

SPECIAL ISSUE (PART 3)

# THE MAZDOOR MANDIS OF METROS

CENTRE FOR NEW ECONOMICS STUDIES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
JIGNESH MISTRY

TEXT BY  
ADVAITA SINGH  
AMAN KHULLAR





A waste picker collects waste next to women Dailywage workers asking for work to a contractor at Dattanagar Mazdoor Adda (Labour market) at Katraj area in Pune, India

## DAILY-WAGE WORKERS IN DISTRESS: WAGES, WORKING DAYS AND WOES

BY ADVAITA SINGH & AMAN KHULLAR

Bringing the narratives and stories of daily-wage workers from various parts of India, this issue looks at the shramiks of Pune, Maharashtra, an important hub of industrial activity and construction projects. Migrant workers from Eastern Maharashtra, UP, Bihar, Kolkata and Hyderabad move to Pune in search of employment.

A booming metropolitan city, Pune is the home to various large-scale construction projects that provide employment opportunities to construction workers

and craftsmen like painters, marble and tile workers etc.

However, since the lockdown, many construction projects were halted or indefinitely postponed exposing the daily-wage workers to acute misery and financial distress. Even now the economic recovery in this sector is sluggish at best with thousands of workers still struggling to find a source of income.

There are nearly 100 chourahas (road intersections) and spots across the city which are populated with thousands of labourers, waiting through the cold and heat during the day for getting hired.



Consider the case of Laxmi Rathod, a migrant worker from Hyderabad and mother of 6 children with an alcoholic husband. Pre-COVID, Laxmi used to work as a construction labourer earning roughly Rs 300-350 for her daily efforts. Between her and her husband, the 2 working members were supporting their large family of 8 people. However, as soon as the lockdown was initiated in March, earning a rupee became impossible for the Rathod household.

She says: "I have 6 children and there is just the two of us earning. We did not get anything to eat so we had to beg, no one helped us"

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*6 bacche hai mereko, 2  
mazdoor hai hum log. Khane  
ko nahi mila toh bheek manga  
hai humne, koi nahi diya.*

-LAXMI RATHOD

Resorting to begging and pleading after finding no alternate source of income or support, Laxmi has seen some very dark days in 2020. Even as economic activity is picking up, she finds employment barely one day a week.







A cement mixer truck pass by construction workers at bhumkar chowk on Pune-Mumbai highway in Pune, India



Dailywage Workers wait below Warje bridge Mazdoor Adda (Labour market) in Pune, India





Dailywage Workers wait for work at Datta nagar Mazdoor Adda in Katraj area in Pune, India



Dailywage Workers talk to a contractor on bike at Dange chowk Mazdoor Adda (Labour market) in Pimpri Chinchwad area of Pune, India





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Corona ki wajah se ab hum itna pareshan ho gaye he, kisko sunau. Sarkar humko sun hi nahi rahi he. Sarkar hum log ke liye kuch kar nahi rhi he. Vote lene ke liye, jhoot moot ka jhasa lagate he. Kahe the mazdoor logo ko 2000 rupeh daan denge, kuch nahi kiya sarkar ne.

- BSER SAHA

In the picture above are two migrant workers Anil Mahato and Bser Saha who hail from Motihari, Bihar. They are construction workers who have been working in Pune for 12 years.

They recall how they got on a truck with 100 other labourers for a five day long journey to return to their village during the lockdown.

Somehow managing to sustain their families by taking loans, in the complete absence of work, they were unable to even afford a train ticket back to Pune. Trains to and from their villages have been erratic and tickets are booked for the next five months.

In the initial months post the lockdown was lifted, the resumption in work and recovery in labour demand was swift; however, as most of the labourers have returned from their

villages, it's getting more difficult to find work.

Both of them reach their spot in the mazdoor mandi in the morning to get hired and are barely able to find work on most days.

On average, they work 20 days in a month and the wages have reduced to anywhere between Rs.200-400 opposed to the minimum Rs.500 pre-COVID, due to the extremely slow recovery in demand for labourers.

Anil and Bser shed light on how most of the contractors exploit daily-wage workers by abusing them, cutting their salaries for personal benefits, forcing them to work for longer hours, and delaying their payments to an extent that the workers have to let go of some of their earnings.





Women Dailywage Workers wait at Warje bridge Mazdoor Adda (Labour market) looking for work in Pune, India



Women Dailywage Workers wait below Dange chowk bridge to get work in Pimpri- Chinchwad area in Pune, India





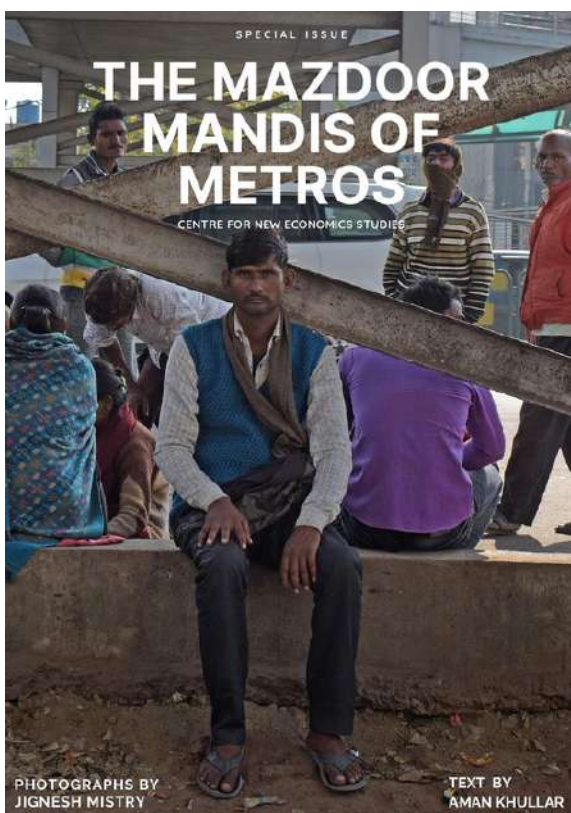
Such cases of abuse and exploitation are more common amongst workers who live on-site rather than in their own homes. However, living on-site also had its benefits for some as a few benevolent contractors continued to look after the labourers even when the lockdown was initiated. These workers continued to earn some money, albeit with a wage-cut of around 50%, as per Sanjar Parmar, a contractor in Baner. While this stable source of earnings came as a relief in difficult times, on average, almost all workers were experiencing a severe fall in living standards.



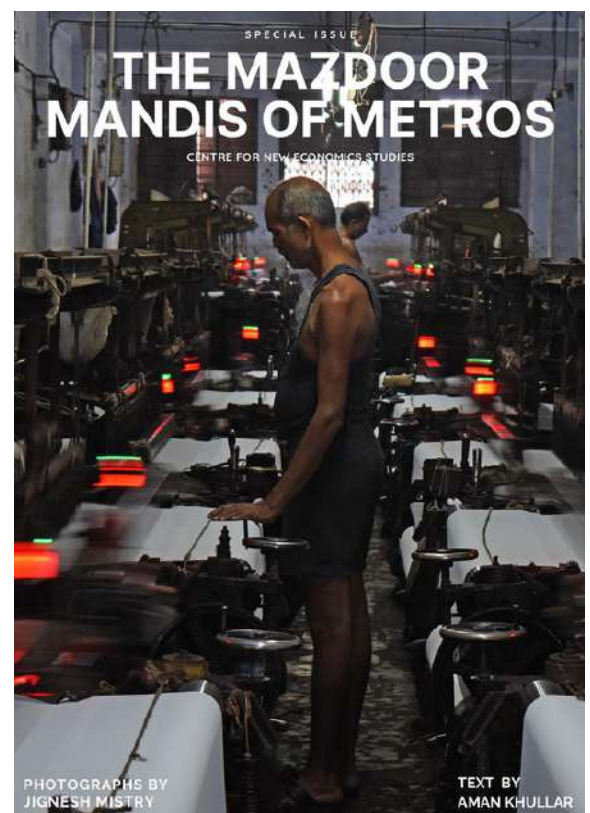
*JIGNESH MISTRY is a Pune-based freelance photojournalist. He has been in the field for over 10 years. He started his career as a nightshift news photographer at a daily tabloid during his graduation. Since then, his work has been published at multiple magazines, wire agencies and national newspapers. He is also involved in undertaking photography workshops for students in academic institutions. Currently, he is engaged with the PAIGAM network and is a regular contributor at The Hindu, The Press Trust of India and the International Wire Agencies.*



TEXT BY:  
ADVAITA SINGH and AMAN KHULLAR  
are Research Analysts at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Part 1 of the Series, based on daily-wage workers from Lucknow, UP



Part 2 of the Series, based on daily-wage workers from Surat, Gujarat