

## **Work and Livelihood of Northeast Migrants in Delhi: An Empirical Study**

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With the recognition of the rise in migration of people from Northeast states to metropolitan cities to pursue a better livelihood, this paper aims to uncover various aspects of their working lives. Responses of a sample of 225 Northeast migrants working in formal and informal sector reveal that they strongly believe that there is a way and possibility of earning a good living in the city. About 12 per cent of workers are engaged in more than one work, a few of them being engaged in both wage work and self-employment. Despite several challenges in working life including the experiences of differential treatment, a majority of respondents reported a better livelihood in the city. Although the BPO sector work has been one of the most preferred jobs for these migrants, most of them tend to change jobs for better opportunities and payment. It is strongly believed that communication skills are most important for a job. While factors like facilities in the workplace, organized and professional environment, and new learnings shape good working experiences for wage workers; for the self-employed, extra income, passion for and interest in own business, and financial independence are the motivating factors. The impact of the pandemic on Northeast workers has been quite evident from the fact that about one-fourth of people took new jobs in the city in the aftermath of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Northeast migrants, wage work, self-employment, livelihood, security, well-being

### **Introduction**

The neoliberal transformation in the big cities allows space for the migrants to find ways to pursue their livelihoods. Official data shows that in recent years, some states in India have witnessed a higher rate of migration to cities. The data also points to an increased number of people from the Northeast region migrating out for work and employment. Apart from West Bengal, Delhi has been a major destination of these migrants.

Among the Northeast migrants in Delhi and Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR), the highest percentage is from the state of Manipur (Sankar, 2020). Empirical

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studies clearly indicate an increase in people from the Northeast region in metropolitan cities like Delhi for better livelihood (McDuie-Ra, 2012a; Marchang, 2017; Sankar, 2020). With the recognition of the rise in migration of people from the Northeast states to metropolitan cities to pursue a better livelihood, this paper aims to uncover experiences of working life among these migrants in Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR), with a focus on wage workers and Self-employed..

A wide range of literature suggests that pull factors involved in the movements of people to big cities include good educational facilities and infrastructure, better job opportunities and livelihoods, a higher rate of labour recruitment, and increased connectivity. However, there are factors like underdeveloped economy in the native state, unemployment problem, social disturbances, cross-border terrorism, ethnic conflicts, displacement, and socio-political unrest very often push the people to move out (Dasgupta, 2010; McDuie-Ra, 2012b; Marchang, 2017, 2019; Rimei, 2015). This has been highly true for the migrants from Northeast region (Karlsson & Kikon, 2017). Given the unemployment problem in their home states, many educated people in particular migrate to big cities to fulfill their aspirations through dream jobs (Marchang, 2017, 2019) and live a middle-class lifestyle- “to consume goods, to own a property (usually at home), and to have secure employment”, while fulfilling the basic requirements at home (McDuie-Ra, 2012a). In many cases, there has been a chain migration from this region to Delhi, social networking playing a vital role (Kipgen & Panda, 2019; McDuie-Ra, 2012a; Raleng, 2021; Ramesh, 2012).

The irony is that, as evident, migrants from Northeast region continue to face different forms of social exclusion and differential treatments (McDuie-Ra, 2012a; Mukherjee and Dutta, 2018; Reach Out Foundation, 2014). However, it is argued that there is an ‘economic inclusion’ of these migrants in the city (McDuie-Ra, 2012), as they are preferred by a few sectors that fit their skills and backgrounds (Kikon, 2018; McDuie-Ra, 2012; Raleng, 2021; Ramesh, 2012). As reported by Ramesh (2012), the companies of BPOs even recruit the Northeast youths through agencies and training centers in different cities of the Northeast region. According to McDuie-Ra (2012a), the economic inclusion of these people is greater in two sectors- the new consumer space created by the neoliberal transformation like malls and call centers, and the services sector.

There are certain reasons why Northeast migrants are preferred in certain sectors of work. As observed, their un-Indian looks, their English-speaking skills, their pleasing looks, and friendly nature make them desirable in the hospitality industry (Kikon, 2018; Ramesh, 2012).

Sometimes, they are known for their hard work, honesty, commitment, soft-spokenness which do not go against the interests of the business establishments. In the multinational corporation, these migrants are found suitable and well qualified to de-Indianize their accents and playing the role of neutrals (McDuie-Ra, 2012c). Moreover, most of them are flexible in working shift business hours for the markets of many other countries. Thus, there are different sectors of employment where they are preferred, making their economic inclusion easier than ‘others’. In addition to the wage work, Northeast migrants own several small enterprises like grocery stores,

clothing shops, and restaurants where they reside in a hub. In recent times, an interesting business among young migrants has been thrift stores, which are sold online using an online application like Instagram that connects people worldwide (Raleng, 2021).

However, the key questions are- ‘does relatively better economic inclusion among Northeast wage workers in big cities ensure their social inclusion in a diverse working environment?’ ‘What have been the experiences and perspectives of their working life?’ This paper is an attempt to look into the issues like sector of work, nature of work, means used to get the work, job mobility, match/mismatch between the work and qualifications/skills, job and social security, major challenges in working life, overall experiences in work situations with a specific focus on the experiences of differential or/and unfair treatment, work in the aftermath of the pandemic, work aspirations, coping with challenges, and overall well-being.

### **Method**

This paper looks into the nature of employment and experiences and perspectives of wage workers and self-employed among the Northeast migrants in Delhi and NCR. While there has been a focus on wage workers in view of their institutional working lives guided by specific norms, a small sample of self-employed constitute a reference group for the analysis purpose. A total sample of 225 Northeast migrants working in Delhi and NCR constitute the respondents of the study, of which a majority (92 percent) is primarily wage workers. However, it may be mentioned that while 8 percent of the total sample constitute self-employed, of the total wage workers, about 9 percent is also engaged self-employment. Although respondents from different Northeast states were contacted with the help of associations or unions from different states existing in Delhi and NCR, a snowball sampling method was used to draw the sample. Of the total sample, distinctively higher share was from Manipur (69.3 percent), followed by Nagaland (14.2 percent) and Assam (4.4 percent) and Mizoram (3.6 percent) while the remaining small percentage were from other Northeast states. Despite the fact that the highest share of migrant population from Manipur in the Delhi and NCR; the state being the native state of the researcher, it was easier to reach out many migrants from the state through social network. Of the total sample, the percentage share of males and females were 45.8 percent and 54.2 percent respectively. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule designed specifically for the purpose of study. As mentioned earlier, the study looked into a wide range of aspects related to working life, therefore, considered a mixed method approach, leading to an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected using the research tool.

### **Key Findings**

The analysis of data is divided into two parts around the wage workers and self-employed among Northeast migrants, though there has been a specific focus on the former and their experiences in the work environment and their overall well-being. These are discussed in the following sub-sections.

***Nature of Wage Employment among the Northeast Migrants***

Undoubtedly, a majority of the Northeast people move to the capital city of Delhi and NCR to find better lives. Among other factors that push many to migrate to metropolitan cities are unemployment and limited job opportunities in the native states (Marchang, 2011, 2017, McDuie-Ra, 2012a). It is true that voluntary migration happens in order to achieve a better livelihood through employment, security, and better environment (Santhapparaj, 1996). Recent studies have shown that these migrants work in the capital mostly in the hospitality sector (airhostesses, hotels, waitresses), multinational corporations (BPOs and call centers), and private sector (salons, artists, shop owners) (MacDuie-Ra, 2012a; Marchang, 2017 & 2023). In this study, it is found that some of the major sectors in which Northeast migrants in Delhi and NCR work include call centers (48.8 percent), private companies (16.5 percent), education (11.1 percent); hospitality (waitresses, receptionists, and working in restaurants) (9.6 percent), aviation/airlines (6.8 percent), health care (4.3 percent); while the remaining include working in the social sector, law firms, and finance (Table 1). Thus, nearly half of the wage workers are engaged in multinational corporations set up mostly in the Deli-NCR, a sector where special skills are in demand. As reported, the Northeast migrants work largely in this sector because of their English background and un-Indian accent (McDuie-Ra, 2012a).

**Table 1:** Percentage distribution of Northeast workers in different sectors

<b>Sector</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
BPO	48.8
Private sector	16.5
Teacher/Research/writer	11.1
Hospitality	9.6
Aviation	6.8
Healthcare	4.3
Others (Social, law firm and finance etc)	2.9

Source: Field Study

The study shows two types of employees within the this sector- those who are customer service executives, making up about three-fourth, and those who are team leaders, supervisors, and facilitators. The nature of work suggests that the former mainly provides assistance, brings resolution to customers, collects debts or bills, and deals with clients; whereas the latter manages a team of employees, organizes and provides training, handles disputes, and conducts audits. Although majority of respondents prefer this sector over other private jobs, one of the other professions in the service sector that is also preferred especially by the Northeast female migrants is cabin crew or airhostess. As McDuie Ra (2012d) views “the exotic appearance of the Northeast, their appeal to a globalized aesthetic of the class travellers using airlines, and their English language skill made them more visible and preferred by the airline industries.” It is true in the sense that even airline companies try to make use of these attributes.

As one air hostess shares:

Since my company belongs to an Asian airline, we have at least one of us (North-Easterners) who looks Asian when we are assigned a duty to each airbus.

As evident, another profession among the Northeast migrants that is less talked about but that is coming to light is that of teacher-ship. This mainly includes subject teachers in private schools, music teachers, and physical education teachers. Data also indicates that some of the jobs that other Northeast migrants are engaged in are- health care business, hospitality, designing, working in administration in the private sector, business associates, event managers, making clients, and providing consultation services. Besides, some of the technical work includes developing applications according to customer requirements, laboratory work, and content moderation on social media. Within the health sector, nurses are the majority. As Kipgen (2023) opines, the capital city emerging as a major healthcare hub, attracts a large number of migrants from the Northeast. There is a growing demand for health services, salaries are much higher, and there are equal opportunities for recruitment (both private and government). The data thus points reveals that besides a few trade-mark preferred jobs, the Northeast migrants in Delhi and NCR take up many new kinds of work they are good at, and are happy about them, even though they are not in the public sector, and many people back at home were not aware of it before.

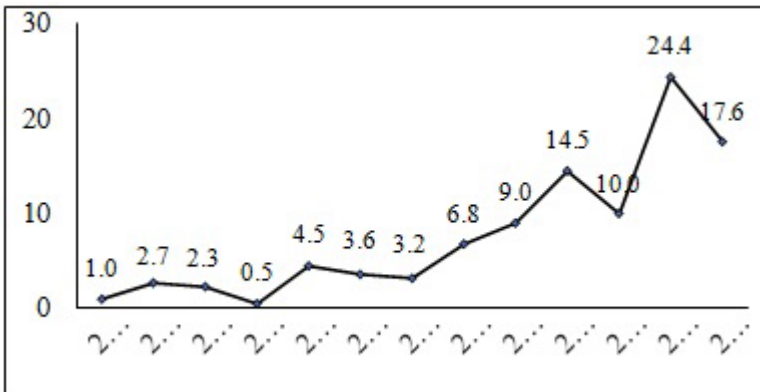
### ***Occupational and Job Mobility***

Literature suggests that given the unemployment problem in the North East region, the majority of educated youth move to big cities for better job opportunities and to fulfil their aspirations for a sustainable livelihood, as well as their requirements at home. For many, to live in big cities after their arrival remains earning the minimum wage, constraining many to compromise with the nature of work in the beginning of working life. Data reveals that nearly 60 percent of respondents reported having 'changed jobs'. It means for 40 percent of the respondents, it is their first job. Of the respondents who changed their job, while 28 percent changed their job one time, 35 percent changed two times, 23 percent changed three times, and the remaining changed more than three times. Marchang (2022) also found that in Bangalore, there was flexibility in searching for and choosing the next job among the NE migrants, so their job waiting period was short, and especially the experienced workers sought after a certain job with a reserved wage. It suggests that most of the Northeast migrants in the Delhi and NCR work for different kinds of companies. The Northeast migrants working in both formal and informal sectors have good job mobility, mainly for higher wage, better opportunity, and job satisfaction. This also suggests that they continue to strive for better work opportunities as they begin to live in a world of opportunities. It is also found that a few respondents left their past jobs and started their own businesses in different sectors, thus shifting from wage work to self-employment. This is discussed in the separate section later.

Data also indicates that there has been a rapid rise in migrants joining new jobs in the aftermath of the recent Pandemic. As found 42 percent respondents changed their

jobs after the pandemic as for many migrants, livelihood was at stake, and many lost their jobs and returned to their native states amidst the pandemic (Yadav & Priya, 2020). In addition, during the pandemic, the Northeast migrants in the capital city faced differential treatment because of their mongoloid features, and suspected to have the virus; and they have to fight for recognition and acceptance as Indians (Haokip, 2020). Data shows that after people started migrating back to Delhi-NCR after the Pandemic in 2021, the highest percentage of them started a new job in the city (Figure 1), to suggest that the city has better options for them to return and earn their livelihood.

**Figure 1:** Percentage of respondents reporting job change in different years



Source: Based on Field Study

Data reveals that although, a large majority of the respondents (94.6 percent) is full-time workers, still 11 percent are engaged in more than one job. As per the responses, they have regular wage work and also one or two side jobs as self-employed. It suggests that the respondents make use of their extra time and work in more than one job for better earnings and a good living in the city given available resources. Thus, there is a way and possibility of earning, opening up more spaces, creating new ways and opportunities for the migrants, and that the migrants find their way into tapping the resources and networking in the market place.

Related to the issue of job engagement and mobility, respondents were asked about the means by which they got their present jobs. It was found that more than half of the respondents did not receive any help getting jobs. About three-fourth of respondents (76.7 percent) got jobs either through an open interview or were approached by the company in response to their application for the job through a job portal or website or through an agency. The later shows that many of them had the required skills for certain jobs. About one-fourth reported receiving help in getting a job, mostly through recommendations or referrals from someone close to them. The Northeast migrants are associated with their community people and specific associations, and help one another through social networking even in terms of finding employment, whether arrive at city for the first time or in changing jobs (Kipgen & Panda, 2019; Marchang,

2022). With the inter-community support, specific skills and job experiences, and increased knowledge about the job markets, many seek for jobs or the company they prefer. This is dealt with in detail in the following section.

### ***Qualifications, Skills, and Training***

Responding to the question of whether their qualifications match their job, 83.3 percent reported positively. Of those who reported that qualification and job do not match, most of them are of the view that they studied different subjects but ended up working in a different profession, while for some, payment does not match the nature and volume of work. However, the majority respondents agree that job-oriented training and skills do matter in getting an expected job. It must be noted that nearly three-fourth of the respondents had some sorts of training. The percentage of respondents with different kinds of training is shown in Table 2. While 17.3 percent took up job-oriented training, 16 percent took up skill training,

10.7 percent had computer skills, 9.3 percent had training in hospitality, customer service, and hotel management; four percent each had teacher training and knowledge of fashion designing. A small percentage of the respondents reported training which include church ministry, leadership, foreign languages, hairdressing, entrepreneurship, and nursing.

**Table 2:** Percentage of respondents with different kinds of training and skills

<b>Trainings and Skills</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
<i>Pre-service and In-service training</i>	
Pre-service training/courses for better job opportunity	21.3
Pre-service Job oriented Training	17.3
In-service professional training to perform better	64.3
<i>New skills acquired during job period</i>	
Communication skills & New language	27.1
Professional skills (team building, work and time management, multi- tasking, strategic planning, leadership, coordination, public dealing, resource development etc.)	41.0
Computer skills	10.6
Soft skills & Interpersonal skills (patience, confidence, etc)	21.3
<i>Skills more relevant for getting a job</i>	
Professional Skills	39.0
Communication Skills	33.0
Computer and Technical Skills (software, application, typing)	16.0
Inter personal & Soft skills (problem solving, friendliness, discipline)	12.0

Source: Field Study



Thus, it is clear that most of the Northeast migrants have the advantage of some job-oriented training and specialized skills, besides other personal traits that provide a skill set ready for a job. However, about 78 percent of the migrant workers mention that there is the need for different kinds of skill sets to perform any work particularly basic skills in communication and computer, besides the professional skills. Another important skill mentioned by many is the interpersonal relation, trust building and other soft skills of a person. However, the significance of each skill is recognized in relation to the nature of work in different sectors.

Other new skills that many respondents have acquired through their work experiences are team building, time management, patience and confidence, multi-tasking, planning, strategic coordination, and learning how to deal with customers and outsiders. About 64 percent of respondents reported receiving training in their present job depending on the profession and nature of job, whereas 10 percent received personal and soft skills training and 8 percent received communication skills training. As reported by many respondents, these skills are emphasized by the companies in order to work in the different kinds of jobs the city provides. These skills acquired by many during their job period either through in-service training or special training programs. These skill requirements would have implications for the new migrants to be prepared for a job or for the old migrants to have a better opportunity.

### ***Work Experiences***

Overall well-being-related to work and work situations were examined through level of overall satisfactions and 'feeling good'. Results showed that 29.5 percent of respondents rated their work experiences as 'very good' whereas more than half (54.6 percent) rated as 'good'. On the contrary, 16 percent reported their work experiences in negative terms. One of the important reasons for better work experiences is found related to the facilities in the workplace, which are described as organized, professional, and friendly. Another important reason cited was related to satisfaction with the nature of work. The new work experiences and new learning provided exposure to teamwork motivation. Further, professional growth through the enhancement of skills keeps them motivated for further occupational mobility.

Thus, for the Northeast migrant workers, it is not always financial gain from work that provides satisfaction though it is held important, the working environment and new learnings and skills motivate many to work. There are professions like teachers, make-up artists, musicians, etc. that require constant good and healthy relationships with people and exposure to the outside world. Working for international companies where they meet new people from different cultures and countries and explore new places excites many, and makes the journey of working life fulfilling. As a language teacher shares:

I have had experience teaching foreign languages, which I loved; I had exposure to teach and enhance skills; and I met people all over the world.

For those who work in corporate settings, they achieve targets and goals consistently, so it makes them happy. Some workers received appreciation for their contributions



from the customers. As a case in point, an air hostess mentions like:

It is fun, and sometimes it is not when there is rush hour, but when we compare it, happiness weighs more. My experience of work depends mostly on the person with whom I fly, but being accepted and understood by a customer is the happiest satisfaction we get from the job. So, I help passengers, and make sure that their journey is a good one.

Some are happy about their learning, which includes good communication skills, teamwork, personal and professional development, and helping each other in terms of time and money with no work pressure or a toxic work culture. A worker in a call center shares by saying:

Working as a call centre agent has benefited me in utilising my soft skills, and also improved my work-life balance.

For some, there is flexibility in working from home, but for others, their good and bad work experiences depend on the colleague they work with or the process of work because it changes every day. For example, for an air hostess, every day they change their team, so their work experiences for that day depend on each other. Working for the best company in the city where the company policies are in line with the core values, and the company is supportive of employees, made them very proud and satisfied. On the other hand, there are workers whose working experiences are found dissatisfactory or mixed because of other challenges rather than the work situation and nature of work. Most of the factors that dissatisfy workers are mainly related to pressure at work, shift changes, unsupportive relationships among co-workers, fewer opportunities for carrier promotion, and odd working hours, not to mention a feeling of low-pay.

### ***Experiences of Differential Treatment***

In recent years, some studies have indicated that Northeastern migrants are treated differently in cities on account of their distinct attributes related to physical appearance and cultural practices (JMI & WC, 2014, 2018, Mukherjee & Dutta, 2018, Reach-Out Foundation, 2014). It is believed that many migrants face differential treatment due to ethnic or racial reasons.

Nongbri & Shimreiwung (2017) while mapping the unfair treatment report that physical features, dressing styles, and nature of lifestyle are some of the important reasons. For this, they mainly face the problem in public places: educational institutions, rented accommodations, and working places. Northeastern women in particular experience intersectional discrimination (Mukherjee & Dhutta, 2018). Sitlhou & Punathil (2023) view that with the rise of migrant populations from the Northeast region to the city, there is a “hierarchical construction of mainstream Indians and its socio-spatial others, the Northeasterns accompanied by routine violence. In this study, an attempt was made to understand the extent of the experiences of any differential treatment by the Northeast workers in their work situation vis-à-vis public

life. While nearly one-third reported experience of differential treatment in public life; a majority reported similar experiences in working situations. As reported, in public places, generally the experience of 'name-calling' because of their phenotypical features similar to people in a few other countries, cultural practices, food habits and life styles remains prominent. Such experiences corroborate with the findings of other studies.

This study however had a specific focus on experiences of differential treatment in the workplace, which are normally regulated by institutional norms of social acceptance, good interpersonal relations, and fairness. Unexpectedly, a majority (91 percent) reported experiences of such treatment. A small percentage (4 percent) reported similar treatment from employers or authorities. It may be mentioned that sometimes the experiences in social and institutional settings might not be differentiated in clear term. Many workers in private sectors sometimes have to work being associated with people outside the work situation. Moreover, while in public spaces, the differential treatment takes place more explicitly, the same may not be true in work environment, but it could be understood from day to day behaviours among co-workers and others in course of interaction as per the requirement of the job. Moreover, in a competitive work environment, when the Northeast workers spend maximum time of their lives within the work environment/space, in comparative terms, they perhaps got to experience differential treatment more inside the workforce as compared to general public space. However, despite such experiences, they cope with these kinds of challenges and focus on making a living out of the opportunities they have and earning for their livelihoods. Some of the shared experiences of the migrant workers in the city are as follows. As a Northeast girl who works together with Koreans and Indians shares:

I have been treated better from the Koreans end but quite the opposite by the Indians. A few workers working in airline industry shares:

There were situations where I was denied directly by a specific passenger to serve as I am from the North East and I look different. So, I had to call my other crew, who is from other parts of the country and looks Indian, to serve the passenger.

There is a bias in the work. Equality is not there between the crews. Some crews get more packages and more layovers.

Since I am from Northeast, they think I will say yes all the time, so they give so much of workload from other colleagues and seniors.

A worker in a hotel states that:

There are differences in looks, and people sometimes do not allow us to serve them.

Another worker in corporate office mentions:

Once, my boss issued an order about dressing style in the office, but the same was rescinded as she did not have authority.

### ***Job and Social Security***

People move to cities to explore better job options. Yet, some are engaged in unregulated jobs in informal sector as major source of income. Uncertainties over job tenures push many into precarious work situations, and are forced to compromise with their security concerns. Similarly, the importance of social security measures in job/work has been well acknowledged. Social security is meant to cover contingencies. Despite the fact that informal workers who directly or indirectly contribute towards social development, almost half of them are deprived of various social security benefits, making them suffer immensely in situations of crises. This section deals with questions like- to what extent Northeast migrants working in different sectors work with job security measured by working with a written contract, and have access to various provisions of social security?

Empirical data reveals that the nature of the employment of Northeast migrants is mostly temporary (44.4 percent) and contractual (14 percent). Although the remaining respondents claim to be permanent, the job involved an agreement between the employer and the employee. About three-fourth have a written document. However, as mentioned by 58 percent of the workers there have been mention of terms and conditions for termination, which include negligence, bad performance, irregularity, going against the rules, protocol, and policy of the organization, misconduct, and using abusive and offensive words.

Analysis of social security among the migrant workers was made using five indicators of social security measures. Data shows that nearly two-third receives the Provident Fund. While 58.2 percent of workers received the maternity/paternity benefits, 56.1 percent received health care and medical claims, 37.4 percent received gratuity, 28.7 percent received accidental claims, and a minuscule (1.4 percent) received additional claims from their companies. The percentage of beneficiaries those working in cooperatives and hotels, and as cabin crews, nurses in the health sector, and teachers are relatively more. It is evident that a significant percentage of Northeast migrants work with low job security and social security.

### ***Nature of Self-Employment among Northeast Migrants***

The nature of self-employment among a small sample of Northeast migrants reveals that while 41.7 percent are engaged in small business, a similar percentage is service providers and the rest (16.6 percent) includes different kinds of business that works only online. Those who have own business, these mainly include export and import of cloths, business of designer clothes (especially wedding gowns, and any kind of clothing where the customers place an order and they stitch it and deliver it to the clients), selling of second-hand items (especially clothes coming from other countries), food businesses (eateries), cafés and restaurants (some of them supplying homemade food from their kitchen to store owners in their community), stock trading, business consultants and entrepreneurs working on international partnerships.

The online business includes selling of products online (buying used items

especially clothing at a discounted price and reselling them) run with the help of an application called Instagram, where the source original, branded, and good clothing at the market, each item hand-picked and re-sell it again. Another buy flowers from the main source and resold them online (on Instagram). Within this self-employed group, there are two categories- those who work full- time on their self-employment and those who work as a side income using their extra time, skills, and resources. Technology is extremely important in the operation of these businesses. The service providers include private vocal and music teachers, having a job at school as a second job while a few own music studios, taxi business, and freelance painter, sound engineer and writer.

Out of the total 36 respondents, 44.5 percent are both wage workers and self-employed. Some of them were employed as regular workers, but with their savings over time, they started their own businesses mainly because of their own interests and hobbies such as music teacher for private classes. Majority of the respondents (86.2 percent) are engaged in self-employment for the first time. Further, 41 percent of the businesses owners had started the business six to eight years ago. Thus, many are new to this type of self-employment, and their businesses are micro in nature. About half of them work alone. Interestingly, 94 percent of them planned and started their businesses after coming to the capital city, suggesting that exposure they received from the city life helped them open up their ways of earning and means of livelihood. However, a small percentage (14 percent) have registered their businesses.

About half of the self-employed received help while starting their business, of which 61.9 percent received from family, 19 percent friends, 14.2 percent from partners and mentors, and 5 percent from colleagues/co-workers. As mentioned earlier, many people from the Northeast live within a community even in the city based on their kin, clan, tribe, and ethnicity, as well as within their circle of friends; and even creating a chain movement through their relatives and friends already living in the capital. So even when it comes to self-employment like the wage work, they help each other. Their family and friends are the biggest supporters of their activities, showing the close relationships and community feeling of being looked after by each other they have living in the city.

### ***Motivation and the Reasons for Self-Employment and Businesses***

Despite job opportunities in many sectors, this study found that there are migrants who are engaged in self-employment. The factors that motivated many towards self-employment include- having an extra income and earning to supplement their monthly expenses; and the passion, interests, and hobbies. As a self-employed who owns an online thrift shop started the journey by selling old vintage clothes he had in his closet shares:

It developed out of my hobby of shopping and going after used vintage and branded clothing.

Similarly, another self-employed says:

I have always been passionate about writing, and there is a high demand for content writers in the market. It is tasky at times, but it mostly enhances your skills too. So it is rewarding, and this motivates me.

A migrant who had a lot of experience working in corporations but decided to work in his own kitchen and earn his livelihood, shares his experiences by saying:

I have worked for many companies in the past years, but I did not enjoy the work or the policies given by the company. I have always wanted freedom of my own, and my passion for cooking makes me think about starting my own kitchen.

An ex-airhostess who saved her money and started a flower shop mentions:

I noticed that there are no flower stalls within the area where I am currently residing. Besides being a hard-core flower lover, I took advantage of taking up this business after seeing the demands of the consumers.

Moreover, freedom (the use of time, the number of hours they invest in work, and the flexibility of timing since they work for themselves), financial stability and independence, and 'wanting to be their own boss' led to 16 percent to go for self-employment. As a women shop owner shares:

She wanted not to be dependent on her husband.

Similarly, another woman who is an international businesswoman says:

Financial responsibilities cannot be fulfilled by salary, and I want freedom of time.

Other factors include an enhanced skill set, and past experience in certain professions. Most of the online clothing business owners claimed to have a skill and knowledge of the trends of clothing. But, for a few, it was requested and demanded by the clients or customers or in the market, especially in the food business. Similarly, for some artists, it was influenced by the arts and living inside the capital city of mixed cultures. As MacDuie-Ra (2012a) rightly observes:

People from the Northeast migrate for their livelihood. Now, the migrants have gone beyond the phase of earning or getting a job. They have found their ways to get wage employment, and in addition, they have more than a job. They are also self-employed, and many leave their job despite their experiences in multinational companies to pursue their passions and interests and earn their livelihood. It may not be true or possible for some others to pursue this journey, but some have tried and found their way into the market through networking and connections. These migrants are now slowly making their own spaces, making use of the resources within the few pockets of the capital and markets like online stores using applications, and also making their own network system within the community and the locality where they are mostly found living.

***Skills and Beyond***

There are certain skills that have helped these self-employed migrants start and continue with their work of livelihood, whether it be a teacher, businessman, artist, etc. Good communication skills are mentioned by almost all, despite the differences in the nature of their work. The positive factor of coming from an English-medium background thus has helped in their professions and businesses today. Besides the communication skills, other skills include a friendly nature, patience, commitment, networking skills and connections, knowing the customer's choice and their demands, honesty. There is also a connection between the cultural elements they follow and the profession they perform for their livelihood. As MacDuie-Ra (2012a) views, 'they have the ability and the potential to follow the trend, especially with East Asian and Western clothing. In line with this, online clothing shops now need another set of technical skills for taking pictures, photo editing, and styling, all of which require immense skills, determination, and creativity. Even an artist or painter is motivated and influenced by the art and culture of the city itself. With these skills and knowledge acquired under the influence of cosmopolitan city life, their experiences and opportunities in the city with the available resources have now created pathway for the migrants as a means of livelihood. Thus, the study sheds light on the economic mobility within the Northeast migrants and factors influenced by recent globalization and economic liberation.

***Self-Employment: Aspirations, Means of Livelihood and Challenges***

The migrants migrate to the city in order to do something as a means of livelihood, indicating their aspirations in the city life. It is their aspirations that led them out of their native place to fulfill their specific desires. However, Marchang (2017) talks about the rising aspirations because of the educational attainment among the youth for securing jobs. The sample of self-employed in this study has a similar kind of aspiration. A majority of the respondents plan to expand the business while a few others wanted to have more clients, and to make a bigger investment in their work. There are specific stories to reflect on this. For instance, a respondent has already come a long way from being a shopkeeper of second-hand clothes, to being the owner of a boutique store where the items are imported, and plans to open a branch shop in their home state since the business has been a success with her partner. Similarly, knowing the online business, a clothing shop owner wanted to sell their item online, and another wanted to make a bigger connection for marketing. A respondent who was an online store owner and also a freelance model continued the passage of growing their businesses, particularly saving his profit for opening a big thrift clothing store in the capital, to enable to keep different kinds of clothing for renting and also for buying. Similarly, a florist who was an air hostess saved up her money and left to sell flowers online, and now she wanted to open a shop of her own. A musician and a teacher wanted to open up their own music school and commercial recording studio in the capital. These suggest that these migrants have dreams and plans beyond having a secured job, not only to earn but also to pursue their passions, interests, and talents, which are the driving force to make a living.

Despite various challenges, 83.3 percent of the self-employed are able to provide enough income for their livelihood in the city. This shows that this group of migrants find their own ways of living and earning. This is contrary to the idea of getting a secured job. Many of them have shared the uniqueness or positive nature of being self-employed compared to being a wage worker. According to them, the differences are mainly in the flexibility in managing their time or investing their time, besides the freedom in executing the work and in making decisions. Many shared their experiences, and they are happy and satisfied with their journey. A music teacher who has three jobs- a combination of salaried job and self-employment shares his journey like:

I was always fond of music, ever since I was a kid. I grew up performing in school and at local events.” My business has ups and downs in terms of the number of students. However, it is mostly on the bright side. Running a self-owned business like this with only interested parties requesting my service makes it more fun for me to work and also saves my time and effort from looking around for students.

An online thrift shop owner shares that:

I enjoy shopping. Now I could distinguish authentic clothes. With flexible time management and more income, there is no stress or pressure from anyone else, like a boss. Since it can be done from home, the experience so far has been good.

A respondent with a lot of work experience in cooperative life left his job to cook and earn a living through his kitchen. He shared his experience, saying:

Entrepreneurship can be a tough and long journey for many people. Some get lucky and succeed the first time. As for me, I have been on the lucky side.

A global businesswoman who travels across all the continents while having global partnerships based in the capital shared her experience:

Acquiring new skill sets whenever I get any kind of exposure and working with and getting trained by successful, top-notch people who come from different industries has been the best experience so far.

One of the characteristics of self-employment is the lack of basic social protection. The nature of being self-employed is such that it demands more investment in time and finances to get more earnings. It is also a challenge to invest more for a higher return. This is true to all self-employed migrants who follow different kinds of business. Many start their work, and invest their savings to start new businesses and for those businesses to grow. For some, though they have time, they do not have the capital to scale up. Failures in financial management, planning, and marketing are other challenges for some. One of the most difficult challenges the self-employed person face is the lack of a proper structure. As a music teacher mentions:

Cancellation of a class means no fees for that particular class, and I have to give



another class, which is a big adjustment since I have a schedule and it often happens from time to time. So, it is both a challenge and a disappointment for me.

Since business deals with fulfilling the needs and wants of the customers, there is competition among the sellers, especially those doing business online. A successful clothing business also depends on the product and quality they get from the sellers. So, it is a challenge for them if they do not get the items their client wants. An online thrift shop owner shares that:

There are competitions amongst the sellers online since there are many of us. So there is a challenge to having better clothing items within our online store and also less availability of preferred items from our sellers or in the market.

### **Conclusions**

This paper makes an attempt to understand how the migrants from the Northeast region earn their livelihoods through wage employment and self-employment in the city. In line with the findings of a few other studies in recent years, this study also found that migrant workers most often work in those sectors, which primarily include multinational corporations and hospitality. But, there are a few other professions that have a good percentage of these migrants such as teachership in music and physical education, designers, receptionists, and consultants. There is job mobility among these migrants. Many have changed jobs many times with very little job waiting period. Some also shift from wage to self-employment. Most workers are found to have required skills for different kinds of jobs. Since a good percentage of the migrants work in informal sectors, many lost their jobs during the pandemic, hence, their means of livelihood were at stake. In the post pandemic period, nearly half of the respondents started new jobs in the city. This one way also indicates a better earning opportunity in the city. It is evident that some migrants are engaged in more than one job. They reach out for secondary and tertiary jobs besides regular wage earning to use extra time and utilize the resources available for more earning. Many are aware of the job opportunity. Although most of them got the job through an open interview and were approached by the company, many use their social networking to get a job. Majority migrants reported working in jobs that match their qualifications and the training they had. Many had job-oriented training and specialized skills, showing their awareness of market competition and employability for certain jobs. Job-oriented training and skills put them into an advantage position in getting the desired or expected jobs. Communication skills, interpersonal soft skills, computer skills, and technical skills are reported important for employability. Factors like good facilities in the workplace, and scope for new work experience and learnings motivate many for occupational mobility. Significantly higher percentage of Northeast migrants experience differential treatment in work environment but they cope with it for their livelihoods. Those who are self-employed, tend to use various means including communication technology to earn their livelihood in the city. Since most self-employed migrants are new to this type of earning, they have enterprises which are micro in nature. Their social relationships help them set up their businesses. It is

quite evident that having flexibility in managing resources, working on the needs, and coping with work stress can contribute to having a very satisfied working life in the city.

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