think I would like to work as a farmer after spending so many years here... I also see news channels about the condition of people who are travelling back home. Reaching my house will take 3-4 days if the train on that route is open, that gives me more nightmares... I would rather stay here

and get work, especially when so many of us have left ... construction will not stop, will it?"

The horror of what she saw happening in reports on news channels or videos circulating on WhatsApp—visuals of workers returning home being sprayed with disinfectants, a migrant woman delivering a child on the road, and some collapsing on the highways *en route* home—further informed her husband's decision to stay on.¹⁵ Most residents of this *basti* hailed from the far-eastern parts of the country, thousands of kilometres away, and walking to their villages was not an option for them. Their fear of contracting the virus or dying on the way to the destination was further reinforced when their kin discouraged them from returning. According to Aslam, not only the government but also many of their relatives in their native place had the perception that returning migrants were 'potential carriers of the virus' (Priyadarshini and Chaudhury 2020). It added to the stigma of returning empty-handed 'as dependants', which Rapheeja insists had been a bigger cause of anxiety than the disease itself. Nail's theory on the migrant figure, suggesting that 'for some movement offers opportunity, recreation, and profit with only a temporary expulsion' (Nail 2015, 2), helps one understand Rapheeja's conviction that nothing could stop the never-ending construction work in Noida for more than a few days, and opportunities for contractual work would become available sooner or later, especially when so many of the workers had gone away.

To this end, one also wonders whether the process of migration, along with the sense of insecurity it brings for the migrants (Nail 2015), also enables a simultaneous consolidation of a mobile identity once they have steady incomes and jobs to support not only themselves but also their families and communities back home. The 'transformation of social space' through circular migration, as discussed by Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003), became a self-imposed deterrent for most migrants who decided against the arduous journey to their hometowns. For Rapheeja and her husband, the anticipated forms of social expulsion in their native place were stronger deterrents than those they were actively facing in these housing societies. To understand the phenomenon of reverse migration, unfolding in the wake of COVID-19, one must first comprehend the motivation to migrate in order to secure livelihood and capital. The social capital riding on the migrants' earning potential in the city perhaps needs to be revisited and understood anew in view of the changing paradigms of proximities and distancing. The 'capital of hustle' (Janah 2017) is consequently the primary source of capital accessed by domestic helps to survive in the city.

Rapheeja's husband Aslam had secured a semi-permanent mobile stall as a fruit vendor, a job considered less arduous and less hazardous compared to construction-site labour. However, Aslam lost his steady income due to the economic flux in the wholesale market, making it difficult to procure goods. This was further complicated by local politicians' announcements in Uttar Pradesh against buying from Muslim vendors, who were now generically referred to as Tablighi(s). Aslam had never heard of the Tablighis until the news channels started

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constantly blaming the convention held in New Delhi of the Tablighi Jamat as a COVID-19 hotspot. Messages were circulated on social media rationalising not buying grocery from Muslim vendors.¹⁶ Aslam suggests that he did not have the money to pay the required under-table commission for his fruit stall at one of the market intersections in a buzzing sector in Noida. Rapheeja laments people's apathetic attitude in the city for adding to their woes caused by the pandemic. Certain guidelines were unofficially put in place in the city for consumers who buy groceries from Muslim vendors, or even exchange currency, lest they contract the virus. All participants in the study concurred that the changing of names by Muslim migrants, especially by those who did not have the means to return to their hometowns, was the only solution to earn their livelihoods.

Navigating Governmentality: Distancing and Lockdown

Once COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, stringent measures to stop the spread of the virus were taken worldwide. These included restrictions on civil liberties and mobility, and in some places, increased surveillance of citizens in varying degrees. Some countries gravitated towards a Darwinist policy of the survival of the fittest and bolstered their underfunded healthcare system; others enforced stringent measures to monitor and control the situation. The nexus between the political and the local administration (in this context, the RWAs) has taken many forms. Under the pretext of maintaining discipline, RWAs took measures to control all sorts of mobility, particularly of those whose agency was regulated by their employers. Under these circumstances, many informal workers' decision to continue stepping out of the house for their livelihoods was not personal or individual, but social and political.

With resident communities begging for better security and safety from the 'outsiders', the RWAs of gated societies were emboldened to implement strict governing measures. The RWAs, acting as mini-sovereigns (Naidu 2020),¹⁷ took it upon themselves to impose severe restrictions on the residents' mobility and regulate the entry and exit of the residents as well as those who constitute the 'outsiders category'. As to how the emergent patterns of this governing logic in the current COVID-19 circumstances can reconcile with the eventual reopening of spaces remains to be seen. The major area of concern has been that an outsider might 'bring' the virus into the housing society. The governing logic aimed to find a balance between the medical infrastructure and residents' economic welfare, both of which remain unconsolidated. The domestic help, targeted and marked as a potential host of the virus, bears witness to the prejudice and injustices meted regularly. Foucault's discourse on biopolitics can help explore the disciplinarian route taken by such 'mini-republics'. According to Foucault (1990, 142–143), biopolitics is the study of how the 'biological' is captured by the 'political' when life enters into 'knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention'. A parallel can be drawn with the spatial politics of the RWAs of these gated societies that use

the virus as a pretext for assuming and exercising political powers not only over its residents but also the outsiders.

On my inquiry as to why Rapheeja and Aslam decided against taking the train to their village, Rapheeja laughed over the phone call and said it was strange that I should ask such a question. For her, the room had been her house for the last few years. Inexplicably, she found it funny that even after the lockdown, her *did*i (referring to her employer) fails to understand that the virus could come into anyone's house and that *she was not the virus*. The stigma experienced by Rapheeja as a non-resident came from her employer's insistence that she furnish documents related to her identity, along with reports of a thorough medical check-up and tests proving the virus did not infect her. The documents produced were to be then vetted by the housing societies' management bodies before she could resume her work.

Additionally, the surveillance tactics employed by the RWAs/AOAs in the form of mandatory usage of the Aarogya Setu app by the domestic help and of the MyGate application¹⁸ by the service providers as well as residents introduced further complexities into the scene, especially for the helps. Not only were they required to own a smartphone with sufficient access to internet packages, but they were also expected to be familiar with the usage of these applications. Hitherto, the RWAs/AOAs could keep tabs and impose restrictions on residents' travel plans; now the domestic helps too were subject to their unreasonable demands and had to produce their medical records if they were to gain access to the housing society. This elicited a severe backlash from a section of residents concerned about the potential risk involved in their domestic help visiting medical facilities for a COVID-19 test and the expenses incurred on the tests. Many of the residents who were now spending a greater number of hours locked into their homes, were awaiting their maids' return to help them with their household chores; the concern eventually expressed by the residents was more for their own well-being than for the livelihood of their maids.

Long (2020), in his report on quarantine patterns during the COVID-19 crisis, posits that actions against the crisis were of a collective nature. He elaborates that the collective quarantining methods adopted at the household level demand a 'collective co-ordination of social behaviour within a network to ensure that the virus will not be transmitted further'.¹⁹ Much debate has occurred over the articulation of terms such as 'social distancing' in various contexts.²⁰ Long suggests that social distancing as a collective collaboration can perhaps be better understood through the term 'social containment'. However, this concept is instrumental in reproducing the norms of purity and pollution between the service provider and the employer in the gated enclaves under study. Although both groups of social actors involved in such a set-up recognise their dependency on the 'other'—hence recognising their own vulnerabilities to the virus—the intertwining junctures of interaction, touch, and other sensory abilities between the two are distinctly lopsided since they become the prerogative of the wage-provider entirely.

Navigating Community: Two-way Dependency

The dependence on domestic helps in India increased in the post-liberalisation era. With more and more urban women working outside their homes, the demand for domestic helps surged. Lahiri suggests that for the ‘women who work in urban India, “work-life balance” depends increasingly on having help’ (2017, 6). Not surprisingly, the primary concern expressed in most of the housing societies’ social media pages and instant messaging groups has been about the return of the domestic helps to their societies. While the rules imposed by the Noida District Authority in the various containment zone areas²¹ waxed and waned as per the unfolding of the health crisis and the changing risk-levels, the AOAs/RWAs routinely issued advisories that residents were asked to adhere to in the face of the pandemic crisis. These guidelines were strictly enforced on the premise of safeguarding the residents’ health and containing the risk of contagion. Measures included restricting one’s mobility in and around the gated societies, regulated activities for common public spaces, and restricted entry of delivery executives as well as service providers such as domestic helps.

A case in point is the practice of having separate elevators dedicated to the residents and their visitors on the one hand, and a ‘service lift’, aptly named, for all service providers including domestic helps, security guards and delivery personnel. Fatima refers to the service elevator as the *golpo*²² lift (the conversation lift), stating that the elevator provided a safe space for relaxed conversation, wherein the maids working in different apartments met each other between their shifts and shared a minute or two of casual chit-chat, the service elevator thus becoming ‘their’ space in the otherwise sanitised space of the buildings. During the COVID-19 crisis, however, use of elevators became prohibited for household helps working on the lower floors of many apartment buildings, purportedly to limit their touching the walls and buttons of the elevator. The guidelines for outsiders issued by the RWAs prescribed stricter measures for the domestic helps than for the delivery executives of essential goods or the residents themselves. Besides, the residents were asked to dutifully inform their maids to not loiter or use the common areas for resting or leisure purposes. Such prescriptions conflate the idea of safety with contamination and stigma which is corroborated by the experiences of most of the domestic workers, security guards and sweepers in the gated societies.

Mrs Gupta (42), a resident of the housing society in question, viewed these restrictions as crucial to protecting oneself from the dreadful virus. She elucidated how most residents favour the elevator divide to make movement easier for residents availing the elevators, especially in the peak hours of transit. Discriminatory practices such as having a separate public washroom for the maids in the apartment’s common area and granting restricted access to the elevators were normalised using terms such as ‘natural’ and ‘obvious’ for the prohibitions imposed. Mrs Gupta opined that one should exercise extra caution in these unprecedented times. In her words, “One does not know where these maids are coming

from, so either doesn't call them for work or else maintain proper distance to maintain the hygiene and sanitation of one's home."

The structural challenges that Rapheeja and Fatima experience transcend the multitude of gender regimes. Rapheeja is unsure whether it is the nature of her labour—involving cleaning and scrubbing, activities that a respectable woman²³ might not want to pursue—or her identity as a Muslim woman in a Hindu household, that limits her sphere of activities to those not involving bodily touch. Rapheeja's statement on the non-availability of washrooms in her employer's house where she toiled for many hours a day at a stretch or having water served in a plastic glass, or utensils specifically kept aside for her, is incongruous with the idea of sanitation that Mrs Gupta maintains at her place with the help of Rapheeja's labour.

While Fatima could work at her employer's house earlier, even during those monthly 'women-days', her *didi* has clearly instructed after 'Unlock1.0'²⁴ not to come to work during the menstruation period. Unable to make sense of the shift in perception, Fatima blames it on the disease that has made everyone suspicious. In this context, Fatima also points to the ironical shift from the 'no washroom' to the 'bathing first' policy during the crisis, wherein many domestic helps are allowed to work at some of the houses only after they take a bath at their employer's residence and change into 'germ-free' clothes to maintain the sanctity of the employer's house.

The tactile/sensorial precautions that Mrs Gupta refers to shifts the focus from the individual's identity to the sensorial divide considered inherent to the situation. The RWA dictum that the maids should work at only one house and not be allowed to work at multiple houses as they did during 'normal' times, to contain the chances of the contagion spreading, did not address how the helps would be compensated for the loss in earnings. What would be the ethically sound equation and formula for calculating the loss incurred by giving up the work that she was allowed to undertake earlier? And more importantly, who will determine the help's renegotiated wages and which house she would work? It was only the twin concerns of whether the residents' families' security is adequate and whether wages should be paid if the maid is not coming to work that featured in the everyday conversations on the many social media groups where new forms of socialities manifested during the lockdown period.

Not much changed for the domestic help community after 'Unlock 1.0'. Domestic help agencies reported that as many as 10 lakh domestic helps in the metropolitan cities had not been able to return to their old jobs or find new work.²⁵ The question that arises is whether it is only the domestic help who can bring the virus into the house, or could it be the other way around too? A case in point is the 68-year-old domestic help who was the first to get infected in her slum in the Mumbai suburbs. She contracted the infection from her employers who had returned from the United States.²⁶ As Bird (2020) suggests, there are degrees of vulnerability during such a crisis, but the precarious characteristics are experienced unevenly.

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Distinguishing between precarity and precariousness, Butler (2004) suggests that while precariousness refers to corporeal vulnerability shared by all mortals including the privileged, precarity is ‘distributed unequally’ and specifically experienced by the vulnerable, disadvantaged sections of the society—the poor and the endangered.

While many employers now require a resumption of the services of domestic helps urgently, in some cases the helps are reluctant to offer their services due to the risk to their own health.

Conclusion

“We are undone by each other ... relations of interdependence and mutual vulnerability are a dimension of our lives, and we should admit them and be attentive to them” (Butler 2004, 27). Perhaps it is fitting that the caller tune for all telephonic connections in India now serves as a reminder to the caller to fight against the disease and not the diseased. Butler’s above quote helps explicate Fatima and Rapheeja Bibi’s narratives, who maintain that the legal measures drawn by the housing enclaves are discriminatory and prejudiced. These measures dictate not only the hows and whens of their entry into the housing societies but also their labour: how many households they could work at and how their wages will be determined. The hierarchy that operates in most of these gated societies positions the domestic helps much lower than the ‘other outsiders’ such as security guards, delivery executives of essential goods, or the personnel employed by the management offices in these gated enclaves. The containment networks, as Long (2020) observes in his study, are operationalised unequally. The questions as to what it would mean to view some as more members-of-the-community than the others, have more agency than the others or have their health prioritised over that of the others, make it imperative to understand the compromised situation of the domestic helps, who are mostly women.

Bird posits that “the virus is being granted greater access to those who have been structurally excluded, institutionally discriminated against, socially isolated, politically ignored, and/or economically exploited” (2020, 7). This helps us understand that the domestic help’s precarity is not merely a result of governmentality but also the social norms of purity and pollution, or other such dichotomies, practised in many gated enclaves. The costs of lockdown are observed to have been borne unequally, thus making it pertinent to come up with an alternative model of social distancing so as to arrive at a more just and bearable scenario.²⁷

The pandemic and the subsequent administrative actions to deal with it have impacted the entire population but have had a more devastating effect on the marginalised sections of the population, with the women, in particular, bearing the brunt of it. Pertinent discussions on the increasing pressure of domestic chores on women during the lockdown, balancing work-from-home and household demands, and the increasing cases of domestic violence during

the lockdown period²⁸ when many women were stuck at home with violent partners, are significant with regard to understanding the dynamics of the gendered life during the lockdown. The Gender Security Project, in collaboration with the *Saahas* app for survivors of such violence, records that women who were the sole income-earners of their households 'are now unable to get the money due to lockdown, even when employers are empathetic and paying. That lack of money leads to more violence.'²⁹ Correlating this with Janah's 'give work' models (2017), we can conclude that providing steady and dignified wage-work is one of the most effective means of addressing the twin problems of gender discrimination and poverty. According to Janah's study, the best route to women empowerment at the grass-root level is through 'cold, hard cash given directly to low-income women' (Janah 2017, 76). The social anomalies exacerbated by the pandemic are being exposed through the devastation experienced by the migrant labourers. Migrant figures such as Fatima and Rapheeja are robbed of their economic agency, of their already-limited access to healthcare facilities, and eventually, of their dignity at the hands of the associational committees of the high-rise gated societies. No discussion is found to be taking place around migrant women workers, who are secondary earners as well as secondary migrants. The lacunae in the labour laws from the gender perspective (Mazumdar and Neetha 2020) aggravate the situation, particularly for migrant workers in the unorganised sector, especially domestic labour. Women face an even stronger backlash when the men in their families fall victim to job loss. The 'chilling global reality that wherever men have a hard time finding work, women have an even harder time' (Janah 2017, 75), perhaps holds significance in this scenario wherein it is not just Rapheeja's gender, but also her religion that impacts the chances of her employment and earning a livelihood.

The empirical data used in this paper explains how in the COVID-19 crisis, the gated societies' governing mechanisms have been facilitated through 'naturalised' measures of maintaining the distance between the wage-providers and the domestic help. The participants' narratives in the study have many layers to them, and their lived lives could be analysed to some extent through an intersectional analysis. While one is aware that distinctive roles and social positionings are 'constructed and interrelated and affect each other in particular locations and contexts' (Yuval-Davis 2006, 200), we ought to raise, if not address, some questions pertinent to the post-COVID era: how do we locate the moral positions of the 'wage-provider' alongside the misery of the migrant labourers? How many victims are unknowingly being created because of the pandemic? Can the pandemic impact be at all understood to have been experienced equally, especially in the context of the surveillance measures adopted by the gated societies, or is it, as the study indicates, more stringent and unforgiving for the migrant labourer?

Notes

1. Pseudo-names have been used for the participants in the paper to secure their anonymity.

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2. The age of the participants in the study is indicated in the brackets.
3. National Capital Region refers to the planned region consisting of Delhi, parts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Further in the paper, the abbreviation NCR is used for the same.
4. New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, Colloquially referred to as NOIDA is a planned city in the Indian state of Uttar pradesh while being a part of the NCR.
5. Referring to her native place in Bengal.
6. The neighbourhood has not been identified in the paper to maintain the anonymity of the residents and participants.
7. The owners of these shanty settlements which most of the participants in the study referred to as 'rooms' were always identified as 'him', 'his', '*dadda*' (Bengali word for addressing the elder brother).
8. As explained by the participant, by this term she refers to an 'only women household', typically a household run by working women, who are not necessarily a family but share the rent and household expenses.
9. As explained by the participant, by this term she refers to an 'only men household', typically, a household run by bachelor men, who are not necessarily a family but share the rent and household expences.
10. According to Fatima, changing one's name to a more ambiguous one was no longer of any use, now that stricter policies were in place requiring prospective helps to produce identity cards such as voters I-card, Aadhar I-card, etc. As of now, even if she uses her assumed name to introduce herself, the identification documents come into the picture and jeopardise her chances of getting employed.
11. Lalita is usually recognised as a Hindu name.
12. The terms have been used interchangeably in the study.
13. Announcements regarding special trains arranged by the government amid lockdown to ferry stranded migrant workers to their native places were made in May 2020. <https://www.financialexpress.com/infrastructure/railways/relieffor- migrants-indian-railways-shramik-special-trains-to-run-with-full-capacity-have-upto- 3-stoppages/1954942/>. Accessed 11 May 2020.
14. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/domestic-helps-atnoida-societies-cut-off-by-employers-some-forced-to-beg-6432229/>. Accessed 29 May 2020.

15. For a concise discussion on the migrant women figure, see <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/06/26/migrant-women-workers-covid-19-impact/>.
16. <https://scroll.in/latest/959111/covid-19-muslim-vendors-stopped-from-selling-vegetables-in-up-accused-of-being-tablighi-members>. Accessed 10 May 2020.
17. <https://internetfreedom.in/aarogya-setu-rwas/>. Accessed 15 June 2020.
18. MyGate application is an advanced security and community management app. The AOA/RWAs have made it mandatory for all residents and service providers to download this app, which enables authorising entry/exit of guests, service providers and delivery executives.
19. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/103801/>. Accessed in May 2020.
20. See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7111296/>.
21. (a) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/noida/to-seal-or-not-to-seal-rules-leaveresidents-guessing/articleshow/76165385.cms>. Accessed 3 June 2020.
(b) <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/covid-19-noida-eases-guidelines-forcontainment-zones-11589542571616.html>. Accessed 15 May 2020.
22. *Golpo*, a Bengali word, refers to the act of storytelling and colloquially as casual conversation.
23. Referring to her employer
24. See <https://www.news18.com/news/india/unlock-1-0-faqs-answered-how-everyday-life-will-change-after-rules-relaxed-for-non-containment-zones-2645107.html>. Accessed 30 May 2020.
25. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/life-style/domestic-helpslack-of-jobs-coronavirus-unlock-1-0-6457415/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.
26. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/coronavirus-inmumbai-family-of-maid-who-caught-virus-also-get-tested-area-sanitized/articleshow/74724594.cms>. Accessed 20 March 2020.
27. See Long (2020) for his ethnographic analysis of alternate models of social distancing which he argues are unsustainable if observed for longer periods of time.
28. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-53014211/coronavirus-domestic-violence-increases-globally-during-lockdown>. Accessed 11 June 2020.

29. <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/04/29/covid-19-pandemic-socioeconomic-political-impact-women/>. Accessed 18 June 2020.

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