Constructing the Moral Landscape of a City: The Narrative Exclusion of Delhi's "Floating Populations"

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*This essay uses as an illustrative example the infamous Nirbhaya Case, the brutal case of gang-rape and murder in New Delhi, India, and a set of politico-legal, governmental, moral, socio-economic and journalistic narratives that ensued in its wake, to analyse a broader discourse on the urban landscape of Delhi as a morally pristine space threatened and invaded by "urban floating populations". The author looks into the narrative construction of the (threatening) floating populations of migrant labourers and the (threatened) urban landscape within an ethical-politico-legal-cultural discourse that constructs – and imagines – the city as a moral landscape conducive to the manoeuvres of Big Capital, and simultaneously uses, abuses and erases the migrant labour feeding the city's upper and middle classes. The discussion draws upon a range of materials – from journalistic writings, opinion pieces and media interviews, to court verdicts and government reports – to locate a perception of insecurity that structures the narrative rendering of the city as a cluster of middle- and upper-class residential areas (*sharif mohallas*, as a* Delhiwallah*, a citizen of Delhi, would put it). This narrated insecurity touches upon issues that range from sexual violence and murder to urban cleanliness and littering of the urban landscape.*

Introduction

In the winter of 2012, New Delhi, the National Capital of India, was rocked by the brutal gang-rape of a paramedical student in a moving bus. As the victim battled for her life in a hospital bed, there was an explosion of narratives – politico-legal, governmental, moral, socio-economic, journalistic, among others – that covered the (in)security questions haunting the Capital. A major issue arising out of these narratives was that insecurity is created by "landless" poor, of "migrant" workers, i.e. by people who circulate between rural hinterlands and urban centres in search of livelihood. This "floating population" was variously traced back to the economic liberalization of India in the early 1990s and the real-estate boom that transformed urban-rural borderlands.

In this essay I explore the more general ethical-politico-legal-cultural discourse that seeks to construct the city of New Delhi as a pristine moral landscape by simultaneously representing, using, abusing and erasing the migrant labour that feeds the city's upper and middle classes. I will look closer at narratives that "imagine" the city as a cluster of middle- and upper-class residential areas (*sharif mohallas*, as a Delhiwallah would put it) threatened by the "floating populations" of migrant labourers. The Delhi gang-rape (the Nirbhaya Case) serves as an example of how a city and its underclass are publicly imagined in the Indian context. I use diverse discursive materials (journalistic writings, media representations, etc.) to illustrate the popular narratives emerging in the wake of the gang-rape as parts of a broader discourse articulating the city's response to its perceived Other. I use the term "discourse" in the essay to mean, borrowing from Foucault, "the general domain of all statements . . . and a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (1972, 80), as a body of utterances in various media. With the term "narrative", in turn, I refer to the mediated telling and retelling of events and ideas that comply with the rules and structures of a particular discourse.

Nirbhaya's Killers: Specimens of a "Floating Population"

The news broke on 17 December 2012. New Delhi, and in fact the country as a whole, was shocked by the heinous gang-rape of a twenty-three-year-old female physiotherapy intern the previous night. The incident would be later termed the "Nirbhaya Case"; the word "Nirbhaya" is a Hindi equivalent of "fearless", the adjective that will go on to represent the victim's fight for survival and her strong resolve to see the rapists punished. She was brutally raped, tortured and fatally beaten up in a private bus which she had boarded with her male friend, Awindra Pratap Pandey. She fought for her life in hospital beds and intensive care units. As a nation took to streets in outrage, she was taken to

Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital on 23 December, where she died on 29 December (Press Trust of India 2013).

The timeline and details of the case are only too well-known to warrant an exhaustive recounting.[1] The six joyriders on the bus – the bus driver Ram Singh, his brother Mukesh Singh, Vinay Sharma, Pawan Gupta, Akshay Thakur, and a juvenile who could not be named for legal reasons – who brutalised the girl and her companion were quickly identified and apprehended by Delhi Police. As the case unfolded and details were revealed, an alarming pattern became visible in the profiles of the accused: Ram Singh (33) and Mukesh Singh (in his early 20s) were members of an immigrant family from Rajasthan, a desert state neighbouring Delhi; Vinay Sharma (20) was an assistant gym instructor who lived in the same slum area, Ravi Das Slum, where Ram and Mukesh had their two-room shanty; Akshay Thakur (28) was a helper on the bus and hailed from the eastern Indian state of Bihar, and had moved to Delhi in 2011, looking for a livelihood; Pawan Gupta (19) was a fruit-seller; the juvenile accused (who was 17 at the time) had come to Delhi from a "village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh at the age of 11, and lived his formative years alone, doing menial jobs in Delhi" ("Profiles: Delhi Gang Rapists" 2015). Their class profile was immediately evident as was the fact that the majority of them were immigrant labourers living on the fringes of the urban landscape of Delhi. It seemed to fit a pattern, as the "threatening urban fringe" has been a refrain in narratives that had constantly been warning the city of the dangers posed by the rural interloper (as we will see below in the essay).

As the case unfolded in the investigation and the extent of the brutality became known through incessant reporting on national media, commentators were quick to point out the class-angle in explaining the misogyny implicit in the act. For instance, Kishwar Desai, a well-known Indian journalist and writer, wrote:

> . . . there are some who feel that a certain class of men is deeply uncomfortable with women displaying their independence, receiving education and joining the workforce. The gangrape becomes a form of subduing the women, collectively, and establishing their male superiority.
>
> The frightening fact is that many of these alienated young men have reached their twenties with a bizarre attitude towards women, and little affection towards them. […]

As a society with a skewed gender ratio, we need to be extremely vigilant about the delivery of justice in crimes against women and in trying to bring disaffected family members, especially alienated and marginalised young men, back into a civilised discourse. (Desai 2013)

Soon the fact that the convicts formed part of the "floating population" inhabiting the fringes of the city entered public discourse, and a number of commentators pointed out that these "faceless multitudes" of people, who enter the city from rural hinterlands looking for work, were a clear threat to the security of the city. In an interview with the *New York Times*, published just five days after the gang-rape, Suman Nalwa, then the head of Delhi Police's Unit for Women, directly pointed to the link between the crime and the city's insecurity as the influx of the floating population" changes its demographics:

Q: The number of reported rapes in Delhi is higher this year than before. If the police are doing their job, why is it that cases of sexual harassment and rape are increasing?

A: It's not just this year, it's been happening for several years now, ever since economic liberalization. There is a lot of floating population in Delhi. We have a lot of people who are not residents of Delhi, but are just coming for work.

Plus we have a lot of immigrants in Delhi, so social alienation is high. A lot of people have made it big, but they don't know their neighbors. So social corrective mechanisms are not in place. Earlier, people would hesitate to commit a crime because they were worried: What will people think of me? That doesn't exist anymore.

Also, because of economic liberalization, many people in the national capital region have made good money through land deals. But they haven't changed their values. For years, they have treated women as second-class citizens or maybe worse than that. Delhi is different from Mumbai, which exists almost as an island. Delhi has such porous borders. It's very difficult for Delhi to control its floating population. (Mandhana and Sreedharan 2012)

The essay will revisit these assertions, by Desai and Nalwa, in the course of the discussion below.

Delhi's Floating Populations: The Indispensable "Undesirable"

For the purpose of this essay, I use the term "floating population" as a term denoting a group of people "whose normal place of residence is different from where he [or she] is 'temporarily' present" (Canales 1993, 69). In the context of Delhi, this includes the migrants (especially rural labourers) who arrive at the city everyday in overcrowded trains and buses and become part of the city's shifting, unaccounted shanty/slum population. A short discussion of the location of this floating population" within the urban power matrix of Delhi and NCR (National Capital Region, a metropolitan area that includes the National Capital Territory – NCT – of New Delhi and surrounding urban areas of states such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan) may better inform this analysis.

Delhi, the national capital of India, has always been a destination for the rural poor, especially of the country's northern belt, who had dreams of transcending the shackles of a stagnant agrarian economy steeped in feudalism.[2] However, a veritable explosion in this exodus takes place, as Nalwa rightly points out, in the wake of the economic liberalization of early- and mid-90s, as the federal government, facing defaults on its foreign debt, was forced to introduce marked economic reforms. Within the next decade, the urban population of the city pushed outwards to the fringes and, in the case of Delhi, ancillary cities took shape in Gurgaon and Noida where large townships developed around industrial and IT hubs. The other side of this apparent glitz and wealth was the arrival of herds" of migrant workers, who tended to the needs of the urban sprawl. One estimate in 2011 reported the number of migrant workers in Gurgaon alone to be 200,000 (Yardley 2011). This was inevitable as the agrarian economy of the rural heartland plummeted further in the wake of the withdrawal of many subsidies and state support,[3] as much was it essential for the new urban landscape which was underserved by a state unprepared for the rapid expansion of the urban landscape.

Jim Yardley's reportage on Gurgaon (referred to above), although indirectly, proves how central the migrant" had been to this new urban". As Yardley describes: Gurgaon (…) would seem to have everything, except consider what it does not have: a functioning citywide sewer or drainage system; reliable electricity or water; and public sidewalks, adequate parking, decent roads or any citywide system of public transportation. Garbage is still regularly tossed in empty lots by the side of the road" (Yardley 2011). The new city, rapidly growing despite the much-needed infrastructure that

should have been provided by the state, largely provided for itself: In Gurgaon, economic growth is often the product of a private sector improvising to overcome the inadequacies of the government" (Yardley 2011). The floating populations of migrant labourers are the cogs of this growth engine: they provide the scavengers, water-carriers, chauffeurs, domestic labourers, courier boys, and (in an ironic twist to the insecurity narrative) private security guards that "man" the city.[4]

This veritable army of urban underclass is massed around in the slums that dot the city, especially around affluent townships that they serve. A 2015 survey conducted by the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi said that "about 6343 slums with approximately 10.20 lakh households were estimated to be in existence in urban Delhi in 2012," and defined a "slum" as "an urban phenomenon which comes into existence on account of industrialization in and around cities thereby attracting in-migration of population from country side" (Directorate of Economics and Statistics 2015). It is this context of reliance and dependence that makes the discourse around the security threat posed by the floating population seem a subterfuge. I peg the central argument of this paper on this context, to ask whether the narrative of insecurity that attempts to erase the "slum" from the *sharif mohalla* masks an economic necessity. The discussion below seeks to analyse the various coordinates of this narrative and its attempt to characterise and qualify, simultaneously using and erasing, deploying and spatially containing, an economically essential and socio-culturally undesirable" population.

Moral Parables and the Migrant Other

The commentaries by Desai and Nalwa, which are representative of the many pronouncements that came out of the protests around the Nirbhaya case, are unequivocal in their construction of an *urban moral landscape*. A conflation of the two statements will easily bring out the contours of this inherently spatial narrative. Spatial metaphors abound especially in Nalwa's characterization of the city as having porous" borders, as (regrettably) not being an island" like Mumbai, and as being under threat from the floating population" and immigrants"; the atrocity happens when the police/state fails to secure this landscape against the invasion. The narrative clearly constructs a moral landscape which is, in itself, pristine and innocent, before it is invaded by the immoral Other – the landless, rootless, floating migrant laborer. This Edenic landscape reflects certain moral codes: it is (apparently) at ease with its women being educated, independent and being part of the "workforce"; it is rooted and socially connected", and values societal approval and fears social censure. However, this landscape is invaded by alienated" men and rootless groups that have come

into a lot of money. They are brazen enough not to think of societal sanctions. The interlopers' communities uphold values that treat "women as second-class citizens or maybe worse than that". Urban space is vulnerable because "*they* haven't changed their values" although *they* partake of urban economic prosperity in the wake of "economic liberalization" (emphasis added). This separation between "them" and "us" is inscribed on the moral landscape of the city. In what follows I explore and try to understand the discursive production of this moral landscape through its various markers.

The urban woman (and her body) is located at the centre of this discourse. Like any other morality tale, this one too hinges itself on the woman's inviolate body and its moral ambience. The observations made by both Nalwa and Desai paint a picture of the alienated immigrant male who is cut off from his roots and family left behind in his native village, and often frustrated in his libidinal lures in the city-space. His unchecked sexual drive then becomes a threat to the city-space, as it is often directed at women who have imbibed the values promoted by the modern city and are liberated and defiant of patriarchy (while retaining their rootedness in the moral landscape of the city). As Krupa Shandilya has shown in her analysis of the nationalist and patriarchal discourses surrounding the Nirbhaya Case, the victim was often framed as a "chaste Hindu woman" (Shandilya 2015, 472). The doublespeak that proclaims the immorality of retrogressive patriarchy while denying the female body both agency and sexuality, is an important marker of the them vs. us" narrative. Mukesh Singh's statements that blame the victim for the rape and murder – A decent girl won't roam around at nine o'clock at night. A girl is far more responsible for rape than a boy" (Udwin 2015) – have often been cited in these narratives. Children are equally vulnerable to the invading predators. Commenting on the increase of sex crimes directed at children in India, Samar Halarnkar writes that the perpetrators are mostly semi-educated, male migrants in their 20s, unmarried and living away from a social structure." The criminals worked as fruit sellers, itinerant labourers, gym cleaners, wood-cutters, private-bus drivers and other dead-end marginal jobs on India's urban edges." (Halarnkar 2013.) The narratives here, as Halarnkar explicitly admits, resonate with the argument of "Bare Branches" made by Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea den Boer (2002).[5] The "Bare Branch" theory endows the rural immigrant male with anti-social, anti-urban, and immoral tendencies that are reiterated in most of the commentaries connecting urban crime (especially sex crimes) to the immigrant problem in Delhi.

The discourse that posits the urban female as the symbol of vulnerable urban landscape, and the rustic immigrant as its immoral Other, subtly glosses over the class moorings of the narrative.

While Desai, in her analysis" of the anatomy of gangrape", discusses "a certain class of men" which "is deeply uncomfortable with women displaying their independence", she does not elaborate on some who feel" and perceive them to be predators, or profile the victim. Shandilya, in her analysis of the discursive production of 'Nirbhaya', has shown how the debates around the Delhi gang-rape framed the victim, while she remained anonymous as stipulated by courts, as everywoman", which helped rally disparate activist groups as well as citizens from all walks of life to the protest". However, even after the victim's identity was revealed, she remained everywoman", because of her very specific identity as a middle-class, urban woman" (Shandilya 2015, 469-70). I argue that, at this point, the urban moral landscape develops into a *landscape of exclusion*. It seeks to exclude the floating populations as aggressors, while also excluding women who have no access to the class privileges that this narrative presumes in its central subject. As David Sibley has shown, such exclusions are informed by ideas of the "self" and the "other", where, in spatial conflicts, one "community represents itself as normal, a part of the mainstream, and feels threatened by the presence of others who are perceived to be different and 'other'" (Sibley 1995, 28-29). Dominant space discourse defines members of the subordinate groups as dirty, defiled or diseased. Boundaries are set up and "violated" through border-crossings, which are a punishable offence. Boundaries "provide security and comfort" to some people, while they are the cause of deprivation to others (Sibley 1995, 32).

The narrative of exclusion, while accounting for the many cases reported around the national capital and reinforcing the mainstream perception of the immigrant laborer as morally suspect, obscures the fact that misogyny is not class-specific or the result of the libidinal urges of the uprooted bachelor in exile. Misogyny pervades all classes of India; it is embedded in highly patriarchal cultural traditions which span from religious rituals excluding women (for instance, the Hindu practice of forbidding menstruating women from entering places of worship) to hyper-masculine popular cultures (the male-centric Bollywood film being one of the most visible examples)[6]. As Leeza Mangaldas has pointed out, in the context of the Nirbhaya Case, Misogyny has long permeated our textbooks, our pedagogy and our parenting. In fact, it runs so deep that it reflects itself even in our linguistics." (Mangaldas 2013) It would be fatuous to apportion this cultural trait along class divides. The fact that misogyny is not a class-specific malaise brought into the city by itinerant laborers is borne out by the statements made by the defence lawyers appearing for the accused in the Nirbhaya Case, in the same interview which saw Mukesh Singh making derogatory comments about the victim. One of the lawyers, M. L. Sharma, went on to say, "If you keep sweets on the street then dogs will come and eat them. Why did Nirbhaya's parents send her with anyone that late

at night? He was not her boyfriend. Is it not the parents' responsibility to keep an eye on where she goes and with whom?" (Garg 2015) The comments made by a lawyer (neither a "low status" immigrant nor a "Bare Branch") that objectify the woman and the female body should be read along with the analysis of the security question posed by the immigrant; the canine metaphor employed above underlines the mainstream view of the "fringes" of the city.

Pristine City/Squalid Slum

Sibley has discussed how the morality of cleanliness" (Sibley 1995, 64) can be pivotal in constructing geographies of exclusion. The morally upright is often equated with the "clean" and the "orderly". "The virtue of cleanliness can be suggested by associations of people and places" (64) and the "immoral" to be excluded/erased could also be suggested in much the same way. In much of the journalistic discourse following the Nirbhaya Case, the space of Ravi Das Camp, the slum housing three of the six accused, was constructed as the city's "underbelly", the Other that bred the criminals running riot in its streets. Many of the reports juxtaposed Ravi Das Camp with the neighbouring R. K. Puram, one of the "swankiest" parts of urban Delhi.

The visual representation of Ravi Das Camp would further underscore this exclusion: the slum was repeatedly represented for its squalidness and cramped, dirty spaces. On 19 December 2012, three days after the gang-rape, *India Today* carried a piece on Ravi Das Camp, headlined "Dens of Rapists: Delhi's Underbelly is a Fertile Breeding Grounds for Criminals". The article, framed as an "investigation" that "brings out a first-hand account of Delhi's seamy underbelly", gives a sweeping account of the slum: The accused all lived within 30 meters of each other, in the camp's narrow by-lanes, clogged sewers and makeshift hutments that turn into breeding grounds for some of the Capital's worst headlines" (Bagga 2012). The narrative is supported by a composite image that brings together three inter-connected visual representations of the slum (see Image 1).

Image 1. A composite image of Ravi Das Camp slum, which underscores the spatial narratives of squalor and immorality.

Here, the resident covering her face in apparent shame, the squalid interior of the home of one of the accused rapists, and the closed and clogged lane that leads nowhere, come together in a 'spatial' narrative that reinforces the stereotypes that Nalwa and Desai point to, while at the same time asserting that this site falls out of the moral landscape of the city.

This morality of cleanliness and the need to exclude/erase the "dirt space" is a recurring theme in narratives that posit the floating populations as the Other. The outcry against JJ (*jhuggi jhopris*, the Hindi term for slums) colonies is a case in point. The ethos of cleanliness and order that govern the moral landscape of the city demand that these be erased. For instance, in 1995, the Pritampura Sudhar Samiti and Okhla Factory Owners Association filed a petition demanding the removal of slums from their neighbourhood because:

> JJ dwellers defecate in neighborhood parks causing "untold miseries to the residents" .
> . . [are] a health hazard to the locality and has [sic] transgressed their right to decent
> living. Besides young girls do not come to their own balconies throughout the day as

obnoxious smell pollute the atmosphere and the entire environment. (qtd. in Batra and Mehra 2008, 401-02)

Sanjay Srivastava, in his study of the Akshardham Temple complex in Delhi, has pointed to a socio-spatial transformation that is currently underway in Delhi and a number of other Indian cities:

> . . . the making of "clean spaces" . . . proceeds apace with the removal of "unclean spaces" such as jj colonies. . . . The "cleared land" is to be put to various uses, including new leisure and commercial activities. . . . Akshardham sits just across the river from the erstwhile jj colony of Nangla Machi, demolished in 2006. There is a telling relationship that each of these sites has to discourses of legality and illegality. (Srivastava 2009, 241)

The morality discourse here coexists with politico-legal discourses that seek to remake the city in the image of a global city conducive to the manoeuvres of Big Capital. The demolition of Nangla Machi to make way for a temple complex that projects the commercial side of religion is not an isolated case. For instance, the Pritampura Sudhar Samiti petitioners who demanded the removal of slum dwellers because they were unclean, also pointed out that the slum should be removed to "prevent the spread of any dangerous disease, [due to which] . . . foreigners [have] stopped (coming) to India [and] that has . . . affected foreign trade resulting into [the] loss of crores in foreign exchange" (qtd. in Batra and Mehra 2008, 402). And the legal authority seemed to agree:

> Delhi being the capital city of the country is a *show window* to the world of our culture, heritage, traditions and way of life. A city like Delhi must act as a catalyst for building of modern India. It cannot be allowed to degenerate and decay. The slums that have been created . . . [are] the cause of nuisance and breeding ground of so many ills. The welfare, health, maintenance of law and order, safety and sanitation of these residents cannot be sacrificed and their rights under Article 21 is violated in the name of social justice to the slum dwellers. (402)

The verdict is rather stark in its expressions of how the city is to be imagined. The geography of the "show window" has no place for slums that are a "nuisance" and "breeding grounds of so many ills". This geography will "degenerate and decay" if the slums invade its pristine precincts. It is also interesting how the court verdict chooses to cast the city in a narrative that stresses the duality of its landscape: it is, simultaneously, a symbol of our culture, heritage, traditions", and a catalyst for the

building of modern [read, commercially vibrant and market-oriented] India". This is exactly where I locate an important moment in the discursive production of the moral landscape of exclusion – in the collusion between right wing political activism (that stresses on the conservation of a certain way of life") and Big Capital (that needs the city to be cleansed of the undesirables to attract investment).

The Political Economy of the Urban Moral Landscape

Implicit in the middle- and upper-class assertion of the moral landscape of the city is, as Leela Fernandes points out, "a new civic culture for the middle classes in liberalising India" (Fernandes 2004, 85). The drive to "beautify" the city, to make it a global metropolis that attracts "foreign exchange", is in effect an effort to purge the city of its migrant poor, or to imagine the landscape of the urban as purged of the floating populations. Fernandes sees a new form of class-based socio-spatial segregation" in this re-fashioning of the urban.

This drive to demolish the urban refuges of immigrant labor needs to be read in the context of new coalitions between the state and Big Capital, formed and nurtured in the wake of economic liberalization and the arrival of private investments in urban development. To attract capital flows from multinational corporations and other developed markets, Delhi is forced to become a "smart city" shorn of its "underbelly". The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), launched in 2005, is one example of this project of urban transformation. JNNURM aims to "encourage reforms and fast track planned development of identified cities". Focus is to be on efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/Parastatal agencies towards citizens. While one of the goals of the mission was to "take up a comprehensive programme of urban renewal and expansion of social housing in towns and cities, paying attention to the needs of slum dwellers" (Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India 2017), as analysts have shown, the Mission in fact asked urban administration to do away with their pro-poor schemes and to work on further commercializing the urban space (Chatterjee et al 2012).

The politico-legal sanction for this process of exclusion and erasure is further brought out by the numerous evictions sanctioned and carried out in favour of "development". For instance, in December 2015, the government agencies demolished Shakur Basti in North-West Delhi to make way for a railway project, leaving the slum inhabitants, largely migrant daily-wage labourers from

north Indian hinterlands, to live in the open in the biting cold of the Delhi winter. In the melee of the demolition, Mohammad Anwar and Safeena Khatoon, whose families had moved to Delhi from Khagaria in Bihar, lost their six-month-old daughter Rukaiyya, who was crushed by falling debris (Iqbal 2015).

Liberalizing India was also the India were right-wing majoritarian identity politics gained ground as a political force. Within a decade of the economic reforms, right-wing parties would come to rule the federal government. In this context, the crystallization of the "Hindu" identity as *the* Indian identity has had a role to play in the spatial purification of the city – or in the effort to imagine the moral landscape of the city as an exclusively Hindu middle/upper-class space. In the wake of the Nirbhaya case, Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an ideological mentor to right-wing politics in India, commented that "such crimes [read, rape and sexual crimes against women] hardly take place in *Bharat*, but they frequently occur in *India*" (qtd. in Shandilya 2015, 472). Here the space of "Bharat" (an ideological space which privileges Hindu traditions, customs and ways of life, and a mythological space of Hindu domination) is pitted against the actual, everyday space of "India" where teaming millions, including the underclass and the minorities and the marginal, defy ideological regimentation and domination. Also, note that the statement refers to "Bharat" in the present tense (and *not* in nostalgic past tense), thereby claiming the simultaneous existence of two parallel landscapes – one that lays claims to a moral high ground derived from Hindu traditions; and another one that is invaded by the Other and thereby, in immoral chaos. It is no coincidence that, as shown by Shandilya, right-wing political activists and organisations were active in consolidating a nationalist campaign around the Nirbhaya case, where the victim was elevated to the status of a martyr and the incident was seen as a reminder about the need to "save" Indian culture and tradition.

The right-wing discourse often works on the fear that floating populations, who often fall outside state surveillance, can be a threat to national security. Fernandes has read these fears alongside right-wing political narratives that have dominated the Indian landscape since the late 1990s, to analyze the production of "a form of purified Hindu citizenship that converges with the dynamics of spatial purification" (Fernandes 2004, 98). The question of visibility/invisibility in relation to state surveillance forms an important crux of this discourse – the haunting fear that anti-India, terrorist, and foreign elements use floating populations as a cover to infiltrate Indian cities. For instance, one of the major complaints against Ravi Das Camp, which emerged in the reportage of the Nirbhaya Case, was that this site was clearly not well-policed or administered, unlike the rest of the city

(Bagga 2012). Another ubiquitous example is the narrative of "Bangladeshi illegal immigrants" and the grave threat they pose to Indian urban spaces, which is often played out in mainstream media.[7] In these narratives, the illegal immigrant" dissolves into the larger multitude of immigrant laborers inhabiting the slums of the city and uses the invisibility of the group to make his inroads into the city.

The threat of terrorism further complicates this discourse: as one news report claims, "[t]he fear that, along with innocuous 'economic refugees', the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence and Al-Qaida-linked terrorists may also be crossing over is all too real" (Chakravarty 2012). This narrative heightens and feeds the paranoia surrounding the "invading Other" and drives the desire to cleanse the city of such elements, as Sujata Ramachandran (2003) has noted in her analysis of Operation Pushback (the action plan implemented by the Indian central government in 1992 to oust "illegal", "undocumented" Bangladeshi immigrants); such operations are situated in a political-bureaucratic collusion with the sanction of centrist political movements. The implementation of this "operation" brought out the processes of othering implicit in the characterization, identification, and description of the spaces that the floating populations of the city inhabit. As Ramachandran points out, "all of the 'Bangladeshi prone areas' recognised by the government and reported widely through the press were also insignificant and marginal spaces occupied by the urban poor". And the way they were categorized brought out the insignificance that bureaucracy assigned to these spaces, "in relation to the rich mohallas they abut":

> Some slums were catalogued primarily through nearby landmarks like police station or monument and prominent land use features like '*shamshan ghat*' (cremation ground), '*ganda nala*' (open sewers), '*bara pul*' (big bridge) near or on which they were situated. (…) A non-Bangladeshi resident of a slum interviewed during the course of fieldwork pithily uncovered this link. '*Log garibi ko nahi, garibon ko* hatana chahaten hain (People do not want to eliminate poverty; they want to eliminate the poor). (Ramachandran 2003, 639-40)

Here, a narrative of marginality encompasses the space of the slums, its inhabitant community and their insignificance. The cataloguing here is a clear indicator of a strategy of exclusion where the city locates, constructs, reads and rejects the "slum" along with the pollutants it rejects and expels from its landscape – dead bodies and sewage.

The Politics of "Relocating" the Migrant Other

The metaphors of the moral landscape find their physical spatial dimensions in the actual "removal" and forced "relocation" of the floating populations and communities of migrant laborers. The physical realization and consolidation of the moral landscape of the city is complete when you ghettoize the floating populations on the fringes of the city. The convergence of the narratives of right-wing paranoiac nationalism and Big Capital seeks the erasure of the floating populations from the landscape of the city. However, the city cannot do without its scavengers, watermen, and "maid-servants". Hence, you install them in the ghettoes *you* assign – (reassuringly) away from your gated communities, while they (conveniently) still service your apartments. Kavita Ramakrishnan has written on one such ghetto – the Bawana resettlement colony. Hers is a testimony of lives uprooted and displaced:

> Mostly rural migrants to Delhi, those who live in the resettlement colony express sadness at the stalling of what they formerly perceived as an incremental migrant journey to relative financial security in the city. Now displaced to the semi-rural periphery, people bitterly speak of Delhi's 'world-class' city ambitions that mainly served to exclude the poor. Though nostalgia permeates narratives of *basti* life in the city, at times glossing over the hardships faced, they make a sharp contrast between the *bastis* of the past and the current situation. (Ramakrishnan 2014)

Their erasure from the imagined moral landscape of the city and the attendant "demolition drives", and their forced relocations to the fringes and semi-urban landscapes farther away from the city, often prove hazardous. Their health and safety are endangered, while the movement away from the city centre curtails the economic ambitions that had originally driven the migrations. Moreover, As Ramakrishnan points out, "in these in-between spaces . . . women face sexual violence on an everyday basis, adding an extra layer of marginality to the already bleak lived realities" (2014). However, these are never reported, discussed or protested.

The dominant discourses on the security threats seemingly posed by floating populations often mask these stories of urban apathy, and elide questions of how urban spaces themselves threaten these marginal populations. Although cases such as the Nirbhaya Case have brought the issue of women's safety in public spaces to the forefront, the lived realities of women (and children) who have to relocate to the margins are often kept out of these "mainstream" dialogues on women's safety. As one of the women in the Bawana resettlement colony tells Ramakrishnan, "[t]he girls here are treated like insects, as if they have no dignity." Here, the urban subterfuge, which seeks to hide away the economic necessity of floating labour and to project a moral landscape that excludes

the perceived Other, also becomes a cover for sexual predators who raid these resettlement colonies. Settlements like Bawana live in fear of drunken men driving out of their city enclaves or from neighbouring villages. None of these stories are reported and no candles burn for these victims.

The narrative politics of the spatially contested city

The insecurity threat that the city perceives in the "flotsam" that arrives at its shores is often based on a contestation over space and the product of a discourse that legitimizes certain classes of the city over others. In this sense, this question of (in)security hinges on the "hospitality" that the modern city seeks to deny. In the narrative representations of the floating populations of Delhi, the idea of hospitality" moves from the ethical or moral realm of inter-individual relationships to the economic, political and legal realms of the city's precarious relationship with a class of migrant laborers, played out as a conflict over urban space.

It may be fruitful to read these narratives against the backdrop of the present state and local government's attempt to restructure the city (as a populated and polluted space) into a "functional" and "efficient" one. The decades following the economic liberalization have seen a new official vision of the city taking shape in the form of government projects to remake it as a global city. Politicians and planners aim to overhaul crumbling urban infrastructure and demolish its slums teeming with migrant laborers, to "reimagine" the city. And yet, inherent to such cosmopolitan" initiatives is a class-based sensibility and politics that attempt to flatten out contests over the different meanings and visions of the city.

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Notes

[1] Debolina Dutta and Oishik Sircar give an overview of the amount of journalistic and opinion-page commentaries that came out on the case: "There has been a surfeit of writing on the incident and the protests on blogs and social media. There was widespread international attention, with statements from the United Nations and international human rights organizations. Media from across the world covered the protests and provided regular updates, many of them recreating the colonial imagery of premodern victimhood." (Dutta and Sircar 2013, 295) For an instance of international coverage of the incident, see Mandhana and Trivedi (2012).

[2]. As recently as in 2015, the Indian federal government estimated that 48.5 per cent of all rural households [in India] are saddled with at least one deprivation indicator" that the study focused on (the indicators ranging from lack of proper housing to illiteracy to landlessness) (Ghildiyal 2015).

[3]. G. S. Bhalla and Gurmail Singh have studied the visible deceleration" shown by the Indian agricultural economy in the post-liberalization period (Bhalla and Singh 2010, 34–44).

[4]. Yardley (2011) reports that Gurgaon has almost four times as many private security guards as police officers".

[5]. Hudson and den Boer (2002, 11) take the term from a Chinese word, *guang gun-er*, "indicating those male branches of a family tree that would never bear fruit because no marriage partner might be found for them", and the term is used in a study that draws a causal relationship among the gendered dynamics of Asian (especially Chinese and Indian) societies where male children are preferred over female, the disproportionate numbers of bachelor men and the increase in the security threats in those societies. Rural–urban migration brings these gender imbalances to the fore as there develops a "a large floating population", "full of the poor, the unemployed, and the vagrant, all of whom were noted to be prone to violence" (ibid., 30). These "transient workers find bewildering differences when they first come to cities, often experiencing disdain or exclusion from urbanites" (ibid., 29–30).

[6] The mainstream Bollywood musicals, comedies, dramas, romances and action-thriller genres are commonly centred on the male "hero" who exemplifies heteronormative masculine ideals. As Kush Varia (2012, 99) puts it, "characters that are symbols of rebelliousness and ideals of hypermasculinity – these are men of action, not words". As Murali Balaji (2013, 56) has noted, Bollywood has increasingly projected a "hegemonic masculinity" to promote "an ideal masculine image while marginalizing the Indian Other—the supposedly undesirable Indian masculinities that fall outside the hypermasculine heteronormative ideals". Also see Roy (2010) for an analysis of the stereotyped imaginary of the hypermasculine Punjabi in Bollywood.

[7]. For instance, see the following report: "In a new challenge for Delhi Police, some Bangladeshi criminals have turned to committing big time robberies in the national capital and fleeing by road or rail back to their country for a few months – before they strike again. According to police, these Bangladeshis take rooms on rent in slum colonies. The women members of the gang work as maids in nearby neighbourhoods. The men, during the daytime, conduct recces of these colonies disguised as garbage collectors or scrap dealers." (Quoted from "Bangladeshi criminal gangs new challenge for Delhi Police," Yahoo News, July 22, 2013)