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## Master Thesis

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# Ephemeralities of the Everyday in Architectural Production

## - mapping Home, Care and Labour on the construction site


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# ABSTRACT

***The politics of space is the politics of class is the politics of body.***

Architecture is often misunderstood as art, as the product of an architect's creative work, entirely obscuring the numerous systems of labour involved within its production. This deliberate invisibilization[1] works to exclude, isolate and alienate construction workers and their labour, both productive wage labour and reproductive care-work (both waged and unwaged) from the collective discourse on Architectural Production. To re-frame this ubiquitous pattern, my thesis is focused on situations and trajectories that are popularly perceived to be outside the horizon of architectural practice while being specifically situated within or near architectural sites.

It perceives home-making practices[2]— the undefined, careful and prudent arrangement of a domestic sphere within the power structure of the site — as an act of embodied resistance against invisibility, aiming to make them observable. The field in this investigation is observed through two temporally transient frames — a make-shift home within an 'under-construction' building and a labour camp[3] of a high-rise construction company— in Hyderabad[4] , India. While the make-shift home moves as the building rises, adapting seasonally, the 'camp' is more stationary, restricted only to brief improvisations. In either case, the 'home' on the site informs socio-political relationships in the capitalistic architectural production network.

This thesis has been an exploratory field exercise under the broad question: What is reproduced through and by the processes involved in the production of Architecture? Within this emergent subject of architectural research, my thesis asks specifically: Who builds our Architecture?[5] ; Where and how do they live and work? How do they make a home-place within the work-place? What components of the construction system act to separate construction workers from the space *they* produce through the labour of *their* bodies? Is there resistance to capitalistic exploitation within their home or workplace?

This information, technical, statistical and experiential has been used in identifying patterns and documenting research findings. In the form of demographic data, interviews, collection of field notes and sketches, an informative cartography has been drawn. These maps along with the essays will chart migration, everyday life, class struggle, home-making practices and gender and caste issues that reflect – and also challenge – shifts in the political economy.

[1] Peggy Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1st edn (Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325182.
[2] In architectural theory, homemaking practices are seen as lived realities that render buildings with experience and meaning
[3] 'Labour Camp is the name given to the company housing provided to construction workers
[4] Hyderabad is one of the fastest growing cities in the world according to several reports (Savills' Growth Hubs Index and Knight Frank India)
[5] Kadambari Baxi et al., 'WBYA Guidebook', Who builds your Architecture? n.d.

# POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

*Through this statement I clearly state my position and privilege of belonging to an upper-middle class, educated family living in a metropolitan city since at least three generations. I belong to what in India is termed as OBC (Other Backward Castes), however, I am not eligible for caste reservations (which are similar to affirmative action in the West) because of my parents' educational and social background.*

*As an Architect, I have been able to traverse a liminal space between the client and the construction worker. Even though this position has been immensely useful fi my research, it has also generated an unavoidable power relation on the field. As a researcher in this relationship, I consider that it is in my capacity to observe, record, analyse and reveal invisible realities on the construction site. However, I also acknowledge that, for the purpose of this project, my capacity is only limited to this.*

*The main political framework of this thesis: class struggle, labour rights and feminist ideas, have been familiar concepts to me since a very young age. With my mother herself being a feminist and active in radical left-leaning student politics, and my father, a journalist with progressive democratic ideologies, I learned to think rationally as a child. My maternal family is a world of Marxist thinkers, writers and poets and challenging class-politics and capitalism was, therefore, always encouraged. Stating these political foundations is important for describing my positionality as a researcher, as through this I declare any ideological biases or affiliations that may have permeated my work. It may also assist the reader in perceiving my position in this thesis, rather clearly.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**1. Introduction**
1.1 Architecture and Labour (Contextual Framework)
1.2 Who builds our Architecture? (Research Design)
1.3 Field of Study

**2. Literature Review**
2.1 About Labour and Care
2.2 About Drawing
2.3 Theoretical Framework

**3. Methodology**
3.1 Access and position on the field
3.2 *Roti, Kapda, Makaan:* Field Notes
3.3 *Din guzaar rahe hai*: Interviews
3.4 Sketchbook
3.5 Photo Documentation

**4. Atlas**
4.1 Map A - Cartography of Migration
4.2 Map B - 'Camp' near the 'Site'
4.3 Map C - 'Make-shift' Home within the 'Site'

**5. Discussion**
5.1 An Elephant-foot Yam and a Smartphone make Home
5.2 *Rozgaar*: Stories of Migration and Labour
5.3 *Pachaas rupaye kam*: Disparity, Abuse and Social Insecurity

**6. Conclusion**

iii. Bibliography
iv. List of Figures
v. List of Illustrations

# 01
# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Architecture and Labour (Contextual Framework)

The purpose of this Thesis is to understand architecture as a process and not a product, as a verb and not a noun, as work and not art, or as Elke Krasny has written 'architecture' with a small a and not with a capital A[1]. Throughout the extent of this thesis, the attempt will be to rethink the production of Architecture itself to understand it as a convergence of labours.

In this era of increasing neo-liberal globalization, architecture is a tool for capitalistic accumulation, a voice for propagating the ideals of the state and system. The fundamental purpose of architecture itself, that of providing shelter is entirely obscure in discourse. It is instead a method to segregate and marginalize.

India is currently the fourth largest economy according to both the IMF and the World Bank. According to the International Labour Organization, a large share of the employment sector in the country is provided by the informal sector. It is clear then that the informal labourers of the country are the major producers of its economy. Hyderabad, India has been cited as one of the 'fastest growing real-estate markets' not just in the country but in the world. Its real estate market attracts construction companies to build megastructures, high-rise apartments and mammoth office complexes that accurately suit the aspirations of the growing middle-class population of the city, advancing more revenue flow into the construction industry.

However, the benefits of this booming economy are seldom reaped by those who produce it. In the fiscal year of 2024-25, the construction sector is estimated to have a Gross Value Added (GVA) share of approximately 8.7% of India's GVA[2]. The minimum monthly wage for unskilled construction workers is set at 20368 INR or 232.91 USD by the central government. However, according to multiple accounts, labourers are paid much less than this number. Further, this minimum wage is not consistent in all states and in Hyderabad, where my research is situated, contractors are legally required to pay 12,420 INR. However, this might not be a real statistic either.[3] This fluctuating wage rate and its inconsistency across different states creates precarious situations for the construction workers who migrate from poor rural areas in states like Chattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal to metropolitan cities in search of better livelihood.

This relentless construction activity creates work for the rural migrants but leaves them inevitably homeless. In the absence of public housing or inadequate company housing, they create temporary homes — usually with tarpaulin and scaffolding-timber — within or near their place of work. The temporal nature of their dwelling is crucial to understand their life within the system; they transition from makeshift shelters into the unfinished building, becoming its first

**1** Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny, Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.), 40.
**2** 'Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India', accessed 21 July 2025, https://www.mospi.gov.in/.
**3** WageIndicator Foundation, accessed 15 July 2025, https://wageindicator.org/

inhabitants or live in auto-constructed shelters in 'informalized' settlements in the peripheries of the city. Employed as informal labourers with no social security in what Peggy Deamer calls 'dubious'[4] projects, missing basic life-sustaining amenities, migrant labourers are further vulnerable.

Navigating through these precarious social, economic and political scenarios is in itself perceived as resistance. Documenting this everyday negotiation with the system is crucial to understand struggles of class, caste and gender, not only on the construction site, but on the global site of the labouring world.

**1.2 Who builds our Architecture? (Research Design)**

> 'The fact that architects themselves are startled by the term "architectural labor" indicates how late, compared to professions like art, film, journalism, couture, and literature, we are to a substantive discussion of labor and its value.'
> - Peggy Deamer, Introduction to the book 'Architecture and Labor'[5]

In popular perception, even within the community and outside it, Architecture is understood as a calling as opposed to being a profession. A larger-than-life image is created and reproduced consistently by architects and the system. By reproducing this image, most architects themselves believe that their work is distant from any discourses on labour. This tendency obscures the work of all the actors that produce Architecture, particularly marginalizing workers who's bodily labour is used, abused and exploited in the realisation of architectural visions.

This obscurity as argued by Peggy Deamer in her book, 'Architecture and Labor' is not by any means accidental. It is a part of the overarching neoliberal agenda to exclude labour, labourers and any paid or unpaid care-work from the collective consciousness of architects. Within this agenda, construction labourers are conveniently hidden away by capitalistic tools and practicing architects while working in the hinterlands of this reality, remain largely indifferent to it. Deamer also argues that if architects could abandon this 'antipathy' and 'structure their work more humanely' the discipline would become a collective effort of multiple creative actors. To this end, a 'structural understanding of power relations' through a 'fluid, horizontal and complex' transformation of our theories and institutions is essential.[6]

Remarkably, the unique space for understanding these structural elements in both

4 Peggy Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1st edn (Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325182.
5 Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1.
6 Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1.



theory and praxis *is* the construction site. The site is where the home-place and work-place merge for construction workers – their social situation and class struggle evidently contrasting the large, luxurious buildings *they* produce through the work of *their* bodies. On the site in temporary make-shift structures or insufficient company facilities, they care for themselves and each other while simultaneously 'going to work.' Here, architecture, becomes an embodied practice – well beyond bourgeois notions of spatial experience.

Within such a place of converging realities, my thesis perceives home-making – the undefined, careful and prudent arrangement of a domestic sphere within the power structure of the site – as an act of embodied resistance against invisibility. It seeks to make everyday aspects of home, care and labour – that underlay the built environment – observable, so as to contribute to a more socially-nuanced, labour-centric understanding of architecture within contemporary political economy. Foregrounding this situated experience of construction workers through mapping, interviews and documentation, my thesis attempts to reinterpret the systemic narrative of architectural production. Here architecture or space is not seen as a static vacant object but as a place of various happenings understood through theories of Social Reproduction. (Taking from feminist urban theories, this thesis considers social reproduction to be an object within the urban that 'constitutes how, where, when and through whose labour the urban emerges.[7]It is part of the movement to locate social reproduction within the household and the workplace which merge on the construction site.')

My research is an attempt to *see* and *show* the various invisible happenings within this field with the aim to contribute to what is described in Peggy Deamer's book as an 'alternative architectural history'[8]. The central question that my thesis poses is this: Who builds our Architecture?[9] What is produced and what is reproduced in the process of capitalistic architectural production? Where do the workers come from? Where and how do they live? How do they build a home-place within their work-place? What are the gender and caste[10] politics that govern under the class politics on the site? What are the contractual/informal relations that decide the type of work, wage and livelihood of construction workers? Are there moments of resistance – do workers organize against capital or unionize?[11] Ultimately, this thesis is an exercise to answer the question, how to write and draw an alternative architectural history of the times?

Additionally, prompted by Joan Tronto's question 'In the process of building are the workers protected and *cared for?*[12], my thesis aims to investigate the field through an understanding of 'care.' The writing of this thesis has been a reflexive and projective exercise to first 'recognize the need for care', to be able to facilitate the beginning of a 'caring' process and

**7** Linda Peake et al., A Feminist Urban Theory for Our Time: Rethinking Social Reproduction and the Urban (John Wiley & Sons, 2021).
**8** 'Foreword' to Architecture and Labor, 1st edn, by Andrew Ross (Routledge, 2020), viii, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325182.
**9** Kadambari Baxi et al., 'WBYA Guidebook', Who builds your Architecture?, n.d.
**10** The caste system is a rigid social social stratification that is based on heredity, with minimal or no social mobility between castes
**11** Tithi Bhattacharya. Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory (Pluto Press, 2017), 91.
**12** 'Caring Architecture', in Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet, by Joan C. Tronto (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.).

in the process, explore 'alternative forms of representation'.[13]

The research methodology for this study includes collecting demographic data, gathering field-notes on different typologies of construction sites, mapping migration, living, working and social patterns of construction workers, added interviews and photographs as supplementary information for the essays and drawing. Analysis of the visual data was conducted with the aim to chart patterns of alienation and exploitation within the workplace. Through these methodologies, it was possible to engage discourse on aforementioned questions through visual, verbal, abstract, inherent and experienced knowledge. However, I acknowledge here that the drawings and maps are not completely representative of the social realities of the site, and bear limitations, and must be read as a 'partial and situated record'[14].

This impetus to understand Architecture as an intersectional activity intrinsically linked to social dynamics and movements originated early in my career. However, the school curriculum didn't provide any pedagogy on social effects or social responses of Architecture, certainly ignoring workforce, manufacturing systems, underlying politics governing access, agency and safety. This general apathy became more palpable when I graduated and went into practice, gravitating me towards questions that increasingly challenged existing social structures in the field.

There is often no consideration to aspects of Labour, Class or Gender when a place is designed. The marginalization that occurs in census documents, the exploitation that is perpetrated on sites of manufacture and construction, the inaccessibility of legal or medical support to the working staff is seldom considered as a part of an Architect's design 'challenge'. The lack of unionization in working groups and the unorganized set-up of firms makes the profession more and more about working for the rich and propagating the dominant narrative of the state.

### 1.3 Field of Study

*This thesis is positioned very much within the field of Architecture, even though it overlaps and intersects many different studies of the humanities. It is my opinion that often, sociological studies in architecture are understood to fall under sociology and not architecture, whereas there is a necessity to establish aspects of socio-political import within architectural studies itself.*

*Peggy Deamer establishes that architecture seeks 'contemporaneity', and this impulse must be 'harnessed into a new project for the field' in the context of understanding labour*

**13** 'Care as Active Architectural Practice', in Care, ed. Torsten Lange and Gabrielle Schaad, Gta Papers 7 (gta Verlag, 2022).
**14** Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Imperialism, 1st edn, by Mark Harrison and Peter H. Cain (Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003101536-9 qtd in: Huda Tayob, 'Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing "Tell" a Different Story?', Architecture and Culture 6, no. 1 (2018): 203–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2017.1417071.



*concerns[15]. Through this thesis, I seek to understand architecture from the inside, as mentioned earlier and by representing situated realities of the site, encourage a more sensitive, care-full outlook towards architecture.*

*This study directly addresses prevailing narratives around architectural production, acknowledging it as a complex process involving multiple actors. Through an exploration of on-site spatial relationships as social relationships, it discusses how architecture can perpetuate social marginalization. It engages with the politics of space, discussing invisibility, alienation and 'othering' of construction workers and is therefore part of the discourse on architectural theory and criticism.*

*It also finds locus in Labour Studies with emphasis on care-work. Examining the experiences of construction workers in architectural production and social reproduction, it explores the multiple meanings of labour on the construction site/ homeplace. Highlighting the concept of 'embodied labour' it emphasizes on the precarious living and working conditions of workers through a perspective of care.*

*Through maps and drawings of everyday life on the field, this study observes and documents the material culture of workers' temporary homes, including the objects and artifacts they use to create a sense of place. These everyday aspects can be seen as forms of resistance against power structures challenging ideas of 'neutrality' of space.*

*Postcolonial theory acknowledges the complex interplay of cultures and the ways that marginalized groups create new forms of identity and resistance. The place-making activities on the construction site can be viewed through this frame.*

*Listed below are some works that have formed an important introduction into this discourse and become foundational aspects of this thesis. CARE journal by ETH Zurich (Lange and Schaad 2022), particularly Jos Boys' Care as Active Architectural Practice'(Boys 2022) points to the distancing of architecture from those who inhabit and build it. The Critical Care Exhibition journal with the premise "that architecture and urban development do not have to be subservient to the dictates of capital and the exploitation of resources and labour" (Fitz and Krasny 2019). The work of Who Builds Your Architecture has been welcome proof that thinking of architecture from a care perspective is beginning to happen (WBYA 2011). Peggy Deamer's 'Architecture and Labour' highlights the prevalent notion in the profession that architecture 'stands outside the dirty world of both labor and the political economy' (Deamer 2020, 59). Tithi Bhattacharya's Social Reproduction Theory has turned out to be a fundamental theoretical* concept to base most of my analysis on while Silvia Federici and Alessandra Mezzadri's works have been pivotal in shaping some foundational ideas.

**15** Deamer, Architecture and Labor.

# 02
# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. About Labour and Care

Peggy Deamer in her book, 'Architecture and Labor' establishes the premise that the invisibilization of construction workers is not by any means accidental. It is a part of an overarching capitalist agenda to exclude labour, labourers and any care work from the collective consciousness of Architects. According to Deamer, this marginalization is first a self-directed action — graduate architects often consider their labour as a 'learning endeavour' or a 'necessary rite of passage' and settle for unpaid internships or underpaid jobs. This is further extended - even more severely - to those who labour on architectural sites, believing that architecture 'stands outside the dirty world of both labor and the political economy'.[1]

To understand the question of Labour in Architecture we must first understand whether the practice of designing itself is understood as labour. Numerous examples from critics, theorists and architects/designers themselves reflect that design activity is perceived as 'art' and not work. Peggy Deamer brings up an interesting rhetoric in this regard: If artists have managed to understand their work as work and demand the society to change their perception, then why are Architects still calling their work art to distance it from the definition of work itself? She argues that architects as a group are late to the discussion on labour or value. This general apathy towards labour, Deamer suggests, is the reason why construction work is understood as separate from the intellectual work of architects. Due to architecture being a service industry with smaller firms having no organizational framework within which workforce can unionize, such debates or discussions are not a general part of a work-day for most architects. The 'vague relational distinctions' in the hierarchy of the firm add to this, according to Deamer. [2]

Even with this absence of unions or active political discourse in the field itself, architectural labour, Deamer argues falls thoroughly under 'Creative Work' which itself falls under 'Work' which itself falls under 'Capitalism'. Architecture as a profession is only concerned with the short-term economical profits that occur through real-estate markets and much less, if at all, concerned with social or ethical aspects. Succumbing to the overarching 'neo-liberal' paradigm of the world, it fails to recognize its own form as 'institutionalized labour'. Peggy Deamer tries to reorient the language towards architecture, by calling it a profession consisting of an 'assemblage' of different types of work and numerous groups of actors. She criticizes the current 'neo-liberal paradigm' in which architecture is a tool to achieve short-term real estate goals while overlooking longer-term social and ethical value. Calling focus to the 'how' of architectural production, she comments that the discipline is 'devoid of labour consciousness.'

**1** Peggy Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1st edn (Routledge, 2020), 59, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325182.
**2** Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1.

Peggy Deamer also discusses the global boom of urban building motivated by the need for accumulating capital, opening employment options for migrant labourers. The spaces of this employment are however, precarious and alienating and render the labourers vulnerable to abuse, both by the construction companies and by the state. In most of these cases, Architects are never held accountable for their involvement in the systemic exploitation of the working-classes or for that matter in the material-supply chain. The designer is not considered morally obligated to answer or assume responsibility of their role in the system. Peggy Deamer also points out that 'Mangerialism' is the excuse by which Architects can by-pass discourse on labour. The whole point of hiring labour revolves around making a profit in the profession of Architecture.

As an alternative, Deamer proposes an Architectural radical Democracy that would reorganize work in such a way that would also provide flexible, situation-specific solutions for those employed in a particular project. In this way conditions of living and workers would not be as volatile or precarious. Radical democracy calls for addressing conflict rather than denying its existence. Architects in this system must also 'protest' on the streets as well as impact change at the work table. This system of radical democracy in Architecture as Deamer suggests would also encourage architects to improve the terms and conditions of their employment by directly acknowledging the exploitation of others that their work involves. It would also further encourage academics to bring into their research and education aspects of exploitation and alienation so that students are aware of the consequences and the oppressive systems that govern and support their profession.

Peggy Deamer's work inspires to produce knowledge for what she terms an 'alternate architectural history'. This thesis aims to contribute to this history by bringing forth aspects of labour in architecture from the frame of an architectural site.[3]

Furhter, design practices can contribute to imagining and altering society by their innovative methods and diverse fields of association. However, more commonly, design systems exist in dominant hegemonic structures and often, if not always reproduce similar knowledges.

Design ecospheres, exist in this world as almost impenetrable echo-chambers. Architecture, as pointed out in the CARE jounral by ETH Zurich, talks to and about itself. Not only does Design exist in a capitalist consumerist world passively, but also practices to further the normative narrative.[4]

One of the most crucial arguments that arose in this discourse is about the distance that exists between the designer and the 'bodyminds' (Boys 2022) that inhabit a space or use

**3** Deamer, Architecture and Labor, 1.
**4** 'Care as Active Architectural Practice', in Care, ed. Torsten Lange and Gabrielle Schaad, Gta Papers 7 (gta Verlag, 2022).



a designed object. Something farther than this distance is that between the designer and the number of actors that create, build, produce, manufacture and live in the periphery of such spaces or in the desire of such objects. In the long shadow of architectural commodification, even space can be a barrier. Indifference of designers to a socio-political structure can only be called uncaring. The capitalist elite, the bourgeoisie control the production of the material used for construction or manufacture, the land on which world-famous buildings exist, the real estate of modern infrastructure and the branded retail of designed objects.

Those who live on the margins of societies do labour and care work that keeps these systems in shape. This care, however, is almost never returned, individually or by the state to them. So commonly seen everywhere, it is an invisible labour, a thing of overlooked mundaneness, an act that need not be returned in full or part. Architecture drives this segregation and hierarchy by building barriers (both physical and philosophical) to separate these interconnected spheres. When we look at the back of architecture without focusing on its aesthetic facade, we may see that there is a more complex system of production, supply, construction (making/labour) and maintenance that is exploitative and extractive in nature. This system remains unseen in architectural discourse as it is purposely hidden for capitalist accumulation.

Those at the back of architecture are the 'misfits'[5]trapped between complex tensions between production, supply and construction industries, and yet, they are the reason for these industries to capitalize to such a phenomenal extent. In short, the system deliberately pushes these marginalized 'bodyminds' further into the margins, denies any social access by denying physical access. Architects and designers are a part of this system. Our education system only teaches us to design and assist in building, no questions asked. The exhibition, Critical Care in Vienna, Austria cites examples from different geographies to show that architecture need not follow the state's example, "that architecture and urban development do not have to be subservient to the dictates of capital and the exploitation of resources and labour."[6]

The definition of care according to the Introduction to 'Critical Care' is that it must be considered a species activity including everything we do 'to maintain, continue, and repair our world, so we can live in it as well as possible.' The way to care in this way as suggested in the book is through circular economies, reuse, use of local products or by building a public environmental pedagogy.[7]

Joan Tronto on the other hand in the same collection describes a caring architecture to be one that can develop new ways of seeing socio-spatial relationships. She also rightly point out that architects and planners while not being 'uncaring' are in fact, caring wrongly.[8] Later in the discussion Tronto also suggests that we must go beyond a client-centric and even beyond

**5** Jos Boys, 'Care as Active Architectural Practice', in Care, ed. Torsten Lange and Gabrielle Schaad, Gta Papers 7 (gta Verlag, 2022).
**6** Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny, Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.).
**7** Fitz and Krasny, Critical Care, 13.
**8** 'Caring Architecture', in Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet, by Joan C. Tronto (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.), 27.

a ‘green’ architecture.[9]

This thesis originated through a reading of architecture through the different perspectives of care. Care became the central focus of its investigation and was also a part of designing the methodologies of the research and representation of my findings.

Boys poses a number of crucial questions within her essay and one of them has been borrowed into my thesis along its own context. I have tried to answer through my work: What are the everyday, unnoticed social, material, aesthetic, and spatial practices that perpetuate one particular normality – including one version of care or its lack?

By documenting the social, material, aesthetic and spatial practices within the construction site and within the sphere of Architectural Production this thesis, hopes to add to the emergent research on care in architecture.

Further, through a reading of Feminist Spatial Critiques, the thesis is positioned in a framework where care is understood in relationship with feminist studies and also with Social Reproduction Theory. As written in the essay Care, Uncare and the City, the means to establish a relationship between care and architecture, ‘the feminist care tradition’ played a pivotal role. In the second chapter of the collection Ali Madanipour this temporal period as an ‘age of carelessness’, citing ecological and social challenges that are due to anthropocentric concepts.

Carework has historically been performed by ‘ethnoracialized, classed, gendered minorities’ and also performed within marginalized spaces. [10] Through this lens an observation of the care-workers in India, reflects the centuries of caste-based discrimination, due to which most of the carework is done by the people of oppressed castes.

### 2.2. About Drawing

Huda Tayyob’s ‘Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing ‘Tell’ a Different Story?’ considers the potential value of using drawing as a means to study what she terms as ‘subaltern’ architectures. As part of her research, she has studied a series of markets in Cape Town, South Africa. This essay has been particularly instructive for my research because of the similarities between the cases. Firstly, Tayyob describes the field where she conducted this study as spaces that ‘usually fall outside typical architectural studies’. She highlights the spatial value of these

**9** ‘Caring Architecture’.
**10** Nir Cohen and Sabine Knierbein, ‘Social Inequalities, Uneven Space, and Care’, in Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies, ed. Angelika Gebauer et al. (Taylor & Francis, 2022).and Care\\uc0\\u8217(), in (\\i[]Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies), ed. Angelika Gebauer et al. (Taylor & Francis, 2022



‘marginal’ spaces and discusses the ethics and power dynamics that are involved in researching on such a field. My topic, incidentally also falls outside ‘typical architectural studies, despite its situation. Further as Tayob explores ideas of ethics on the field while mapping the ignored aspects within architecture, this essay has been a ‘how to’ of field research for me. Some of the methods and the ethics explored in this work were employed in my fieldwork as well.

Additionally, Tayyob introduces the use of architectural drawing as a tool, not just of documentation but also of analysis, especially to reflect such ‘overlooked and unseen spatial practices.’ The essay also questions whether this method of orthographic drawings can tell stories that are different from typical research fieldwork where there exists a distance between the researcher and the people on the field.

The essay also brings to notice, aspects of ethics on the field especially when working with these different methodologies, by citing Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said. Through both these sources, the essay explores the how to ‘draw’ the ‘subaltern’, but also how to recognize the power structure that inevitably exists between the researcher and the researched. They further argue that having this concern impacts results and process of the research. Further, by citing Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry and bell hooks’ concept of the ‘margin’, Tayyob positions architectural drawing as an indispensable tool in researching marginal spaces and uncovering their often ignored radical potential.[11] [12]

In the construction site, just as in Tayyob’s markets, the construction workers’ place is both home and space of work, additional to being their primary, sometimes only, source of income. Considering these multiple parallels, I have tried to include in my research methodology ‘drawing’ as a tool to record activity and document material culture. Taking it further from Tayyob’s analysis from hooks, I have also tried to understand the margin as both a physical and metaphoric space and approached my interviews in that direction. It was then inevitable that I found even in my study as did hooks and Tayyob, aspects of resistance and creative potential that are unique to understand the ‘marginalized’ communities. Drawing as a method of research, according to Tayyob positions the researcher ‘actively’ in the field and not as a transparent, invisible recorder of things. Taking from John Berger’s ‘Ways of Seeing’, Tayyob speaks about the act of seeing as a political and social act.[13]

Discussing the contrasting meanings of drawing, as drawing the things that have already happened as opposed to drawing the ‘ephemeral and temporal’ happenings while they happen is a theoretical and methodological device I have adopted in my thesis.[14]

**11** Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in Imperialism, 1st edn, by Mark Harrison and Peter H. Cain (Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003101536-9.
**12** Edward W. Said, Orientalism (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014).
**13** John Berger, Ways of Seeing (Penguin UK, 2008).
**14** Huda Tayob, ‘Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing “Tell” a Different Story?’, Architecture and Culture 6, no. 1 (2018): 203–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2017.1417071.

## 2.3. Theoretical Framework

Social Production of Space

In Lefebvre's famous critique on space, he discusses the strategic spaces in a city, those that are of technical importance and those that of economical importance, where the use of resources happens from peripheral spaces and the use of capital happens from urban centres. Lefebvre discusses also how the production of space is different from production of goods.

However, the point of focus of this work, in light of this thesis is to see space as a social relationship in itself. Space, is also linked to ownership of land, which makes it a property relationship. Space according to Lefebvre is both a product and means of production. Space facilitates and also affects networks of exchange and flows of raw materials.

Lefebvre also discusses how the production of space is intrinsically linked to the space it produces, the place where it is produced and what this process of production reproduces. This space inherently is divided and that division is linked to the division of labour. My thesis explores the social relationships within space and also those relationships, social, economic and spatial that are involved in its production. [15]

Social Reproduction Theory

The book, 'Social Reproduction Theory' edited by Tithi Bhattacharya is a selection of essays that are an attempt to situate production and reproduction within a single framework instead of understanding social reproduction as a separate component from the production of commodities. The premise through which this is explored is by the understanding that labour power is socially reproduced to be able to produce commodities.

The Foreword to the collection by Lise Vogel, begins by understanding intersectionality. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that understands social heterogeneity as an interaction of class, gender, race etc., Here intersectionality is not understood as an antagonistic concept to SRT, but as a contributing factor to understanding particularities of each social difference. However, Lise Vogel clearly suggests that it would be useful to discard the assumption that the differences themselves (race, class, gender) are comparable and are equal in 'casual weight'. A failure to do this according to Vogel might overshadow the particularities of these categories and thereby missing out on understanding specificities of each and being able to define where they all fit in in the whole.[16]

**15** Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Blackwell, 1991).
**16** Lisolette Vogel, 'Introduction', in Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory (Pluto Press, 2017).



The essays from the collection became an important theoretical discussion for my thesis. The introductory essay 'Mapping Social Reproduction Theory' by Tithi Bhattacharya explains aspects of 'social reproduction', the aspects that 'produce' labour power itself, the position of social reproduction theory in the neo-liberal age etc.,

Bhattacharya's essay begins with the question: 'who produces the worker?' If a worker must arrive at their workplace and do work, what are all the processes and factors that enable this work itself. Also touching upon aspects of 'education' and 'public transportation' beyond household work, she asks what are all the factors that 'regenerate' the worker to come back to work each day? For this purpose, Social Reproduction Theory overlooks what the author calls 'visible facts' while focusing on the process. Studies rooted in the Social Reproduction Theory, therefore look, not at finished entities but to the systems behind them to understand society. These systems maybe social relationships or situations.

For my thesis, I have adopted this theoretical basis to examine the field. Here, if the worker who arrives at the architectural site is the finished product, while the construction workers, contractors, architects, supervisors and clients are the different actors in the system, the focus of the study is the numerous social situations that they are engaged in including migration, unemployment, home-making, labour etc., and the human relations involved in the production of the worker: the familial relationships, social systems, contractual relations, legal aspects, informal contracts, the relationships between all the actors in his web. [17]

'Human Labour is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole.'

This is one of the main syntheses of the social reproduction theory, that not only is labour involved in the production of a commodity but also that this labour itself is reproduced by the different systems that enable it to be utilized for the purpose of capitalistic production, thereby concluding that Human Labour of all forms is in the centre of both creating and reproducing society as a whole. However, Capitalism itself doesn't recognize reproductive labour that goes into 'making' the worker as 'work' because it can attribute no exchange value to reproductive labour. The theoretical framework of Social Reproduction Theory make labour that is not obviously visible, visible.

My thesis with its aim to make the invisible labours on and around a construction site observable, follows in this specific direction. Here, there are two types of labour. One, the productive labour of construction, the transportation, installation and maintenance of the material, masonry, carpentry, structural work, curing of the concrete etc., where there is skilled and unskilled work involved. This is considered 'productive' labour as it produces 'capital'. Two,

**17** Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory (Pluto Press, 2017).

the reproductive labour of the families and groups of workers who live on or near the site they work in. However, there are also multiple other labours involved that I wouldn't put into either group. Therefore, instead of understanding the labours of the construction site within these binaries, I would focus on those that are reproductive in nature, even if at times they do fall within the recognized capitalistic structure. Labour power according to Marx is the only commodity not produced capitalistically. Taking from this, theorists of social reproduction theory posit that "production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process."

One of the ways of understanding this as an integrated process suggested by the author is by understanding them as 'conjoined' spaces and not separate. This becomes even more interesting in the context of my thesis as the 'home' and 'workplace' are not physically separate on site. The spaces are not only conjoined but are also one and the same. The site, by work-day is a place of production creating commodity, and at its end, a family's home where numerous social practices of home-making take place. The aspects around living that are described to be under the milieu of social reproduction like healthcare and education are often missing in this scenario. However, I will be discussing more on this in the later chapters of this thesis.

If according to capitalism, the worker is 'free' after the end of the workday to regenerate for the next day of work, how does this work in a place where the home and the workplace are the same and there is no definitive 'end' to the work day. Capital then doesn't 'relinquish' control in this case. A close understanding of this endless workday comes through in one of my case studies where the construction workers work from 8am to 8pm every day of every week with a three hour window on Sunday for 'free time'. And 'time after work' is equally tedious. Essentially for women workers, housework and work outside result in a day in which they are constantly contributing to capital, while only receiving wages for half of the work. To make matters more complicated, the women on the construction site receive much less wage than men, as in most workplaces.

To cast more emphasis on this scenario, Bhattacharya also points out how capitalistic production exists only to 'valorise' capital and not for the social progress of the worker and therefore doesn't care about whether or not the material needs of sustenance are realized for the worker. The relation between the spheres of production and social reproduction however is seen in this essay as an opportune moment for 'class struggle'. While there were in the past, ways of supplementing income through household activities, in the present day, capital has overtaken these to an extent that households are primarily dependent on capital. On site, there is no space even to conduct any activity that may contribute to the household wage in any way apart from the wage earned through the production of capital. In some sites, it is not allowed, in some places like the 'camp' it is impossible to do any other work at home due to the working hours. Therefore, unwaged and waged labours are still separate on the site where the workers live. Further, I would argue that unwaged labour, the power to regenerate and reproduce themselves on site is much



imbalanced compared to capital that accumulates through the productive labour of the bodies of the construction workers.

The present moment of time, as described by the author is a 'map of political protest that is united in its extreme unevenness'. In this historical scenario, in a neo-liberal context, the essay urges an engagement with aspects of class and economy in our specific moment in time. I believe that my thesis will be a part of this collaborative project of creating and curating knowledges that will help in the comprehension of the social order in a more nuanced way.

In another essay 'How not to skip class', Tithi Bhattacharya argues that to understand the working classes, Social Reproduction Theory is a necessary framework, especially to realize that the 'workers have an existence beyond the work-place. On the construction site, this existence of outside the workplace also happens in the workplace itself and therefore, the world away from work is blurred and disappears more often.

Social reproduction can be applied to know the urban in different ways. [18] Instead of reading the urban as a living breathing entity, we only read it from aspects of wage labour and capital.[19]

Recognizing the other

In the book 'Strange Encounters', Sara Ahmed discusses the nature of othering, the definition of borders and the recognition of self through the recognition of other. Through her theorization, humans are only able to define their identity and also the borders between themselves and the other. The 'familiar' in such an instance must be established as the 'familial' by defining the other as other. What happens when two embodied others inhabit a single space, as that of a construction site. According to Ahmed, a spatial negotiation takes place, with this stranger.

This negotiation that takes place on the construction site between the capitalistic system and the wage labourer, renders the labourer as the 'body out of space' even though in this instance, it is a body that creates the very space in the first place. [20]

The 'other' is represented by the construction worker on site and my thesisi explores the relationship of this other in a space that is unfamiliar to them too.

**18** Linda Peake et al., A Feminist Urban Theory for Our Time: Rethinking Social Reproduction and the Urban (John Wiley & Sons, 2021).
**19** Peake et al., A Feminist Urban Theory for Our Time.
**20** Sara Ahmed, Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality, Transformations (Routledge, 2000).

# 03
# METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 The Field in two Frames

> "Most urban research takes place in major cities or rural areas,
> leaving out the difficult task of defining peripheral, suburban areas in
> theoretical debates on the future of cities"
> -Samantha Biglieri,
> Examining Everyday Outdoor Practices in Suburban Public Space[1]

The place where my research is located, is, as I have explained in the introduction chapter, the architectural site. Nevertheless, aiming to diverge from definitive notions of the word 'site' associated with established ways of acting, recording and building', I describe this 'place' and those entangled within it as the 'field'. Huda Tayyob has written that 'field' suggests a place to learn from and research as opposed to the fixed perceptions associated with 'site'.[2]

The field, in my study is seen through two frames. The first one is a 'labour camp', built by a construction company to house around two hundred construction workers who work for two of its high-rise megaprojects that are being developed in the vicinity. The second is one of two make-shift houses that are auto-constructed[3] inside a small building that is under-construction. In this chapter, I will outline the two frames in brief and also address aspects of my access to and my position in the field.

### Labour Camp

The Labour Camp is located in a rapidly developing suburban area of the city. It is a place where there is constant construction activity: roads and infrastructure, commercial ventures and most popular of all, residential high-rise. The country's largest construction companies display massive hoardings of advertisements featuring upcoming projects as shining visions of the future city. These visions seem to reflect and satisfy aspirations of the growing upper middle-class society of the city. Behind this display, lay the sparse realities of the working populations who build these megastructures, often at the expense of safety, health and care.

The construction site in focus here shall be referred to as 'the towers', or 'the site'hereafter for anonymization. The towers, projected to be magnificent, modern and futuristic are not the main subject of this study, but a brief description of them is necessary. The building in question is a group of four buildings, under-construction, each planned to reach forty floors in height, gated inside a large campus with a club, a swimming pool, a community centre and a day-care centre. Every floor of every tower has two apartments, 500 square meters in floor area

**1** Samantha Bilglieri, 'Examining Everyday Outdoor Spaces in Suburban Public Space.', in Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies, ed. Sabine Knierbein et al. (Taylor & Francis, 2022).
**2** Huda Tayob, 'Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing "Tell" a Different Story?', Architecture and Culture 6, no. 1 (2018): 203–22,
**3** Auto-construction is a term associated with building one's house by oneself.

each. Every apartment is designed to have four bedrooms with attached bathrooms, a formal and informal living room, a dining room, a kitchen, four large balconies and a room for the domestic worker.

There are different groups of workers on the site: some of them travel from nearby neighbourhoods and informal settlements while others live in the labour camp. The workers who live in the camp are all migrant workers who travel from different places in the country, often poorer states that have lesser employment opportunities. This frame constitutes the site and the camp in particular, but also features a market and a water plant that are an integral part of the everyday life of people living in the camp.

Make-shift House

The part of the city where this house is located, is also a suburb of the city. However, this region is very different from the gentrified area around the labour camp. This is a more modest neighbourhood of small independent villas belonging to middle-class people. The maximum building height in these areas is around 18-24 meters. There is a forest area and a lake in the vicinity. Some of the roads in this area are entirely dirt roads on rocky, undulating terrain.

In a small under-construction building in this area, on the ground level of the bare skeleton of the building there are two houses built out of tarpaulin sheets, bamboo scaffolding standards and other material salvaged from the construction site. One of these houses belongs to a middle-aged couple who come from the state of Chhattisgarh. The nearby forest is an integral part of their everyday and hence, constituted within this frame.

Additional to these geographical locations, the field also constitutes the transitory zones through which the labourers migrate and transit within the city. Also, it must be acknowledged that the fieldwork was conducted only in the geographical region of Hyderabad and other areas featured are only through the anecdotal accounts of the migrant workers.

Access to the field and position within

As an Architect, obtaining access to the field itself, in both cases was not a very challenging task. The important challenge was to understand my position on the field, in the power structure of the site, while conducting this research. Through the process, at different moments, in different places on the field my positionality seemed to evolve.

During the field visits to both situations, the ‘architect and labourer’ or ‘researcher and subject’ power dynamic definitely existed and affected the content of my interaction with the subject. What has been gleaned through this exercise through the positions and



inherent biases, is what Donna Haraway terms as partial knowledge.[4] This is not to say that the findings themselves are incomplete, but only that such situated experience (both mine and the construction workers’) is a part of the emerging knowledge repository of marginal narratives. [5]

The power structure undeniably produces an unfamiliarity, where both the researcher and the subject are strange others to each other and embody different realities in the same space. It becomes imperative then, to understand the interaction also as a spatial negotiation which constitutes a ‘fear of being documented’ and ‘a general suspicion of researchers’[6] on part of the subject. In my methodology, I ascribed more import to sketches and fieldnotes and not as much to photography. In fact, I didn’t use photography as a central element in my research. It has only been supplementary material. I sought other means of visual representation instead to avoid being invasive in the ‘homes’ of others. The photographs that were taken were only of spatial and material culture, taken under complete consent and after the rest of the documentation process.

With my camera out of sight and only a notebook and pencil, it was easier to have conversations with the people in the field, while documenting in sketch format the spatial setting of homes and the activities that take place in it. In consideration of their agency over their space and narrative, my interviews were designed to be open-ended, to reflect the idea of ‘speaking to’ the subject instead of ‘speaking for’[7]. This provided an insight into everyday aspects that emerged out of unplanned trains of thought, which a question-answer format would perhaps, never have achieved.

The rest of this section is divided into 4 parts, including 3.2 Field Notes where I discuss my notes from the field, 3.3 Interviews, where I provide context to and explain the interviews conducted on the field, is 3.4 Sketchbook, which is a set of sketches that were made originally on site and later developed. The last chapter of this section is 3.5 Photo-documentation.

> “There is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various sociocultural, historical, and political formations that give epochs their peculiar individuality”
> - Edward Said, as quoted in Huda Tayob’s Subaltern Architectures. 8

**4** Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, Feminist Studies 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.
**5** Torsten Lange and Gabrielle Schaad, eds, Care, Gta Papers 7 (gta Verlag, 2022).
**6** Tayob, ‘Subaltern Architectures’.
**7** Tayob, ‘Subaltern Architectures’.
**8** Edward W. Said, Orientalism qtd in. Tayob, ‘Subaltern Architectures’.

### 3.2 Roti, Kapda, Makaan: Field Notes

What sustains the worker?

Roti, Kapda, Makaan (Food, Clothing and Shelter), the most fundamental necessities that are required to sustain human life. The phrase 'Roti, Kapda, Makaan' popularized in the 1960's in India as part of an election campaign has come to be used by different political movements especially those related to class struggle. It is at once a political slogan and a standard to measure social reality in the most basic terms. This chapter outlines the observations that were made on the field as part of the field work. The phrase 'Roti, Kapda, Makaan' is here, a measure to understand the living standards on site. Here there are no 'separate spheres', the workplace is not entirely physically separate from the home place, and capitalistic production of architecture and social reproduction of labour power happen in proximate parallels[9]. This chapter will discuss the practices of home-making and this ambiguity between home and work when they are essentially located in the same place through observational analysis and situated experience on site.

Even though these field notes are only from the two-week long engagement on the field, it is safe to say that there have been multiple scenarios before where I encountered these social realities. My earlier observations remined as scattered and non-relative bits of knowledge but made a distinct impact on me and became the origin of this thesis. Apart from the act of building itself, the architectural site is a place where a range of other activities take place, material inflow and outflow, logistical planning, managerial functions, design discussions. All of these activities are explicit on site. Contrasting this image is the work and life of labourers – their work separated from the discourse on architecture or construction, their life conveniently invisibilized. Here the focus of the field notes is to reflect in plain terms, what has been structurally obscured. To this end this chapter is an account of observational knowledge gathered through the fieldnotes written through this investigation.

> "It is particularly by exploring and appreciating long-conceived class, race, ethnic, and gender relations in the city (among others) that we could capture the variegated ways in which the needs for care are expressed, denied, and sometimes struggled for, in and through urban spaces."
> - Nir Cohen and Sabine Knierbein, Social Inequalities, Uneven Space, and Care[10]

I visited Hyderabad, India during June 2025 to conduct field visits. The following accounts are field notes from the Labour Camp at Nanakramguda; and from the make-shift home at Narapally.

**9** Mohandesi, Salar; and Emma Teitelman, 'Without Reserves', in Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory (Pluto Press, 2017).
**10** Angelika Gabauer, Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies, ed. Sabine Knierbein et al. (Taylor & Francis, 2022)



<< FIELD NOTES DAY 1 NANAKRAMGUDA >>

The site is located on a street that departs from a major four-lane road in Nanakramguda near the Financial District.The labour camp is a 500-meter walk from the site.

This is one of the places where, to quote Alessandra Mezzadri, 'the global industrial proletariat sleep and rest before going back to the working rhythms of the capitalist assembly line.'[11] My first visit to the camp was around the first half of the day, it was almost lunch time (13.00 hours) and some groups of workers were making their way back to the camp.

Tucked between a mound of boulders to its west, a large retaining wall which secures the deep foundations of some residential towers to the north, a two-lane paved road to the south and a dirt road leading up to the entry of the site on the east surrounded the gated complex of the camp. The six-feet high gate - a corrugated-metal roofing sheet screwed onto a rudimentary metal frame - is on its north-east corner, perhaps following vaastu,[12] but is not entirely secure with only a single lock in place. Along the periphery of the premises is a boundary wall built in concrete blocks using cement mortar, but left untreated and unfinished.

A group of small children (none seemed older than 6 years) led me inside the gate and continued to play under the flight of a metal staircase leading up to the next level.

The camp building is an apparently temporary structure in two levels. The design of the camp building gives the impression of a 'colonial plantation line' or 'barracks'.[13] The skeletal structure is a steel frame and the walls are made up of prefabricated concrete panels of minimum thickness. The design of the camp is quite banal, none of the surfaces are treated or finished with paint. A narrow passageway in the centre splits the building into two blocks and scant light filters through a grate above the passageway that doubles as a corridor on the next level. On either side of the passage metal doors open to the rooms. The rooms are modules of two sizes: 1.5m x 3m and 3m x 6m, the shorter side being the width in both cases.

Next, I was invited into a common room, which was essentially a kitchen.

The busiest room in the complex is the 'kitchen' which itself seems no different from any of the other rooms with the exception of the 'furniture' in it. In one corner of the kitchen there is a single-

**11** Alessandra Mezzadri, 'The Informal Labours of Social Reproduction', Global Labour Journal 11, no. 2 (2020)
**12** Vaastu is an ancient Indian pseudoscience that governs architectural planning
**13** Mezzadri, 'The Informal Labours of Social Reproduction', 158.

burner stove connected to an LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas) cylinder. There is a large kadai[14] on the burner on which Munagakaya Curry is cooking as it is close to lunch time. Another large pot with freshly boiled rice is next to it. There are a few old 10 litre plastic water bottles to store water and used plastic containers and glass jars are repurposed to store salt, spices and oil around the stove. All these condiments and cooking utensils lie on the floor all around the stove. There are also sacks of onions and other basic vegetables stacked in a corner. On the other side of the room, there is a bed fashioned out of four concrete blocks for legs and a wooden plank for frame. A protective sheet - made up of composite plastic, often used to protect freshly laid floors from wear during construction- is used as a mattress and a bedspread combined, a worn blanket is rolled up on the sheet. This is where the cook sleeps. On another corner are what seem to be his belongings, a backpack suspended with a piece of string tied to the roof beam, a small pile of clothes near it. There is a framed picture of the Hindu god Hanuman, tied with a wire to one of the steel columns. There are clothes, strings of small shampoo sachets and a random collection of household items hanging on clotheslines along three walls of the room. There is also a make-shift bench made out of two concrete blocks and a concrete wall panel. The room has one window opposite to the door. All the windows in the camp are identical with a metal frame and grille and a metal shutter fitted with glass. The frames of the window seem to be welded together carelessly and the glass is a low quality kaccha[15] glass. Even though this seems to be the cook's room, since it doubles up as the kitchen there is constant activity with comings and goings of all the people who live here.

## << FIELD NOTES DAY 02 NANAKRAMGUDA>>

On the next field visit day, I was able to meet the supervisor who is the link between the workers and the company management. The interview is discussed in the next chapter. I was able to get consent to visit two of the rooms in the camp by the families who live in them, while others denied me permission.

I had expected each of these rooms to be private places for families, one room for each family. I realize now that it was a privilege bias and an inaccurate presumption. This room which can be termed as a bedroom, living room and closet all combined in one, is also all these three places for three or four families. One of the rooms has a metal cot with a mattress and three additional mats with bedspreads are laid on the floor. On the rear side backpacks, duffel

**14** Kadaai is a flat-bottomed wok used to make curries
**15** Kaccha means 'informal' or unfinished in this context.



bags and large jute bags are hung on the wall or suspended from the ceiling with a string or ribbon. A long clothesline zig-zags across the room close to the roof. On this there are clothes - sarees, shirts, pants, towels etc., Additionally there are also bed-sheets hung on the clothesline, acting like a curtain between the created 'private' sphere of each family. In the adjacent room, everything is similar except the beds. Five or six mats and mattresses are laid one next to other, overlapping on each other with other bedding material folded on top of them. A slightly broken chair with wobbly legs is perched against one of the walls. The distinctive feature that unites all the rooms is the clotheslines. They also appear outside the smaller rooms. Inside the rooms, it is very hot as there is no insulation on the outer walls or roof and the inner 'walls' are made up of corrugated tin sheets.

## << FIELD NOTES DAY 03 NANAKRAMGUDA >>

On this day, my goal was to explore the services on the site, plumbing systems, electrical amenities, access to drinking water and clean toilets.

Outside the building there is an open tank divided into three compartments. These compartments are filled with water, but there is no source, no pipeline or tap connected to the tank. There are no buckets or mugs to fetch water with and some of the workers are using hard hats from the site to collect water. There is a shed made up of corrugated sheets which serves as a bathroom and seems to have only 3-4 cubicles inside it. There is one ceiling fan and one LED light-bulb per room in the rooms I was able to visit. There is no drinking water supply on the site and the workers must walk to the water-plant nearby to bring water for drinking.

## << FIELD NOTESDAY 04 AND 05 NARAPALLY >>

After travelling on a rocky, undulating dirt path where the top soil has been eroded by the relentless rain this monsoon, I arrive at a two-story building under construction. Only the structural skeleton of the building has been completed and, there is still substantial amount of masonry work remaining in the last floor of the building. A middle-aged couple - TL and RM - live in one of the two homes on the ground floor, while another couple lives in the adjacent house. Their home exists amidst heaps of sand and cement and the myriad accessories of construction-work. At first glance, it is a chaotic puzzle of blue, black and orange tarpaulin sheets, held up together by bamboo standards of scaffolding timber.

There is a small space between a heap of sand and a concrete column through which one can enter 'their' space. This space roughly constitutes a third of the slab area. TL and RM's home has, in conventional spatial terms, two distinct spaces. One of them is a room put together with numerous scaffolding standards - vertical and horizontal members tied together with jute twine - and re-used tarpaulin sheets, cardboard and green scaffold netting. The other space is what can be called a semi-outdoor space that can be a 'verandah' but also doubles up as a kitchen and a wash area. In this 'verandah' a small square trough is created - a hand-built cement bund around a small patch of the floor with a drain in a sloped corner. This is essentially a wash-basin for hand-washing, a wash stone for doing the laundry and a kitchen sink for washing dishes. On the other side is a small traditional stove called a chulha[16]. It is a semi-circular hand-built clay object with an opening on one side, fixed to the floor. The curve tapers at the top where the cooking pot can be balanced. Through the opening some logs of firewood are arranged to be lit during cooking. Piles of fresh firewood are stacked on the side. A flat shallow basket used for winnowing lay next to it with some red chillies set out to sun-dry.

The indoor space is separated from the outdoor space by a tarpaulin 'curtain' and a door. The door, unlike the rest of the material is not unusual, but more intriguing. It is an actual flush-door with a door handle and a metal latch to lock it. The door is fixed to scaffolding on either side. On closer observation, I noticed that the door shutter is oriented upside-down, while the metal latch is fixed correctly. This is an old door, salvaged and repurposed - The actual bottom of the door is completely worn and tattered. It seems ingenious of TL and RM to have flipped the door on its end to make it efficient and more secure than if the tattered part was on the bottom.

Inside the room, there are two mats laid on the floor with sheets spread on top of them. Along the walls are clotheslines with clothes hung from end to end. A couple of backpacks are hung on the timber. Opposite the bed is another chulha on which there is an earthen pot filled with water. Above the chulha, on the wall, a couple of wooden planks are cantilevered on the scaffolding using steel wires. These shelves hold a number of framed images of different Hindu gods and other religious assortments. In another shelf below, more reachable if one were to sit on the floor, there are kitchen supplies, baskets of vegetables, jars of condiments and spices etc.,

**16** Chulha is a handmade brick and clay stove, usually used in Indian villages for cooking.



Throughout these notes, roti-food, kapda-clothes, makaan-house, is observed as a central theme. There is not much else in terms of material culture that is outside this triad of bare essentials. However, even an objective account of the visible features of the site reflect that some necessary elements of these life-sustaining elements are either missing or scarce in these homes. Roti, Kapda, Makaan, therefore is still an aspiration for a key demographic that is instrumental in creating the urban in an increasingly neo-liberal economy within a post-globalization world.

### 3.3 Din guzaar rahe hain: Interviews

Bas, din guzaar rahe hai', AM, a construction worker at the camp in Nanakramguda tells me in the middle of an interview. He says, 'we are letting the days go by'. In itself the phrase might give an impression of a leisurely time, just passing by. Although, AM is not talking about passing time, he is talking about time slipping away, with no hours left in the day for him to think of a life beyond the labour camp. AM is a young male, in his early thirties and has been active in taking his fellow workers' problems to the management. He is popular at the camp and also with his employers. His is the first interview I take.

<<INTERVIEW AM DAY 01 NANAKRAMGUDA>>

> "Only from a capitalist viewpoint being productive is a moral virtue, if not a moral imperative. From the viewpoint of the working class, being productive simply means being exploited." – Silvia Federici, Revolution at Point zero[17]

**AM** is from a rural district in West Bengal and has been working in the 'civil' line of construction work, by which he means masonry work. Every morning, he walks to the site at 8:00 in the morning and works until 8:00 in the evening, like all of his fellow labourers. I ask whether he has made a home here at the camp o which he replies, 'Making home? The company provides us this space; we will stay if they pay us well enough or find another place to go to.' The concept of home seems not only elusive but also alien and distant in this context.

I explain my question again, to which he answers: 'Food is cooked at the same time for all of us in our groupin the kitchen, we all eat together, men, women and children.' One person from the group is assigned to cook for the entire group, facilitated by the workers' themselves. It was unclear whether the company pays the cook's wages. AM explains that most of the workers migrate to the city, leaving behind their families in the village, while some families live on the

**17** Silvia Federici, Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle (PM Press ; Common Notions : Autonomedia ; Turnaround [distributor], 2012).

camp.

I ask about the things they bring from their homes when they migrate. Clothes, bedding, utensils are the only essentials they carry with them.

**JS:** What happens when you need to move to a different camp or a different project altogether?

**AM:** 'We pack up all our things are take them to the next place…

**JS:** Do you buy things here in the city?

**AM:** Yes, we do buy rations, clothes, utensils, blankets in the winter. If we need some things, we go out after work to buy them, but we need to travel very far.

**JS:** Do you go out into the city? How do you spend your free time?

**AM:** There is no free time', he laughs. 'Every day from 8 to 8, we work. We come back from work, exhausted. One gets tired, cooks, eats and go to sleep. And every morning, that follows, we perform this same step again.

**JS:** What about on Sundays?', I ask.

**AM:** We work from 8:00 to 5:00 on Sundays, so we do get a little more time on Sundays for ourselves but it's spent in regenerating for the next week. So, there is no time to do anything. Even if we wanted to do anything entrepreneurial for a better future, where is the time to plan?

A small group of children has gathered around and I ask whether they go to school.

**AM:** This is a major problem, there is no school nearby. There are also other problems here, living in an unclean environment, not having access to drinking water. But yes, there is no school.

He is concerned that the children will be unable to develop any skills that can prepare them for a better life.

**AM:** In some labour camps, the company provides access to a school for the children who live on site, but it is not so here.

**JS:** Do women work on the site, or is it only men?

**AM:** No, a few women do work on the site.



AM explains that women work on the same type of jobs as men on the site and there is no discrimination in the type of work assigned to women. But is the wage equal too?

**AM:** Here, the system is wrong. The ladies are paid 50 rupees less than the men per day of work. According to the rule of law, this is wrong, it is illegal. The law gives both men and women guarantee of equal pay…and yet…

**JS:** Can I ask why you think rural migration happens, so many migrant workers come here from other states, why?

**AM:** In most of these states, the employment rate is very low. There is no work to be found. There is no 'growth' in such places. Here there is work and we migrate to find livelihood. We wouldn't have to migrate this far away if there was work in our states.

**JS:** Is there a chance of being promoted in your job? Do you find yourself in situations where you are moved to a better job in case of the contractor liking your work, for example?

**AM:** We do move to different sites, but there is no better job. Our wages are spent in sustaining us, for buying food, water and clothes, raising family here, sending money back to our family in the village, just survival. We are unable to save anything from our wages.

**JS:** What does your job constitute? What is your average work day like?

**AM:** We shift material, debris, cleaning the site etc., whichever job is to be completed on the site…

**JS:** 'Do you do brick-laying or concreting or plastering work?'

**AM:** Yes, we do that as well, but here, there hasn't been opportunity to do these jobs. The company tasks us mostly with the cleaning up of the site, shifting material between different places on the site etc., so, that is what we do here. Our supervisor supplies us as 'manpower' to the company contractors, and we do what they tell us to do.'

**JS:** 'So, what you do is mostly unskilled labour?'

**AM:** 'Yes, here. But we are also skilled to do the skilled labour. And we have done on other sites. Not here, though.'

**JS:** 'How long have you lived here on this camp?'

**AM:** 'We have been living here since April this year, a little under three months.'

AM later tells me when one of the managers, who accompanied me to the site is out of earshot, that there are numerous problems that they face on the site. They need to walk long distances to purchase anything they can afford, that there is no medical security,

there is no school and that he fears the children will end up in the same line of work. He also tells me that on the site, people from different states and communities don't live without conflict - there are sudden fights that erupt sometimes. That there is a hierarchy, the rooms above on the next level belong to the more 'skilled' workers - painters, carpenters etc., I ask about the surrounding of the camp building, and who maintains it. He tells me that the company is supposed to maintain it, make sure it is cleaned up once in a while, but it has never been cleaned since his arrival.

<<INTERVIEW MK DAY 01 NANAKRAMGUDA>>

**MK** is a young woman, perhaps only in her mid-twenties. She wears sindoor in her hair, by which I can tell she is married. She is waiting for lunch to be served, carrying her toddler in her arms when I ask if she would like to speak to me.

**JS:** How do you find living here?

'Achha hai', she says, a little uncertain, 'It's good.'

**JS:** Where are you from?

**MK:** We are from Dumka district in the state of Jharkhand

**JS:** What is the name of your village?

MK is unsure of the name of her village. Someone from the small group gathered in the kitchen answers, 'Karamtola.' We then move out into the corridor.

**JS:** Can you tell me a little about your life here?

**MK:** This is where we live(points to a room)

**JS:** Is this your space, for your family?

**MK:** No, no, two more families live with us in this room, the two beds in the corner, that is our space', she points to some mats and bedding on the other end of the room. We sleep here and have all our clothes and belongings here. We eat in the kitchen. The man you just saw pass by, he cooks food for everyone. We buy groceries from the market and pool them together for food.

**JS:** How far is the market?

**MK:** Just here, a few streets away, to the west.



MK tells me that she also goes to work on the site everyday from 8.00 to 8.00, and comes back here for a lunch break between 1.00 to 2.00 pm.

**JS:** Who takes care of the children when all the parents go to work?

**MK:** The kids stay in the room, play here at the camp.

'They don't go to school?', I ask.

**MK:** They were going to school back at home, but here there is no school nearby.

By 'home', MK means Karamtola, her village and not the camp. Every migrant worker I interview on the camp, when asked about 'home', refers to the village they come from and not the camp or their room in the camp.

<< INTERVIEW GROUP_DAY 02_NANAKRAMGUDA >>

This conversation was technically a discussion and not a one-on-one interview. As I started to speak to one worker, others joined in and answered some of my questions.

**JS:** How many people live here?

Every large room has 7-8 people and every small room has 2-3 people living in it.

**JS:** How many people do you think live here in total?'

The company says they can accommodate 150-180 people in this camp.

**JS:** Can I ask what is your monthly wage?

Men are paid 9000 rupees a month, women are paid around 7500.

**JS:** 'Does it suffice for your livelihood here?'

We don't get the wage in hand; it goes back to our family in the village.

**JS:** So, you get no wage?

We get a small percentage of our wage, enough to buy food and water, and the rest is directly credited to the middle-man who helped to get us this job, the middle-man then transfers it to our respective families.

**JS:** Do you have to buy water? Does the company not provide for it?'

There is a tank out front and a water tank comes in to fill water in it, but this is not potable water. We use it for bath and washing clothes and dishes. For drinking water, we walk to the water-plant behind these boulders and fill up plastic water bottles and bring them back. We have to do this a few times a week, sometimes, every day.

One person from the group is answering my questions very actively. He looks under age to be working on the site. According to the law, anyone below 18 years is not allowed to work under the prevention of child labour act. When I ask him how old he is, he answers immediately without missing a beat that he is 18.

<<INTERVIEW HK_DAY 03_NANAKRAMGUDA>>

> "Managerialism is what allows us architects to by-pass any discourse of labor whatsoever. In architecture, labor is hired and organized for the purpose of extracting a profit; work is precarious, am-biguous, and alienating; and tasks are intensified and polarized—yet we have failed to analyze labor as such in our economic equations or value propositions."
> – Peggy Deamer, Architecture and Labour

An interview with **HK**, an employee of the construction company who manages the different groups of labourers on the site provided me with an insight on the types of 'challenges' the management of the company faces when working with migrant labourers for who live in company housing facilities. He also spoke to me about the way workers are recruited etc.,

**HK:** The construction workers come either from another site, or from their village and we build a temporary camp near the site and house them there. One of the main challenges we face is managing the health of the workers. They don't take care of their health, in the sense that in case of an ailment or illness they often neglect it until it gets worse. The company can't do much in case of a serious illness in such cases. Unfortunately, there are also rare events of death. The company makes sure to maintain the camp in good standard of hygiene and provide clean water, but there is only so much it can do.



**JS:** Do all the people who live at camp work at the site?

**HK:** Yes, almost all of them work at the site, or are expected to work at the site. There are days when we expect a certain number of people to come to work and some of them don't turn up, either due to health issues or others, but this is a logistical challenge for the company.'

**JS:** How many construction workers work on a site where a large-scale high-rise of say 40 floors is to be constructed?

**HK:** About 600 to 1000 people in total, they work in different groups, provided by different contractors.

**JS:** Where do they come from?

**HK:** They are usually from Odisha or West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, most of the construction workers that work in the city come from these states.

**JS:** Where do they go after their work here is completed?'

**HK:** 'They go wherever their contractor takes them. They are employed under the contractor and if the contractor finds another project, they go to work at that project.

**JS:** How do the contractors recruit these groups of workers?

**HK:** The contractor or the head mason, travels to a set of villages, where they meet the middle-men of that region who connect them to potential workers.

<<INTERVIEW VR DAY 04 NANAKRAMGUDA>>

On this day I made a quick visit to the site, to speak to **VR**, the supervisor whom I couldn't meet earlier. The supervisor is hired by the company to manage the camp, labour workflow and organise recruitment according to requirement of the company at different levels of the project. While he only repeats most of the information that I have already received from the interviews before, there are some interesting inconsistencies between these narratives.

**JS:** What are the main problems that the workers face on camp or on the work site and how do you resolve them?

**VR:** One of the major issues on any such site is the security for women labourers. There are safety issues for women on site, sometimes of domestic violence, but mostly of sexual violence. The camp becomes a very unsafe space for women. On this site, the company has a rule to not employ women to keep them out of trouble, the few who had requested

to work together with their families are the only women on the site. It's fairly safer here except on some Sunday nights when the male workers become drunk on alcohol and create a ruckus or fight amongst themselves.'

In such situations, VR tells me that they are called to the site to intervene and are often able to resolve issues by the next morning. When I ask about the recruitment process, he adds some details to the manager's version. When workers arrive on a site, there is a basic medical test to test their fitness.

**VR:** Those found to be unfit are sent back to their villages, those who are fit are housed at the camp, with a register of names for record.

**JS:** What happens when someone falls ill on site?

**VR:** 'We take them to the RMP doctor[18] nearby and if the medicines the doctor prescribes don't bring much improvement, we send them back to their village, after which point, it is not our responsibility, they are the contractor's responsibility, but often, they are on their own once they are out of work. This is true in case of serious illnesses.'

<<INTERVIEW KP DAY 06_RTC X ROADS>>

This interview was a crucial thread that helped connect the stories from the field to the larger context of the state and the system. **KP** is a leader of a construction workers union in Telangana state. We met at the union office for this interview. This union which is called the Telangana Construction Workers Progressive Union was founded in 2004 and caters to migrant workers and local workers from the Telugu States.[19] After I explained the purpose of my thesis, KP started to recount stories of the construction site from his experience as a union member and leader.

**KP:**I believe that workers that come from other states (except those from the Telugu states) are more vulnerable than those who belong to this geographical region. In most of the sites of all scales, until very recently housing was only informal and temporary and often on the site. Now in some of the large-scale projects, companies provide

**18** In India, RMP stands for Rural Medical Practitioner who are usually underqualified.
**19** Telugu states – Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.



housing facilities. There are no toilets for the workers on these sites, even if there are, it is in a very unhygienic condition. When workers have a health issue they are either taken to a doctor or sent away to their villages.

When the conversation comes to gender roles in the workplace, and situation of women workers, KP recounts the harsh reality of these precarious spaces.

**KP:** The construction site is, like most other places in the world is a male-centric society. Women are often sexually harassed by masons and supervisors who are in charge of the site. These violations are overlooked by contractors and completely invisibilized by construction companies. In some cases, contractors are involved in sexual abuse and violation of other basic civil rights.

**JS:** Are they able to access the legal system in these cases?

**KP:** A large percentage of sexual abuse cases remain unreported, like everywhere in the country, often construction workers, especially women have no awareness of their legal rights, and as migrants they are forced to navigate this landscape in fear of being evicted from the site or losing their job or home. Migration is the reason for their social insecurity and loss of agency. In case of a police complaint or a legal procedure, they are at a risk of losing livelihood. In order to not make life much more precarious, they live on the margin, while carefully negotiating the social hierarchies of the site and the system. Even on site, most of the lifting and carrying of material is done by women.

**JS:** Can you speak about the migration system in India from rural to urban regions?

**KP:** There are two types of migrant labourers in India. Some migrate permanently to other states and live there for years working under one contractor or other. The other category is the seasonal migrants who migrate owing to different factors. Within this category, some are landed seasonal migrants. They own a piece of land that they cultivate for one or two crops every year and migrate back and forth according to agricultural seasons. The landless seasonal migrants who are the most marginalized section of the group

migrate occasionally, working some months as agricultural labourers and some months as construction labourers. They are constantly on the move from one place to another. When they come to the city they take on a 24 hour long train on average, while they are brought to the city in a more dignified manner, when they leave, they are sent back with no ticket and often struggling to find a place to sit in the general compartment of a crowded train.

**JS:** What do you think about the surge in urban migration in India in the last twenty years?

**KP:** Migration has become very common since people are aware of the opportunities in cities and agriculture or agricultural labour has become very unpredictable due to climate change, people don't want to take the risk after the numerous drought seasons, they experienced. About 20% of every village are migrant workers, in my knowledge. They are recruited by a middle-man who connects them with a contractor. Often, entire families move away from home in search of work in cities.

**JS:** Does this work out for them; do they get paid satisfactorily?

**KP:** Firstly, construction workers in the city are doing more work per square foot than a worker can do on average. This is clearly a stretch. Sometimes, to handle the pressure of harsh labour, alcohol consumption becomes a commonality. And then, interestingly, they don't get paid in cash in some cases at all, they are paid in food grains in a way to curb alcoholism or gambling, or in some cases, with the idea that they might leave in case they are paid. It is a type of bondage really. They are paid a token amount as 'advance' when they are recruited but they don't receive any wages. In some cases, the wages go to the family.

**JS:** I noticed in the labour camp I have been to that children don't go to school because it is not nearby, is this also seen in other camps?

**KP:** In villages there are government schools, but due to there being no development or employment opportunities in the villages, they are forced to move. Within labour camps or construction sites, it is legally allotted that the company or the contractor build a small school on the work-site if there are more than 20 children. If there are not twenty children



on site, construction companies conveniently overlook the education of the children who live on the site. This leads to child labour and other types of exploitation of children. Eventually they learn to work in the same field and the cycle continues. Provision of books, stationary and 'pocket money' for the children are also some of the provisions of the law, but none of them are followed by companies or contractors. By law, in fact a large site must also have a canteen that provides daily food for the workers. This too, is missing on many sites. And so is Aanganvadi[20] system that is in place in most rural areas, which is necessary for small children.'

**JS:** 'Having spoken of exploitation of women and children, I would like to know about the caste dynamics on the site.'

**KP:** 'Almost all construction workers belong to the 'Scheduled Castes' division of the Indian caste system. They have little to no education and are discriminated against in society. Because of generations of people working in harsh conditions for capital production, their life-span is less than average. The work itself is relentless and they have no rest. They work in precarious environments, often with toxic material and they are at the risk of fatal diseases.'

**JS:** 'Do accidents happen because of lack of safety?'

**KP:** 'Yes, the number of accidental deaths on construction sites was very high until recently, in the last few years, there have been a number of security measures that companies have started to employ, but in cases of negligence by supervisors and sometimes the workers themselves, fatal accidents still happen. In case of an accident that is not fatal, treatment is not shouldered by the construction company. It is left to the family of the construction worker. When a death of a migrant worker happens within the purview of the company, the company alerts the family and doesn't carry out any other responsibility. Often it becomes very complicated for families to complete official formalities which are necessary to transport the 'body' back to their village for funeral rites.'

'Have you seen situations where the workers become contractors, or supervisors or middlemen?'

**KP:** 'It is close to impossible for the labourers to

**20** Aanganwadis are a rural child and maternal care centres facilitated by the government aanganwadi means courtyard

save up enough capital to invest in a contracting job, but sometimes they upgrade to the position of 'middle-men' and in some rare cases even supervisor'.

'How does your union function?'

**KP:** 'Our union has committees in place in different districts of the state. These total number of members in these committees put together are around 7000 men and 600 women. We organise meetings, publish leaflets and posters to create awareness in the workers' community about the existence of the union and all that we facilitate. We also give out phone numbers on the leaflets for distress calls.'

'What are the issues you deal with in the union on a usual basis? And how do you intervene?'

**KP:** 'There are no legal contracts signed in maximum cases of migrant labour, this makes it difficult for them to fight the powerful companies systematically. The most common issue is that, sometimes, wages are not paid to the workers after their work is done. We intervene and negotiate between the company and the workers to make sure they receive what they are owed. Other cases are of neglect, mismanagement and abuse and those of illegal contracts. We handle a number of harassment cases, often sexual harassment cases. We receive phone calls from abused women who often don't speak of the abuse in plain terms, but give us signs through their language about the abuse. We then intervene in person and remove them from unsafe environments and try to find them employment in other places. In case they choose to take legal action, we support them with legal access.'

'Has there been resistance on the sites? Do the workers protest a situation or the system? What is your role in this as the union?'

**KP:** 'There have been protests in extreme situations, like a recent case in Malakpet where a worker had died of an accident on site. The rest of the workers put down their tools and demanded safer working conditions. However, even in such an extreme situation, they didn't leave the premises until union members reached the site, for fear of losing their livelihood'.

'What are the aspects that can be worked out within the law to improve this status quo for the workers?

**KP:** 'The system must improve; there should be policy



level changes. There should be a 'Safe Migration Law' under which certain rights are granted to migrant labourers. As of now there is no public health insurance in the country that workers can avail. That should be introduced. The labour department must make periodical checks and have data of the number of people working on the sites. There should be a medical facility or a doctor who is accessible from the camp or site. If a camp has more than twenty workers it must considered similar as a 'service industry' and due provisions must be given. Most importantly, workers must be provided with identity cards that show their identity and rights as a construction worker and there should be some benefits to secure their work and life.

## <<INTERVIEW TL AND RM DAY 07 NARAPALLY>>

TL and RM are a middle-aged couple from the North Indian state of Chattisgarh. Lacking employment opportunities in their own state, they migrated to Hyderbabad, around 700 kilo-meters away from their village, seven years ago. While their two children live in the village with their grand-parents, TL and RM can only visit them during Diwali, once a year. During Diwali, most migrant workers from the North take an annual holiday of two weeks to a month to travel back to their home-town and celebrate the festival with friends and family. Almost all construction work is stalled or slowed down during that time.

**TL** is a head mason at a small-scale independent building and RM is a construction labourer in the same building. They live in a make-shift home on the ground floor of the building. After I explain my thesis topic, they invite me into their home and we begin to talk.

**JS:** Have you always worked in this area since you came here 7 years ago?

**TL:** Yes, we have. We migrated 7 years ago and started working for a contractor and we just stayed with him. When we start working on a project, we live near the site, in a jhopdi until the slabs are cast. Once it is done, we move inside the building and set up home here.

**JS:** How many times in a year do you move?

**RM:** We move every six months from site to site or from

site into the building. We have everything we need here except a bathroom We have built a small bathroom (Sketch 02) just for bathing, but for everything else, we walk to the forest.

**JS:** 'Do you miss your family?'

**TL:** 'Yes, our two sons live in the village with my parents, their grandparents, one is still in school. We meet them every Diwali.Every Diwali we go home to celebrate and stay on for a few weeks to a month.

**RM:** We tried to find work for our older son in the city, he even lived here for a few months, but nothing worked out, so he had to go back',

RM shows me her smartphone, saying, she speaks to them on video call twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, after work, so, it doesn't seem like they are so far away.

**JS:** Do you both earn the same wages?

**TL:** No, women are paid less, and then again I am the head mason so I am paid much more. I am paid 1000 rupees per day and she gets 500 per day.

**JS:** 'Do you work every day of the week?

**RM:** No, Sunday is a holiday, we rest, we go out

Sometimes, my neighbor and I have a few drinks in the evening to relax.

**JS:** Tell me a little about your life here.

**TL:** 'We like it here, we work for a good contractor, we start work around 9.30 AM everyday and work until the evening, around 6.00 PM. We have built a room to sleep and put our clothes in. Once in a few days, I go to the forest nearby and bring firewood and we have built a small chulha here in the verandah and one inside the room. We cook on it in the morning and light a fire for warmth at night.'

**JS:** I see a lot of picture frames of Gods; do you pray every day?'

**RM:** 'Yes, twice daily.'



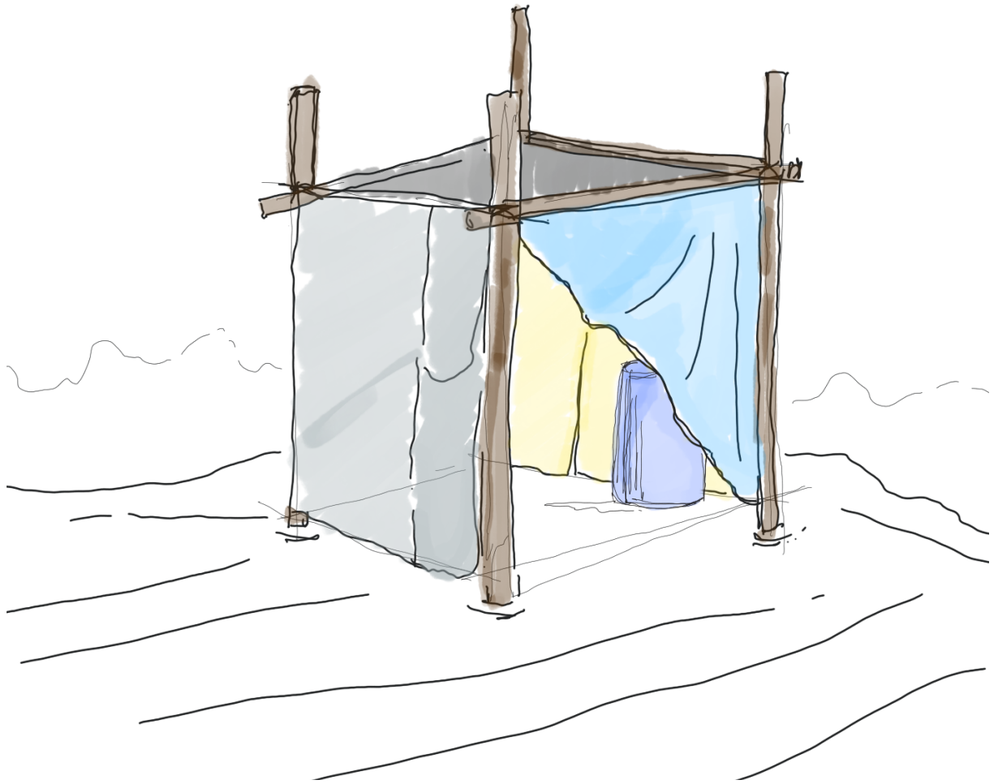
When I get up to leave, I notice a large dry tuber that I don't recognize on the floor right outside and ask what it is -

**TL:** 'It is Zimmikanda…like a potato, it grows under the soil. It doesn't grow here, it is from home.'

### 3.4 Sketchbook

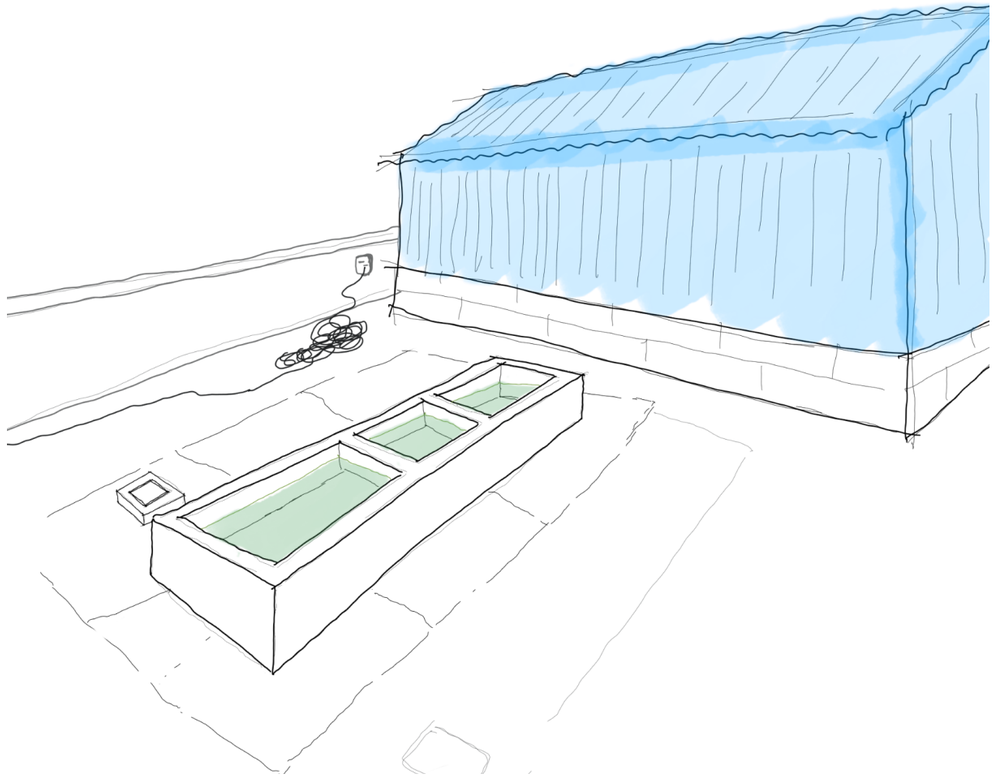


Sketch 01: TL and RM's Home

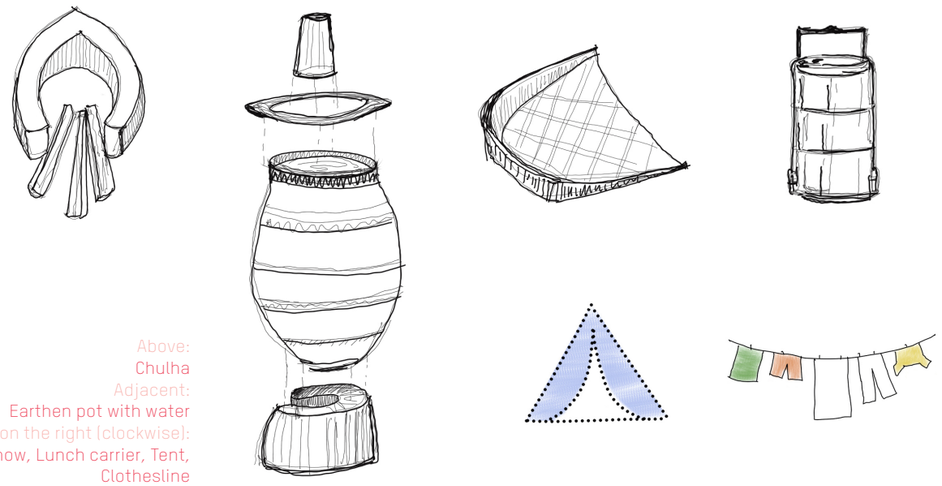


Sketch 02: TL and RM's Bathroom



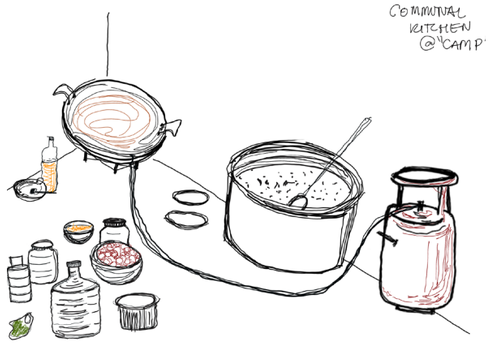


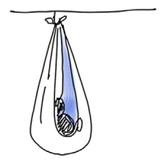
Sketch 03: Tank and Toilet at the camp



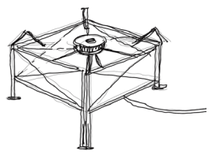
Above:
Chulha
Adjacent:
Earthen pot with water
Grid on the right (clockwise):
Winnow, Lunch carrier, Tent, Clothesline

Sketch 04: Materialities of Care





Left of page
Community kitchen
at the camp
Adjacent
Infant in the cradle
Bottom right
Single-burner stove
Bottom Left
LPG Cylinder

Sketch 05: Materialities of Care



camp entrance


water tank



camp ground floor



camp 1st floor


kadaai


images of god




make-shift door


"bath"


earthen pot

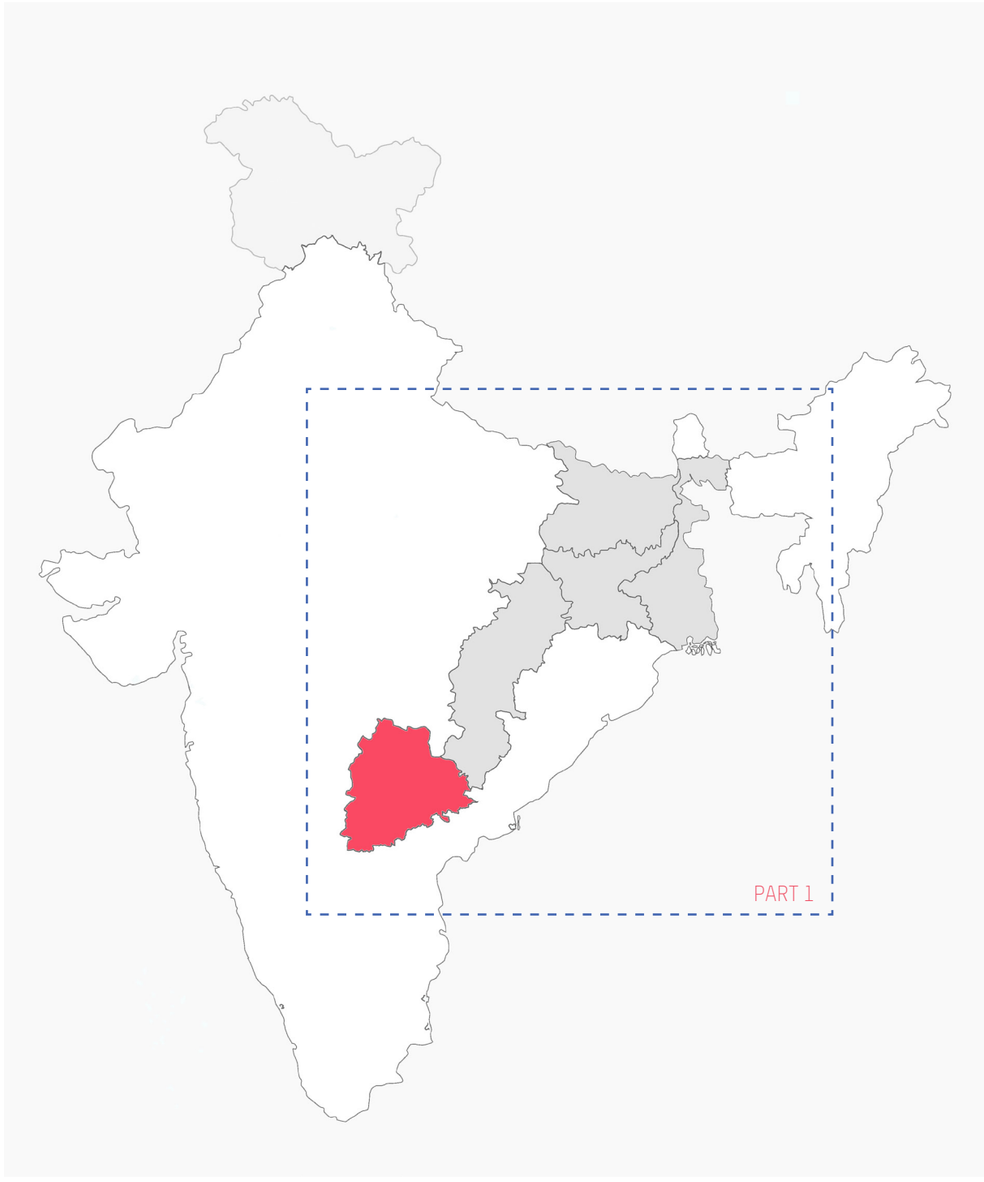

chulha


smart phone


Elephant Foot-Yam

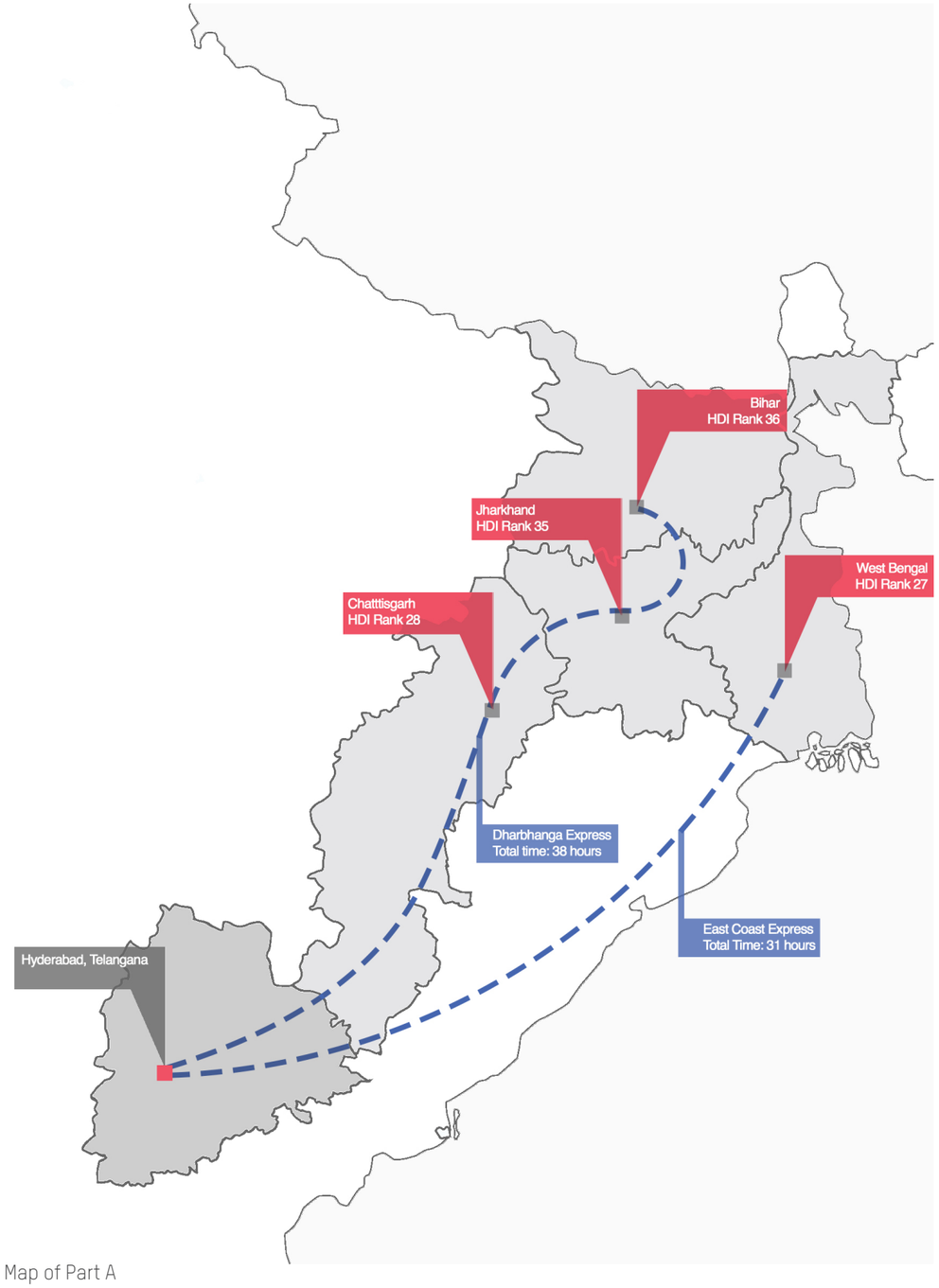
**3.5 Photo Documentation**

## 4.1 Map A - Cartography of Migration




Map of India

- Telangana State
- States where most migrant labourers come from

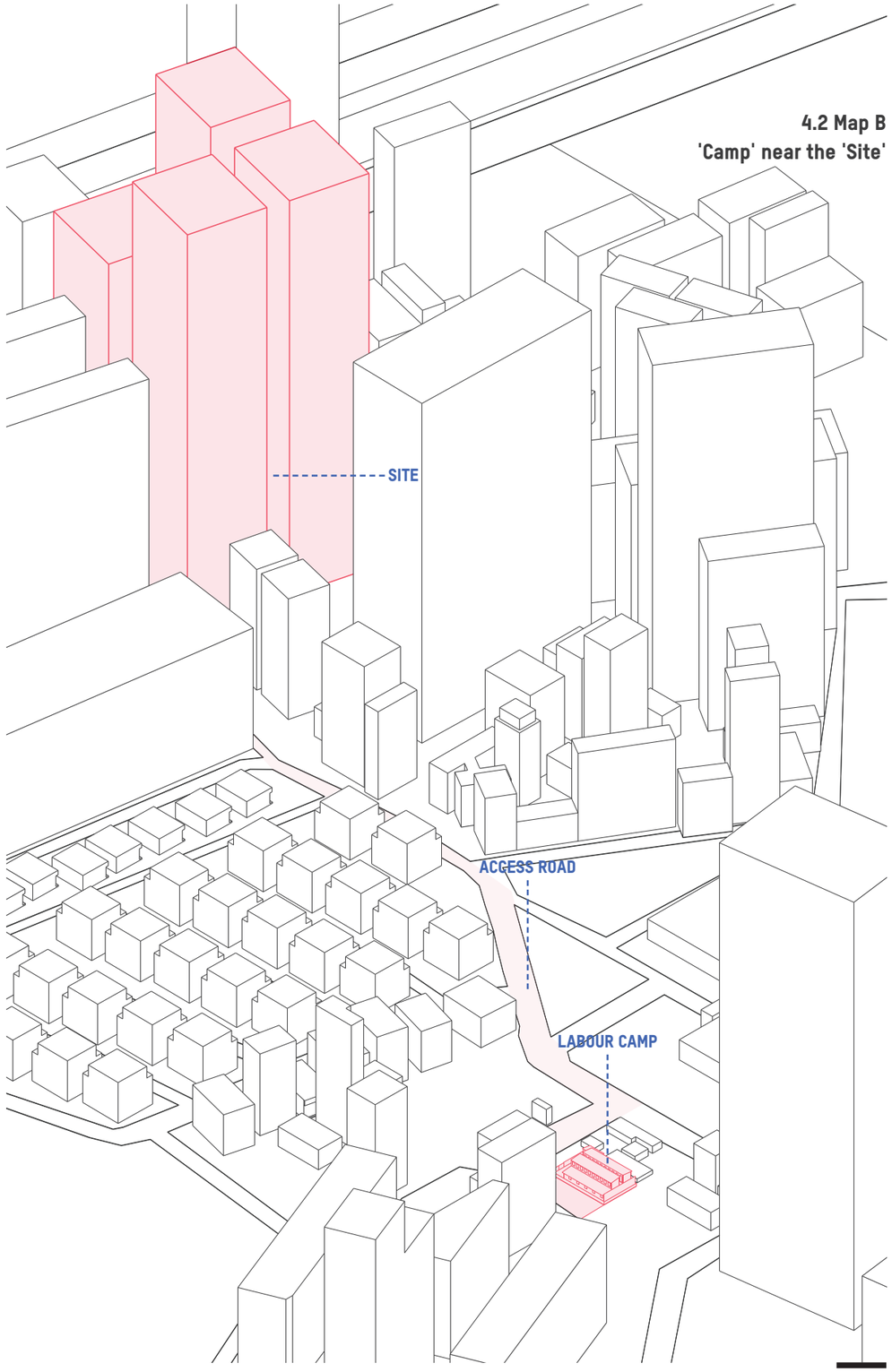


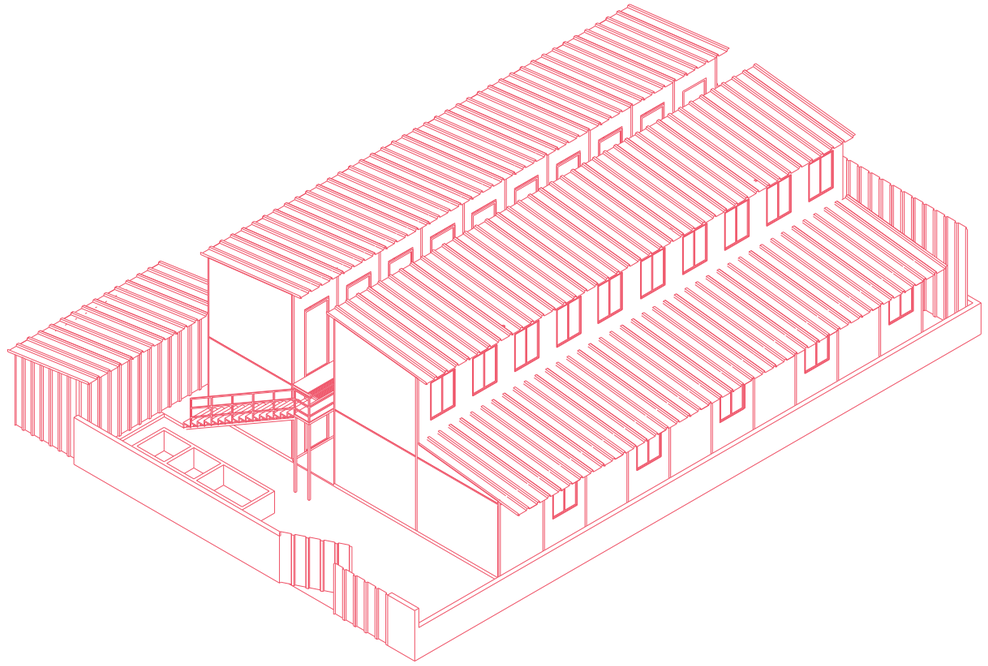

Map of Part A

- Telangana State
- States where most migrant labourers come from
- Train routes used for migration

HDI stands for Human Development Index

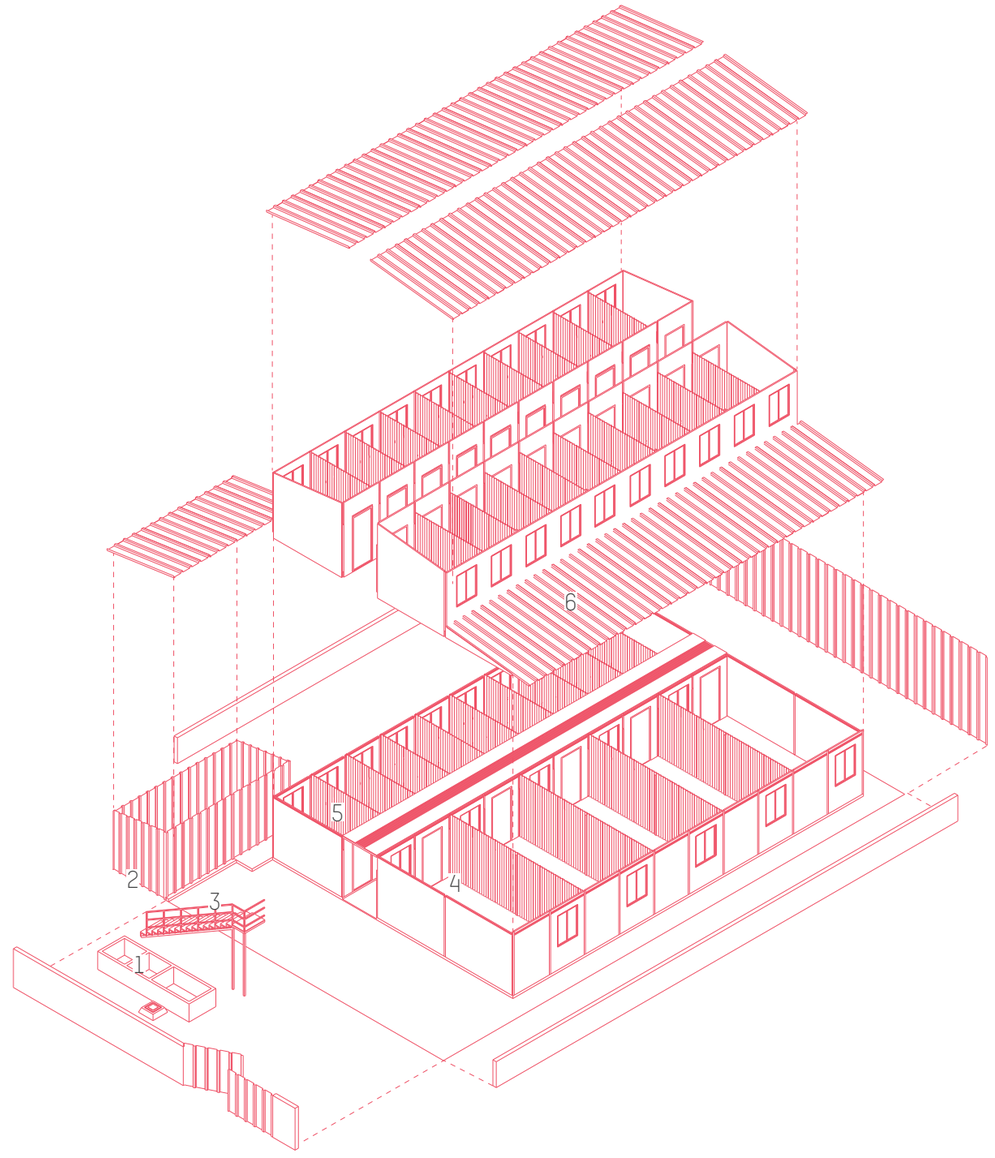
## 4.2 Map B
## 'Camp' near the 'Site'





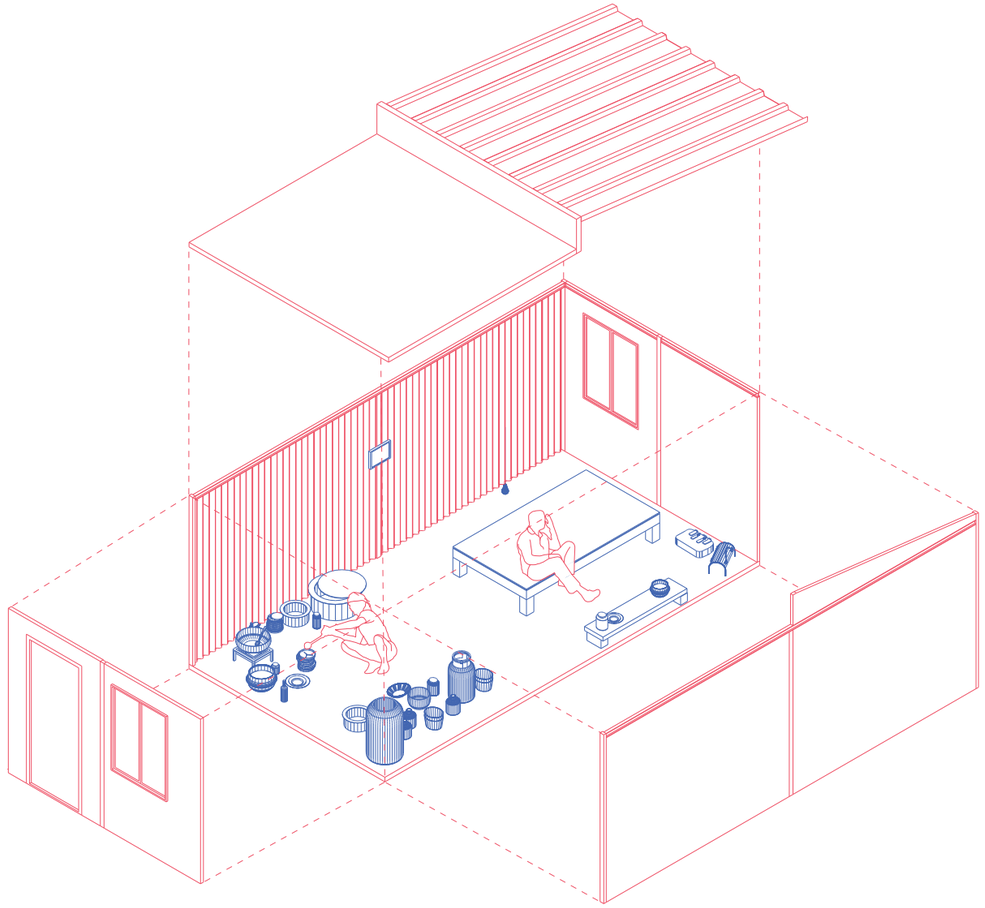
D1: Drawing showing the labour camp



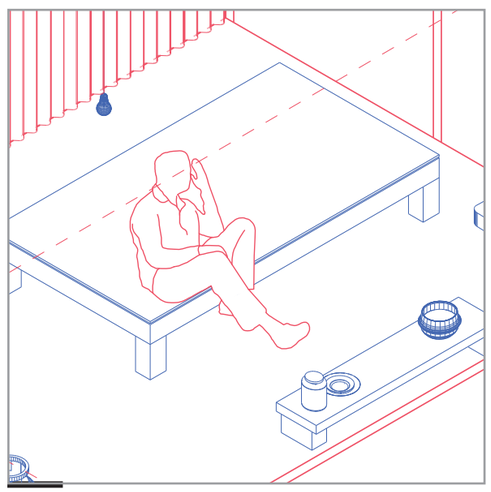


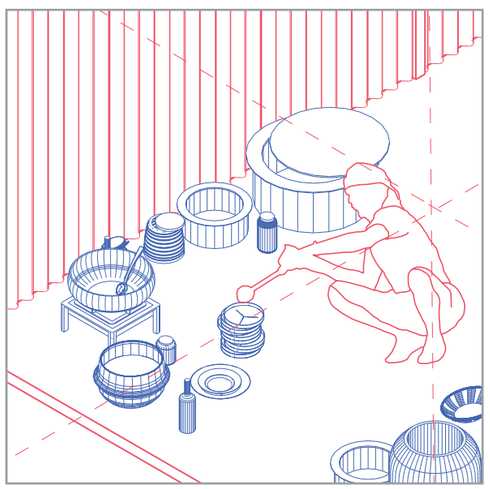

D2: Drawing showing the exploded diagram of labour camp

1. tank
2. toilet block
3. metal staircase
4. room 3 x 6
5. room 1.5 x 3
6. corrugated sheet

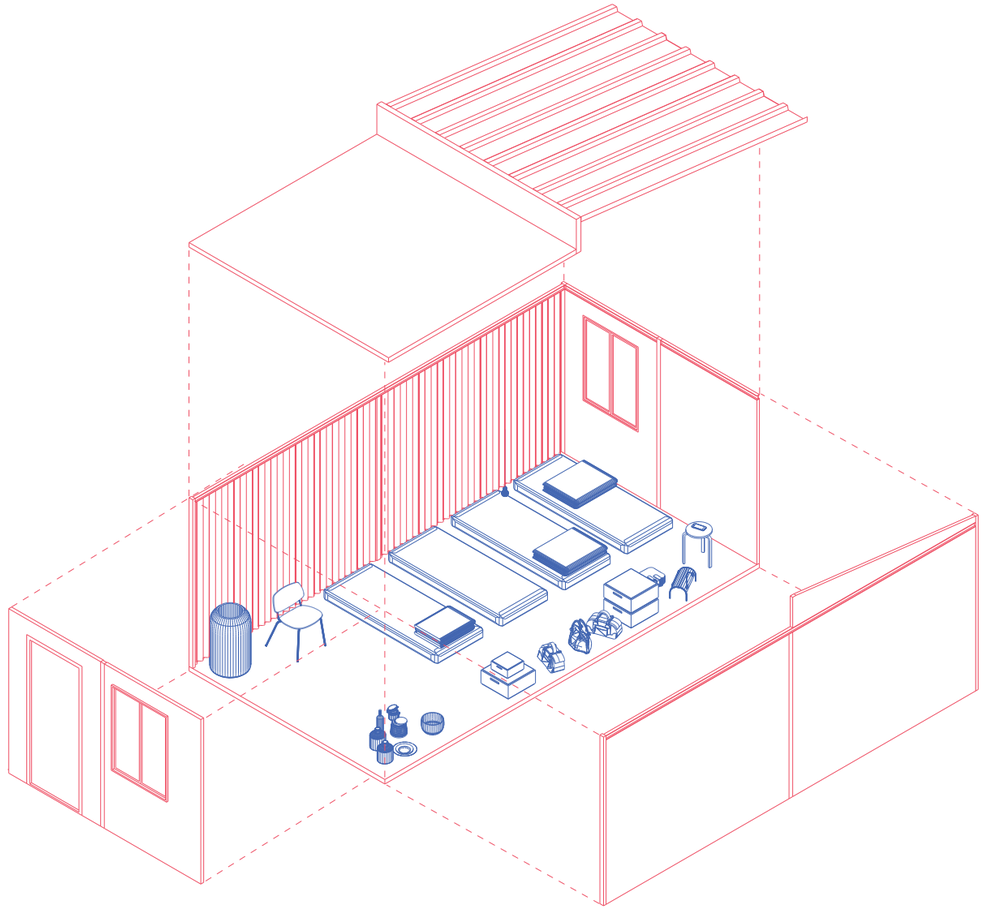


D3: Kitchen at the camp

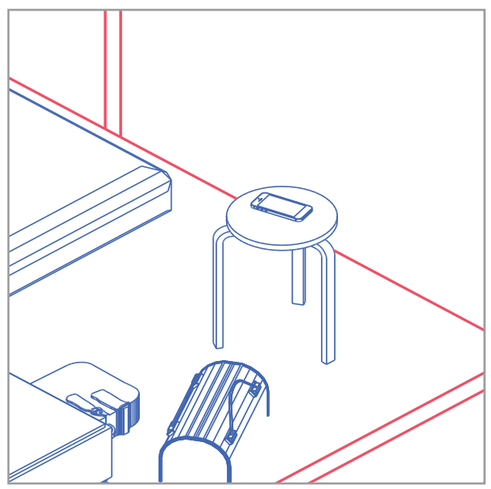


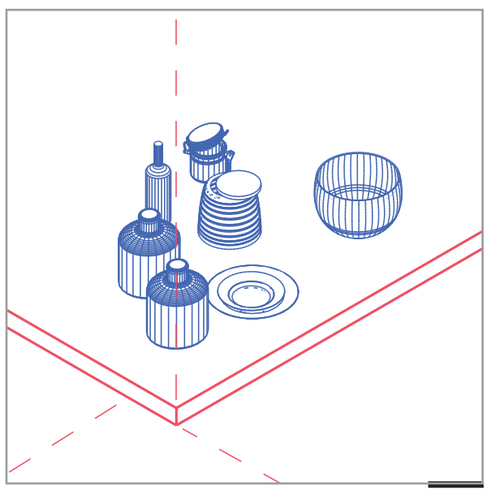


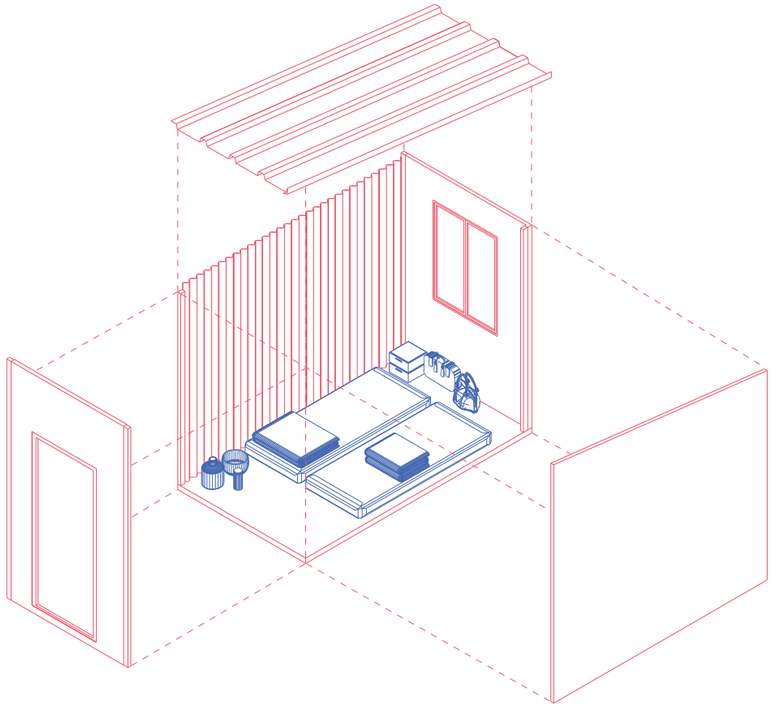




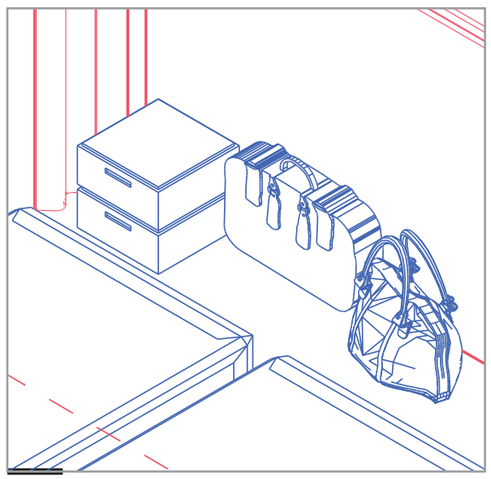
D4: Living + Bed (Large)

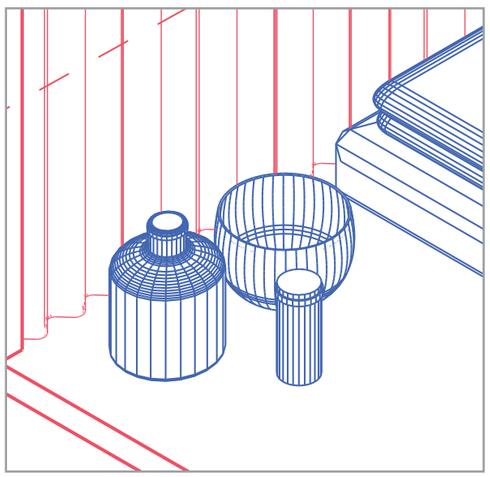






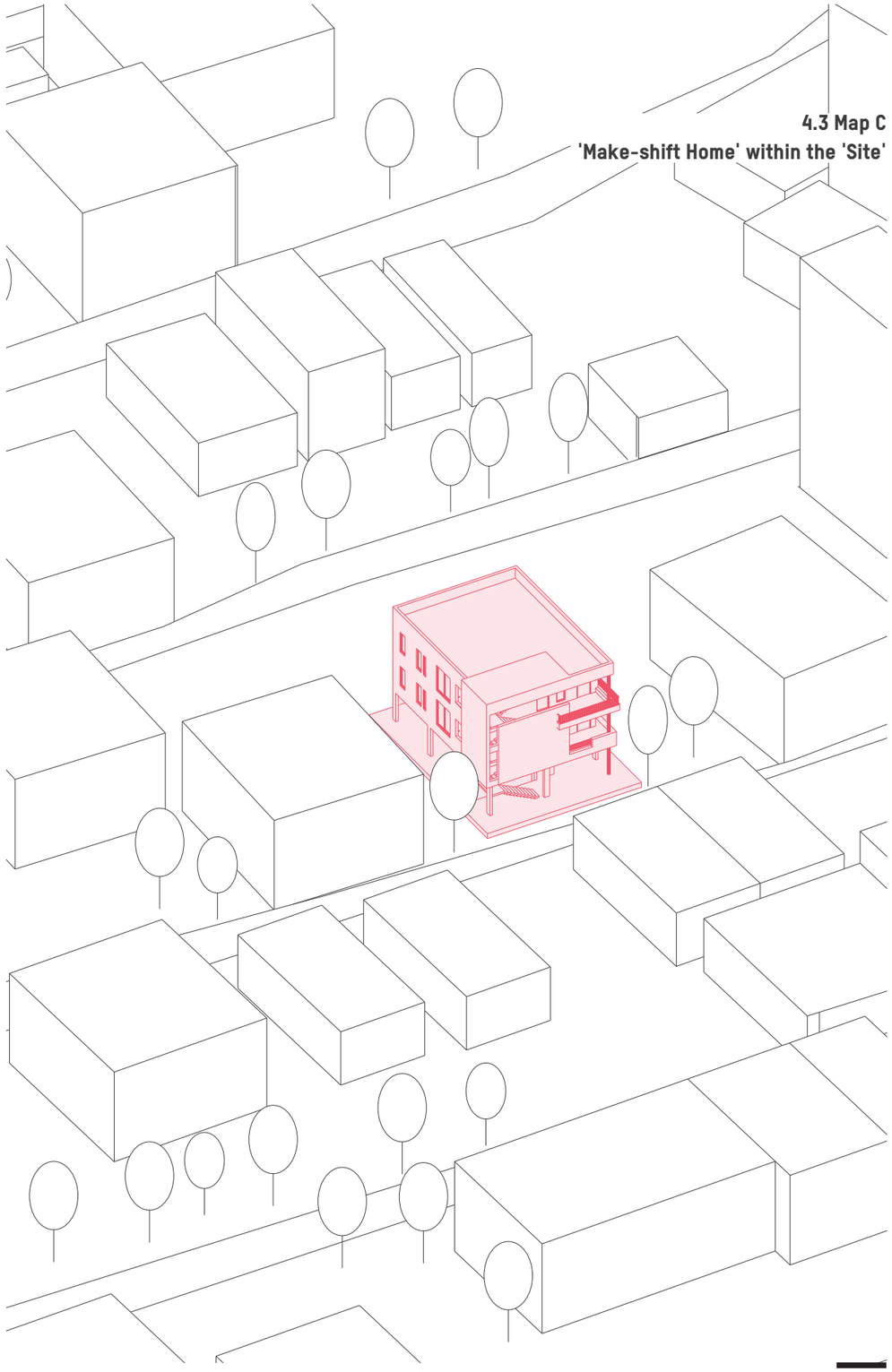
D5: Living + Bed (Small)

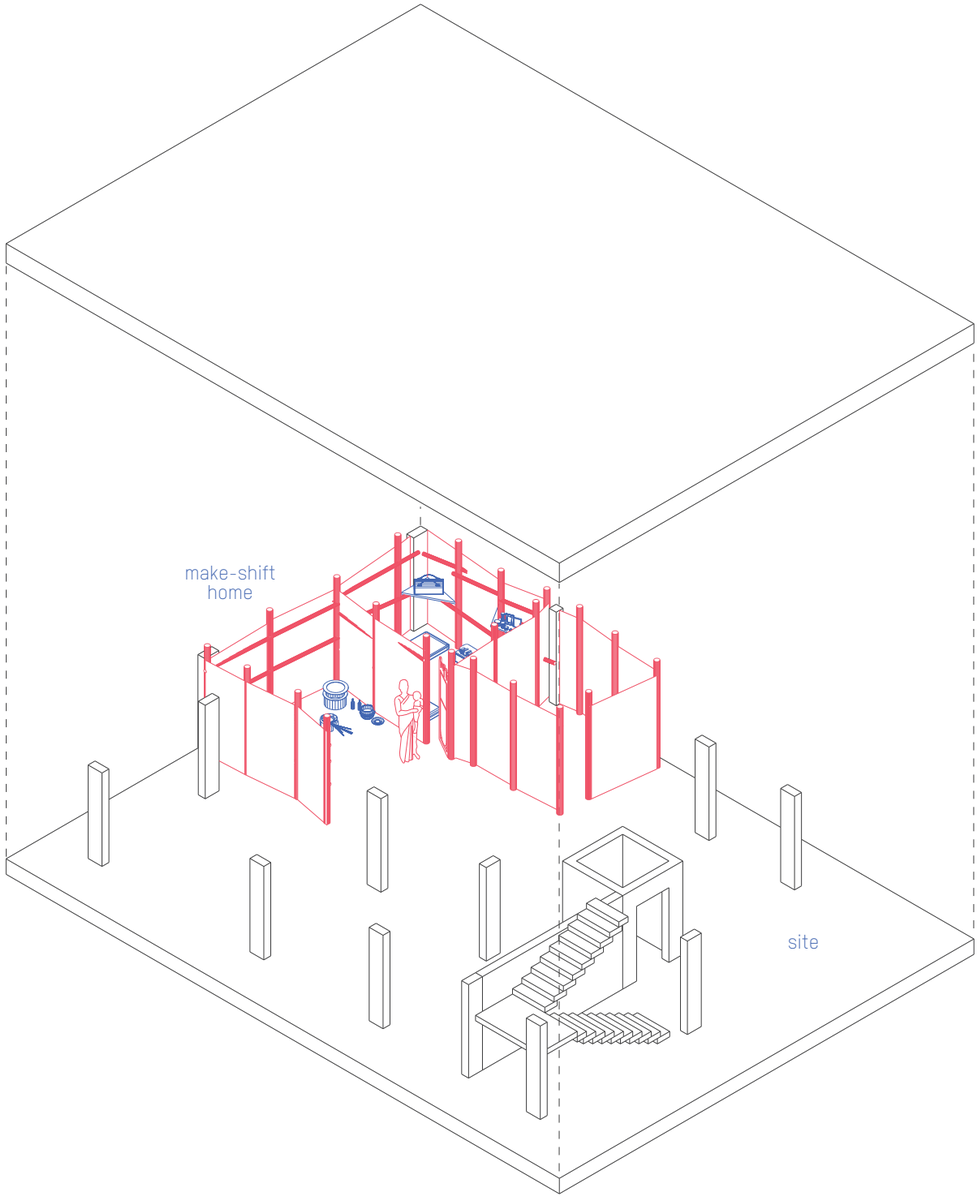






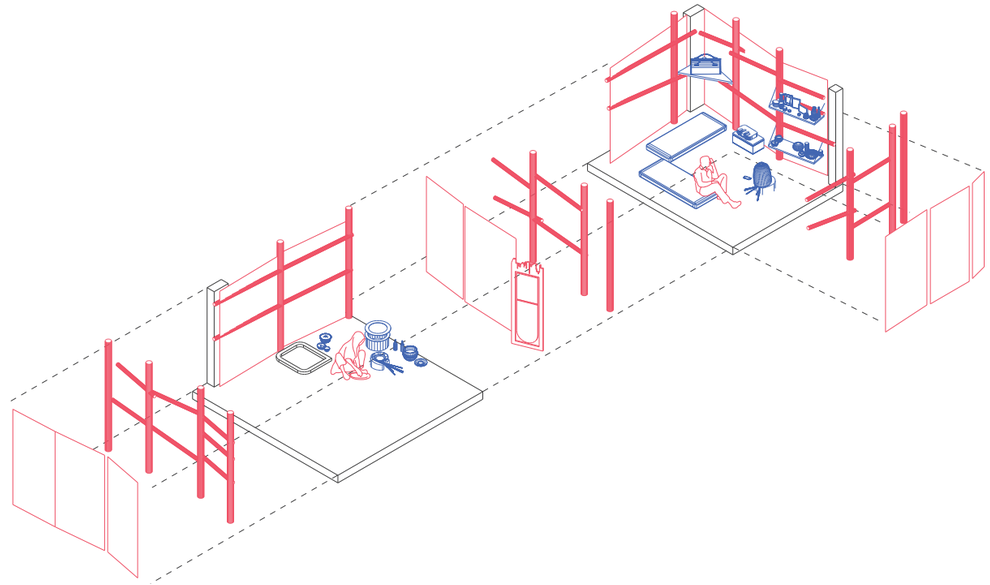
**4.3 Map C**
**'Make-shift Home' within the 'Site'**



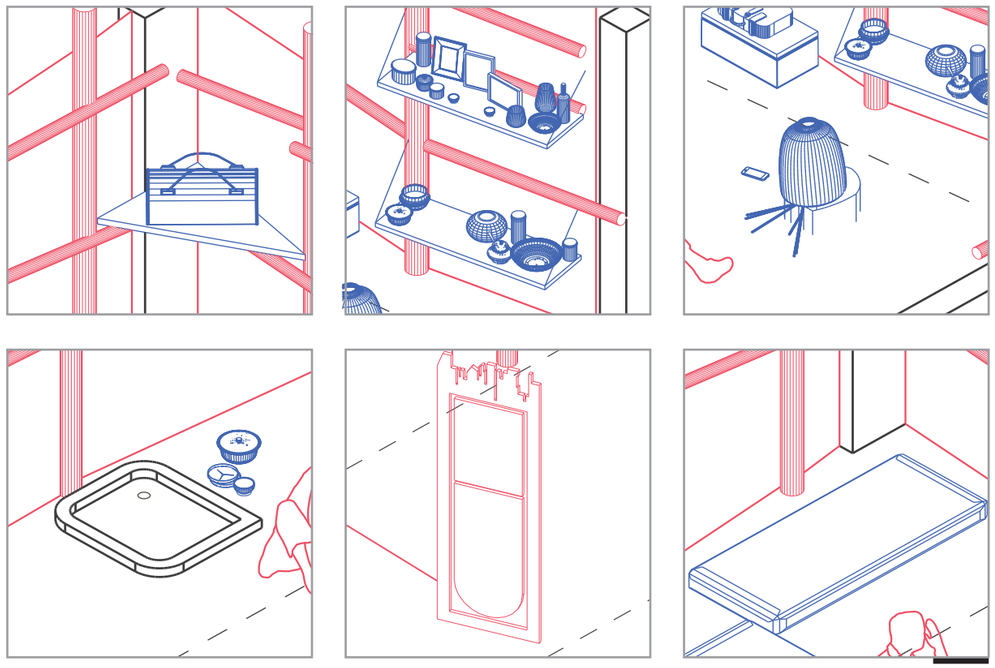


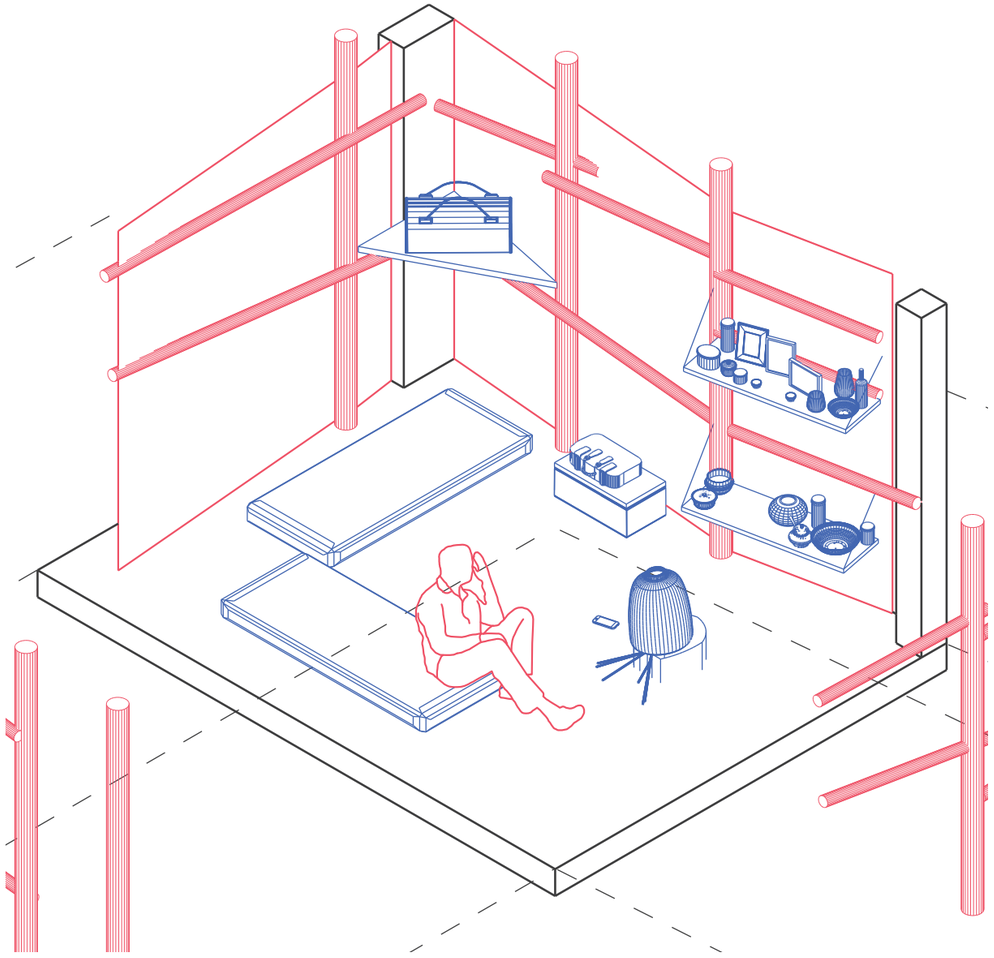

D6: Make-shift house on site





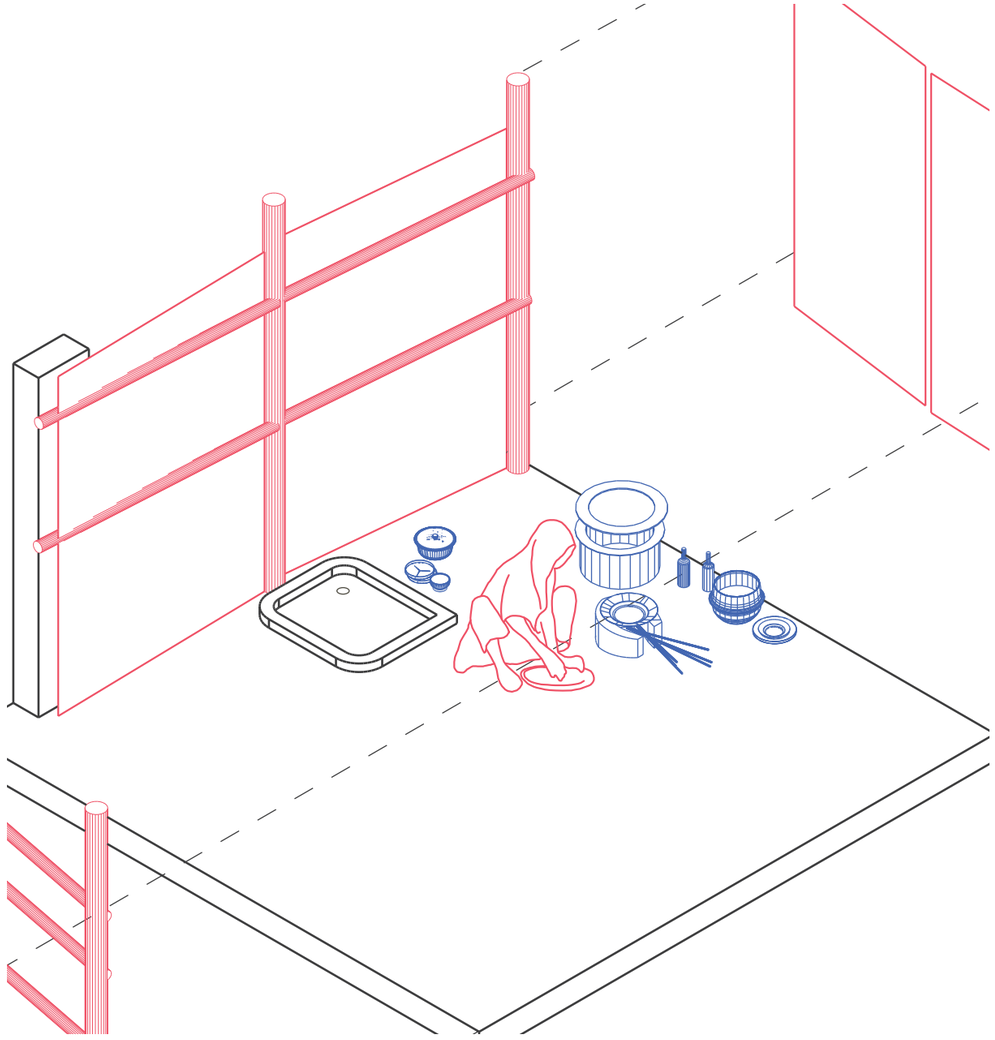
D7: Make-shift exploded view





D8: Make-shift house Room





D9: Make-shift house Kitchen + Verandah

# 05
# DISCUSSION

## 5.1 An Elephant-foot Yam and a Smartphone make Home

The word ‘margin’ evokes images of conflict, contestation and instability. It is always a periphery of a centre, a blurring circle beyond the known, something strange, other, unfamiliar. When accounts of people who live in the margin are written, oppression is inevitably the main theme. The objective of this essay is to expand the lens to also include possible resistance, and investigate whether there is a possibility of resistance. Resistance, here, on the construction site is not only understood as protest or organized struggle; in some cases, it may only be the mundane happening of everyday life.

The aim of this essay is to bring this mundanity into light, to reflect on its extraordinariness. The point is not to shadow the oppressive reality of the capitalistic production of architecture, but to explore the prospect of protest within this entangled margin. It is to speak of the powerful oppressor, but by centring the embodied experience of the resilient worker. It is an attempt to see the margin from the standpoint of the ‘invisibilized’ labourer. The main subject of this essay is ‘the home’ that exists within the margin and across different landscapes simultaneously. In the work of bell hooks, we observe how both home and margin are considered sites ‘of resistance and possibility’[1] while being sites of oppression. It is because of such entanglements that the study of ‘home’ produces a rich palimpsest of different meanings – that of belonging and longing, of precarity and safety, of refuge and resistance.

The method of this research has been a spatial study above all, since it is about spaces – homes, margins, cities, megaprojects, high-rise buildings, labour camps. Since the home is the only place in the city where the construction worker can access some agency, it is the central axis of this thesis. Construction workers, inhabit, in their migratory journey a number of precarious homes on the peripheries of society. Their home is in the margin and the margin is their home. And this precarity and peripherality comes with variety -

For workers living in tarpaulin tents on the site, a non-permeable water-proof, completely shaded roof is a luxury. Only when the slab is laid, this fundamental necessity is fulfilled. Then, they move from the external make-shift quarter, to the semi-interior wall-less, water-less, skeletal frame of the building and build their home there. It could be argued that they are in fact the first inhabitants of the house they are building, its first tenants. It is a process of home-making, but not for themselves. And yet, while they are building this space for the ‘owner’ of the house, through the months and years it takes to build, they also make ‘home’ out of the construction site for themselves. On the construction site, the home is not only in the margin but is also transient. Like TL and RM’s house (discussed in chapter 3), it is a home built out of necessity, with available resources and constraints of time, space and human energy. Where

**1** Bell Hooks, qtd in Huda Tayob, ‘Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing “Tell” a Different Story?’, Architecture and Culture 6, no. 1 (2018): 203-22,

precarity is a consistent condition, the act of making home can be read as an act of resistance.

The Elephant-foot Yam

TL and RM come from Chattisgarh. It is a region of swathes of forests, inhabited by indigenous populations who have been oppressed and exploited by state-sanctioned corporate mining for many decades. This has set a course of conflict between the Indian military forces and the indigenous people. There have been countless human rights violations on civilians in the region by the military through-out the conflict. This and years of resource extraction from the region has made it one of the poorest states in the country. Many people leave the region for better employment and livelihood, like TL and RM. Most of them find work in the construction sector.

The people of Chatthisgarh are characteristically very attached to their zameen, their soil. During my field visits, I encountered what they called the Zimmikanda or Zameenkand (literally, tuber of the soil), a large dark round tuber that I had never seen before. It was brought back with them all the way from their village in Chatthisgarh after Diwali last year, which was around six months before my visit. A chunk of the yam had been chopped off and the inside flesh on that part was completely dried out. I was surprised at how it still looked so fresh.

The Zimmikanda or the elephant-foot yam is a tuber cultivated in many parts of India but very popular in Chattisgarh. According to TL and RM, it is nutritious, delicious and can be stored for six months to a year. A small piece of it would suffice for a meal for two. They told me very proudly that it was very special to them because it is from their village and eating a dish of Zimmikanda was a remembering of home.

The Smart-phone

The phone is a most common object in today's world, easily recognizable and owned by almost everyone. But here, in a place that is home, and yet far from home, technology becomes an everyday part of life. When asked about their children, RM in response, showed me her smartphone and said that she spoke to her children two times every day, and also stressed again, 'on video-call where I can see their faces'.

She recounted the story of how they tried to find work for their older son in the city too, but it didn't work and how her younger son was still in school and she didn't want him to miss his education by moving away with her. Besides, it would be more expensive to raise them in the city. Instead, they send money back home to their children, through a digital wallet.



Alter for the Gods

The belongings of the people who live in construction sites are a unique mix of everything. However, the most common object is the image of God, in a photo-frame. In the camp kitchen, there was a picture of Hanuman, the monkey lord from Ramayana fastened with a copper wire to the steel column. In another room in the camp there was an image of Ram and Sita. In the make-shift home at Narapally, there was a large shelf on the wall with a number of Hindu deities' pictures framed in durable and hazy plastic frames. Outside another home that I came across on the way, there was a poster of Jesus stuck to the outer side of the tarpaulin, while a cross hung above the entrance. Along with bedding, clothes and utensils, the Gods too are part of every migration. In case of the Hindu gods, the alter is always located in the north-east corner, a vaastu-specific direction that is remarkably followed even within the constraints of these transient homes.

The upside-down door

Most make-shift homes on construction sites of my observation use a long curtain, usually repurposed from an old saree as the only 'door' to the house. In better situations, separate planks of wood are put together to create a shutter that is attached with hinges to the scaffolding standards. At the Narapally house, TL and RM had created something unique. At first glance, it looked a generic flush door of typical design, with one end worn and tattered and laminate peeling off the plywood in some places.

On close observation, it was clearl that the shutter was upside-down. The original bottom of the door had apparently become worn while the corners at the top remained intact. As an ingenious way of solving this issue, TL and RM turned the door upside-down. Now, the original top of the door was at the bottom shielding the lower half of the room inside, where their bedding is! There was a latch and a handle screwed onto the door oriented according to its recent flip.

The idea of home can be different places all at once and the plethora of objects that are carried across spaces. The yam, the phone, the Gods and the door all make up different ideas of home. The yam represents a far-away home, of which a small part can be migrated, the phone is the tool to bridge distance. When the construction workers need faith to hold on to, the gods become a metaphorical embodiment of home. And the creative door has a more practical purpose, it protects and makes private, brings agency and right to their space, however temporary.

These acts of home-making are only survival strategies, negotiations with the space, where the actual home is still a faraway memory for most migrant workers. For example, AM, who lives in the camp, the camp holds no significance, even though, every day, the practice of homing the camp is happening. In case of MK, the word home can only mean her village and not the camp, her answer, betraying a sense of longing and hope. For RM, the phone is her refuge to go back to her children, albeit virtually. For TL, the yam curry cooked on the chulha is a sensorial incarnation of a home that is too far away.

Marx writes that the worker is 'freely active' only in the home. The 'unsatisfactory' actions of life like eating and drinking are when the worker is 'doing what he wants to do.' Thus, food, the most basic of necessities, gives space for agency to form within the oppressive power structure of the home within the workplace. The other moment of 'active freedom' in this place is at night when, the workers begin their domestic life after a full day's labour.

They turn on blinding lights, fixed up by a naked wire running across an unfinished cement floor, cook dinner on a small kerosene stove, and sleep, oblivious to the weather, weary of the day's work. In the afternoons, after their lunch break, mothers leave their children to play on piles of gravel, they hang a long piece of cloth on the beam to make a swing that becomes a cradle. Sand pits and cribs are obviously not part of this world. The vulnerability of being in such extreme margins of society is palpable on any such site. The care-work they put in in the making a house is never returned to them even in part. They are only care-givers, service-providers. Embodied in them is the generational class struggle, the dream of better life.

bell hooks has written about the African-American domestic workers: that their work site (houses of the white American landlords) was away from their homes, giving them a sphere of their own to return to, to rest, to be with family and live freely with dignity for a few hours before getting back to work.[2] There is no such clear distinction between the homeplace and the workplace for the construction labourers who live on site. They work, cook, eat, sleep, quarrel and love in the same space. It is this ambiguity that makes a reflection on their everyday life possible, and is also crucial for a labour-centric understanding of Architectural Production. This is because it is only here that the construction labourer is visible as someone who crosses the threshold and goes home after work. Inhabiting this liminal space as an observer, one can record the life that is spent to produce the work that they do.

It is such observation that prompts the forthcoming argument. In their essay in Care and the City, Cohen and Knierben, posit that it is through the 'materialities of care' including bodies, buildings and objects of the urban that care takes place.[3] While construction

**2** Hooks, 'Homeplace'.
**3** Angelika Gabauer, Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies, ed. Sabine Knierbein et al. (Taylor & Francis, 2022).in which caring and uncaring practices intersect and shape people's everyday lives.



workers do receive care through these objects, it is their own bodies that must find ways to care for themselves. While the system and the city provide space and material, it is usually an incomplete provision, like the camp. Inevitably, the dwellers of these spaces must improvise, repurpose and/or adjust to their environment. This improvisation is another type of labour, in that the construction workers must employ, once again the labour of their own bodies. To be able to use objects of care like the chulha, they must first build the chulha, and to build it, they must first eat, to eat they must first cook and to cook, they must build the chulha. In this circle of sustenance, construction workers do not only produce capital, but must replenish their energy and convert it and reconvert it into many forms to be able to generate labour power that will enable them in the production of capital.

The company on the other hand, provides not a home, but a camp lacking in food or drinking water, or beds or insulation from heat. The camp is a less than bare-minimum structure. Capital conveniently assumes that wages for the production labour must suffice to facilitate the care-work and the purchase or preparation of all objects of care in the home of the construction worker. Wages however are not calculated for this labour, because the industry can only profit by exploiting the proletariat. If as Marx said, home is where the worker is 'freely active', and according to Social Reproduction Theory can rejuvenate for the next day, the workers must be emancipated from the unending loop of multiple labours.

The loop, complicating matters further, does not exist in vacuum, but is constantly created by the capitalism. There are countless mechanisms in place that keep the power in the hands of the system and abandon workers to this loop. For example, at the labour camp, people are not allowed to work for the company for more than 6 months. In my interview with a supervisor from the camp, I learned that the main reason for this is because the company doesn't want the workers to become familiar with the job and comfortable in their workplace. If the workers become secure of their jobs and shelter, capital fears that there are more chances of them organizing and protesting for higher wages or better work hours or better places to live in. Ultimately, the system works to keep up this status quo, in a way, to keep itself running for profit, invisibilizing the worker who is the primary producer of this system.

These practices, as they establish identity against staying invisible, against being forgotten by society, can invariably be read as forms of resistance. Therefore, the home itself is the site of resistance. Ultimately, creating knowledge around the home, or in this case, of the home in the work place can shift architectural discourse from being incidental and peripheral, to one that centres the construction worker, thereby bringing the margin into view.

## 5.2. Rozgaar: Stories of migration and labour

'Postcolonial global reality is a history of multiple migrations,
rooted in a number of different historical processes'[4]

In June every year, begins the Kharif agricultural season in India as the south-west monsoons arrive from the coast of Malabar and herald the 'sowing season'. This onset of rains is also a 'call from home' for millions of rural migrants whose migration patterns follow agricultural seasons. The Kharif season is very conducive to rice crops and pulses that need high levels of humidity for cultivation. Every year rural agricultural populations, cultivate paddy, the crop that produces rice, from June to September or October depending on the length of the monsoon.

After the harvest season, they migrate to nearby cities to work in different types of paid care work. A good percentage of seasonal migrants work in the construction sector. Some of them own small patches of land in their village and the wage from the construction work sustains them through the rest of the year when they are not working on the field. The other group of seasonal migrants are paid agricultural labourers, who don't themselves own land. They are out of work for months after the harvest season and migrate to cities to earn a living.

Building Indian cities has not always been a booming industry with a demand for continuous labour power as it is today. This change occurred gradually, as India arrived into the neo-liberal phase post globalization. Over the next few years after its markets opened to foreign investment, cities transformed at an unprecedented speed, racing to become the 'most developed' Indian city, as India tried to move up in the world ranking as a global economy.

Hyderabad, having evolved through the 1990s into an important centre for Information Technology, attracted migration from different parts of the country. Consequently, between 1991 and 2001, the population density of Hyderabad is said to have grown faster than Mumbai, Kolkata or Chennai, which were already metropolitan regions. This increase in density of population created a need for more housing. As a result, construction activity soared in the suburban areas of the city. With major urban development flowing outward, the villages on the city's periphery turned overnight into prime real estate and farmlands became suburban neighbourhoods. This shift proved to be very profitable for landed feudal families in villages and to some extent, also to small farmers. However, it adversely effected the landless agricultural labourers who lost their wage and found themselves in the new suburbs in search of work. Between these shifts in the economy, much needed employment was provided by the construction industry. What is popularly called 'the creation of jobs' is also therefore, in this light, a mechanism through which the working class remains subservient to the owners of capital.

**4** Sara Ahmed, Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality, Transformations (Routledge, 2000), 81.



Following this early surge in development, the building activity in Hyderabad has only exponentiated over the years. The creation of the new state of Telangana in 2014 of which Hyderabad was the capital, prompted the new government to encourage foreign multi-national companies to invest in the city by amending urban policy and urban planning. Therefore, since the 1990s, the city had a gradually increasing need of labour power. People from rural areas displaced due to suburban occupation and those evicted from urban villages around the city, along with migrant population from other states flocked into the market for migrant labour. According to the 2011 census which is the last government register of demographic data, about 60% of the population in Hyderabad are migrant workers working in different sectors. Out of those migrant workers, a large population are employed in the construction sector as unskilled workers in the informal sector. While some workers migrate from within the state, most of them are inter-state migrants who either migrate seasonally or permanently. In the introduction chapter of 'A Feminist Urban Theory of our Time', the editors specifically reflect on the urbanization of 'Southern Cities':

"We cannot overlook that, within the next few decades, it will be approximately two-thirds of the world's population living in urban places, owing not only to rising rates of urbanization in Southern cities but also to the reclassification of rural areas into urban ones...it is now urbanization, the engine of this growth and movement, that increasingly drives capitalism."
- Introduction to 'A Feminist Urban Theory of our Time'[5]

If this urbanization constitutes a third of the world and 'drives' capitalism, then it becomes crucial to ask in the course of this study, what does it mean for the construction workers?

With rapid urbanization, climate change and marginal exchange rates for agricultural produce, more rural to urban population will become more permanent than seasonal. This permanent move to the city, situates them in vulnerable positions of constant migration, even within the city. Migration, thus, simultaneously happens on multiple scales – the migration from the village to the city, the pursuit of work and home within the city, home-making in opportunistic points, sporadic evictions, adapting according to progress in the construction process, moving to secure areas during the monsoon and cooler parts of the site in the summer. There is a transient temporality to these multiple migrations where each of them is a careful negotiation with the system and also with nature and circumstance.

However, in times of global crises, this carefully constructed balance is lost and the marginalized people are the first to be affected. During the COVID-19 pandemic, living in cities

**5** Linda Peake et al., A Feminist Urban Theory for Our Time: Rethinking Social Reproduction and the Urban (John Wiley & Sons, 2021).

could be fatal for migrant workers without a home, but so could travelling back home. In India, a 'lockdown' was announced, too suddenly, without time to prepare. People were asked to 'socially distance' themselves, unless it was an emergency. For the construction workers, with their villages too far way and work on sites stalled indefinitely, life became more precarious than it ever was. All transport systems ceased, and they were forced to travel back hundreds of kilometers on foot. In such a situation why were the systems in place unable to cater to the working class? Is it because systems have never been created for them, in the first place, when all the while, they have been creating this system with their labour power?

And yet, almost immediately after the lockdown was lifted, migrant workers travelled back to cities. Immediately after the pandemic, the supply of construction workers was more than the demand. In an already underpaid and undervalued system, workers were now having to sell their labour power for cheaper wages. On the other hand, the care systems at home that produced their labour power grew burdened as sustaining life was more expensive post-pandemic.

According to Peggy Deamer even though the population of labourers that produce architecture 'seem tiny in comparison to the vastness of the society that buys, uses, and consumes it', spaces created to generate profit inevitably require the exploitation of labourers. And this newly developed cheap labour was exploited for profits.

The wealthy continued to buy for novelty rather than necessity, after a brief pause during the pandemic. As Deamer puts it, the neoliberal world today works on a profit model, for building 'financial capital' instead of 'productive capital.[6]

What is reproduced through this want of novelty?

Let us consider the case of the high-rise towers in Nanakramguda in Hyderabad (see Map B and chapter 3). Local real estate agents value each apartment in the towers at an average of 700,000 USD. According to my interviews at the camp, the monthly wage of each worker is only about 103 USD. In my interview with HK, a manager at the construction company, he established that a project of such a scale, of 640 houses, a minimum of 600 workers are employed at any given point over a period of two years with groups of working moving in and out of work. Multiplying this with the monthly wage of the construction worker, the total wage-bill for the construction company (required to pay the informal unskilled worker) would add up to be about 1.5 million USD, which is less than the total sale value of only two houses. This calculation would be further disparate considering that the women are paid lesser than men for the same type of work.

**6** (Deamer 2020, 58)



In the smaller construction sites, the disparity gap is significantly lower. In Narapally, the construction workers received higher wages per month than at the camp. At the camp, each man received 9000 INR (103 USD), while each woman only received 7500 INR (86 USD) per month. Whereas in case of the smaller site, the head mason received 25 – 30000 INR (287 – 344 USD). Ironically that means small contractors who have smaller projects compared to the contractors of the high rise, pay higher wage than the contractors who work for the companies. Therefore, the higher the novelty and wealthier the buyer, the lower the wages of the construction worker.

In my conversation with the union leader KP, he illustrated the network of these labour relationships and how they are linked to migratory patterns from the start. For the small-scale construction worker, who is paid better, there is more agency from the beginning as they are independent in their method of migration and finding work, even in building home. In the other case, however there is a network of people involved in the hierarchy who decide how and how many workers will migrate from a certain village at a given point in time.

"When architects express ideas, they often do so in a way that draws upon and requires the deployment of vast material and human resources."[7]

In the interview with HK, the company manager, it became clear that there is a well-established system in place to recruit construction workers for high-rise real-estate development. The apparent informality is a planned segregation system, where the worker feels as though they are invisible because the system prefers not to make a record of them. Below the surface however, there is a meticulous system at play.

First, the company projects the number of labourers they might need according to the timeline of the project, for different milestones. Then the contractors are given specific numbers. Since, large-scale construction work requires hundreds of people, there are multiple contractors involved. These contractors further delegate their experienced head-mason or a sub-contractor to travel to a certain village to recruit workers. Elsewhere, the 'middleman' working in a cluster of villages groups together young to middle-aged people who are eager to find work. The contractor and the 'middleman' then make a deal and the group of labourers travel across the country for work.

'what different effect does it have on identity when one is forced to move? Does one ever move freely? What movements are possible and, moreover, what movements are impossible?' [8]

After the migration, their lives are almost entirely controlled by real-estate companies

**7** 'Caring Architecture', in *Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet*, by Joan C. Tronto (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.), 26.
**8** Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 80.

and contractors with little to no agency or freedom. Even the specified wages both parties have agreed upon are micromanaged by the system. For example, according to the account of camp-dweller, their monthly wages are not paid in full. The meagre sum of 9000 INR is divided into two (or more) parts, a marginal sum of it is left to the worker to sustain themselves in the city, the larger half is sent to their family, in the village. I suspect that there is a commission that the middleman earns in this network even though no one confirms this. The workers only say that their wages are transferred to the account of this 'middleman' and then distributed between different families.

In contrast, at the smaller site, the workers are paid their wages directly by their contractor and the money doesn't pass too many hands before it reaches the labourer. They also hold authority over their wages and freely transfer it back and forth between themselves and their families.

According to the Indian Constitution, there are a number of provisions in place for construction workers within the law. For example, the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, provides construction workers with rights and specifies certain security measures for their well-being. One of the provisions, that was also discussed in the interview with the union leader, is the issue of identity cards for all construction workers. These cards were provided in the law to become a proof of identity and employment and would regulate the system by holding employers accountable for any work-related accidents or abuse. These identity cards, according to KP, have not materialized in most, if not all parts of the country.

The law also specifies that "the employer shall make in every place where building or other construction work is in progress, effective arrangements to provide and maintain at suitable points conveniently situated for all persons employed therein, a sufficient supply of wholesome drinking water." In both the sites, there is 'no wholesome drinking water supply provided by the employer.' In the camp, workers walk to the water plant a few times a week, whereas in the make-shift home, manage by connecting the main bore for underground water with a rudimentary plastic water pipe. Even though this is ground this water, with increasing chemical deposits in the soil may most likely be contaminated and unsafe to drink.

From the field notes and drawings it becomes evident that the provision of clean bathrooms, first aid facilities, creche facilities and canteens for the construction workers within or near the construction site have also not been fulfilled.

The law also preconditions the employer to 'provide for a day of rest in every period of seven days which shall be allowed to all building workers and for the payment of remuneration in respect of such days of rest.' As established from the interviews on the camp, the construction



workers work for 12 hours every day from Monday to Saturday breaking for lunch at midday. Additionally, they work on Sundays in 9-hour shifts, which leaves only 3 waking hours of free time in a week. In the words of AM, 'there is no free time' to plan anything new for themselves or think about a future.  This is how capital becomes a tool for 'directing them ... away from themselves.

Sara Ahmed writes of the 'stranger' acquiring the identity of the stranger by the act of migration in itself[9]. Here, in the act of leaving home for work, the 'migrant labourer' is created, and created as the other. In the eyes of Capital, this peripheral entity, while surviving 'everyday discriminations' becomes a creature from whom work can be extracted endlessly for a marginal return of everything – less than minimum wage for a full day's work towards capitalistic production and un-caring spaces for performing unpaid care-work for their own social reproduction on which Capital inevitably rests.

**5.3 Pachaas rupaye kam: Disparity, Abuse and Social Insecurity**

Pachaas rupaye kam, translated from Hindi means 'Fifty rupees less than..'

At the camp, when asked how much women are paid per day in comparison to men, this was the response. Fifty rupees is about .57 USD, which would be just enough to buy one nutritious meal in India. Male construction workers are paid 9000 INR per month whereas as women workers are paid 7500 INR for the same work.

Like everywhere else, even in the microcosm of the construction site, there exists a politics within the space. The women are seen carrying around cement, stone and bricks, heavy-lifting construction tools from one spot to another - an array of activities that include purely physical labour. The more intricate or technical work of laying bricks and bending steel rods and pouring slab mixtures into frames is done by the male workers. The female workers are paid much lesser than the male workers even in situations where they perform exactly identical tasks, as mentioned earlier Under the class politics, the gender politics remain further unattended to. In the smaller circle of family and community, the women are the care-givers. They are further marginalized within the family structure.

They give birth, raise children and continue to labour, within the margin, no matter where. These women embody an 'othered' space within the elusive homeplace. Where women in defined domestic spaces have at least one space to themselves, even if it is only the kitchen, the construction labourer has no space of her own. Further, she is expected to create within the moving frame of home, stability, constancy and even harmony.

**9** Ahmed, Strange Encounters, 79.

Moreover, women on construction sites are at constant risk of being sexually abused on the construction site or at the camp accommodation. Gender-based violence against women who belong to marginalized groups is very prevalent in India. Sexual abuse and harassment is very common on architectural sites where women are employed. They are at often at risk of being abused by their own partners or supervisors or contractors.

As a migrant labourer who is a woman, it is next to impossible to avoid the 'family structure' that claiming to protect her, further subjugates her. With multiple systems acting against women at the same time, their existence is a challenging navigation within these systems. On an everyday level, women are the ones who enable the 'home' within the workplace to provide care-work for their families and labour power to capitalism, while also working for the company in the production of architecture. In the absence of any security from the company, women sometimes turn to unions, if and when they are able to make contact.

KP, the union leader, had revealed in our interview that the most frequent issues they address are those of sexual violence within the site and the homeplace on the site. Sexual abuse is often associated with 'shame' in Indian society, where the blame is placed on the victim instead of the perpetrator. This often forces women from speaking out about their experience. However, the union receives number of calls from women who work on construction sites who are victims of sexual abuse. Often, they explain the abuse through masked language so as to detach any shame from it. The union members are able to distinguish the distress call from the general conversation despite the 'code'. In these cases the union is able to intervene and bring the women to safety, often moving them to more secure workplaces or sponsoring legal and medical aid.

What is the role of the construction company, in such situations?

According to the supervisor at the camp the company has an unofficial policy to not employ women. 'The company management has asked us to stop recruiting women because of these challenges. So we don't hire women unless there is a case where the family requests to work together, the few women on camp are the ones from those families.' Therefore, the ways in which the company presumably assures safety for women is by keeping them in their houses, away from a possibility of employment. In doing so, they also eliminate the woman worker from visibility, depleting women's financial agency on their own livelihood and inevitably separating families. By conveniently eliminating the problem itself, the construction company is responsible for creation of systems that work to erase women from the discourse on paid work. As a result, in most cases, the women of the household remain in the village, doing unpaid care-work.

While speaking of disparity, and intersections of discrimination it becomes imperative to speak about caste in India.



At the Narapally site, as I was taking my footwear off to enter TL and RM's home, the contractor who accompanied me stopped me to say, 'It's alright, you can keep your shoes on'. Keeping your shoes on inside the house is considered disrespectful. It is both customary and a method to keep the indoors of one's house clean.

If I had listened to the contractor, I would have not only been disrespecting their home, but also validating a caste-based practice. This seemingly simple act is an oppressive statement rooted in centuries of caste practice that signifies ritual purity. In simple terms, because the contractor presumed my identity as a higher-caste person and therefore ritually purer than the construction labourers, it would have been okay for me to walk into their home in my shoes. Owing to the nature of their house, their social and economic situation and also their caste, I would not have been considered disrespectful.

Even though in the eyes of the constitution people from all castes are 'equal', the cultural significance of caste and the centuries of bias is still prevalent in India. Caste, like race, is recognizable by facial features, bodily markers. In many cases, educated people of the scheduled castes are unable to get jobs in private companies because of being rejected despite their qualifications. Due to this, despite their qualifications they often end up as labourers, in the construction industry amongst others.

> 'The idea of the architect is shaped by binaries specific to the tradition of Western thought. Structurally, binaries operate by privileging one term and devaluating the other through a process of feminization and othering...This forms part of what Gayatri Spivak has called "epistemic violence."'[10]

This 'epistemic violence' of othering happens on multiple scales on the architectural site, across realms of class, caste and gender. According to this idea of 'binaries', for the architect to be a privileged upper-class, upper-caste man, the construction worker must be an impoverished, scheduled caste man or woman. Only in this binary, can the architect work to further motives of capitalism facilitated by the marginalization of others.

**10** Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny, Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet (Holzhausen Druck, n.d.), 35.

# 06
# CONCLUSION

This thesis, evolved from one question above all: Who produces architecture?

The construction worker who produces architecture is represented by a drawing together of different identities. The capitalistic production of architecture, for accumulating profit, impoverishes the system of resources and underpays the worker. As a result of this, the labourer who produces architecture is entrapped in a perpetual class struggle.

Architecture, by building spaces, segregates the people who inhabit them. However, it also has the power to identify and 'other' them. A small 1.5 x 3m room is considered sufficient for the construction labourer, while they are employed in building novelties and aspirations of the wealthy. The construction labourer therefore occupies bare-minimum space in the world, while producing its expanding 'urban'. They negotiate between these spaces and inhabit both.

Migrant labour is one of the most common demographic groups within the construction industry. The construction worker, for survival, must leave 'home' and migrate to a series of different homes through the course of their lives. In the unending act of building and building a home every few months, the construction worker occupies any space only fleetingly, calling into question their right to space itself. Within the home that moves every few months, the temporality of everyday activities of social reproduction is even shorter. Hence, the worker is somewhere between being homeless and having a home.

Yet, this ephemeral work of the everyday, the invisibility of the 'home-life' of the construction worker is an indispensable unit of Architectural Production. In the absence of this 'everyday' there can be no production or accumulation or making of the urban. Capital must obscure this very significance of the worker for production, and for its social reproduction. Even though capital can not reproduce by itself, the ruse by which it enthrals the world of its greatness is by hiding the crucial presence and everyday social reproduction of the construction worker. Therefore, the worker is reproduced as a seemingly disposable entity of any production, while being the most integral one.

Within the microcosm of a construction site, beyond class, there are two identities that remain further alienated within the already marginalized system. Gender and caste (in India; ethnicity or race in other parts of the world) govern who builds and what and how. Women work on the most unskilled tedious tasks while getting paid lesser than men who do the more precision oriented work. Unskilled work on the site is done by people of the oppressed backward castes who have been historically tyrannized by the ruling classes. Therefore, the site is also a margin within which there exist other margins.



Producing both care-work for wages and un-waged domestic labour for themselves and their families, construction workers receive only 'uncare' from architects and construction companies.

It is imperative then to ask, if we can learn to care for architecture through the perspective of environmental sustainability, historical preservation, economic development, then can we also not care for the people who labour in its production, sustenance, preservation and economy?

Following this question, I assert here that at the back of Architecture, is the work also of other labourers and not just the construction labourers. In the Indian context, sanitation workers face the worst challenges and the most exploited labour conditions compared to all other groups. There are also cases of child labour within the construction industry that require an academic attention. There are those working classes that work in mines and quarries to produce material used in the construction industry. There are also those whose villages and homes have been razed to the ground in developing real-estate for architectural production. Within them, are the rural and urban poor and also people who live in the contested border-regions of world.

This is to conclude that the sphere of exploitation and uncare – within Architecture – of its frontline workers is a multi-scale, expansive, intersecting network. This thesis while discussing a fractional space of that realm, further asks, what else can be observed and recorded by recording marginal spaces within architecture?

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### List of Drawings


D1: Drawing showing the labour camp
D2: Drawing showing the exploded diagram of labour camp
D3: Kitchen at the camp
D4: Living + Bed (Large)
D5: Living + Bed (Small)
D6: Make-shift house on site
D7: Make-shift exploded view
D8: Make-shift house Room
D9: Make-shift house Kitchen + Verandah

# DECLARATION

Herewith I declare that I have prepared this Master thesis independently, that it has not been submitted in the same or similar wording as an examination paper in another course of study, and that I have not used any other aids and sources than the ones indicated. I have marked any quotations given in the thesis in their original or similar wording as a quotation.

**Place, date**

Dessau, 20.08.2025

**Signature**

