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The Notion of Freedom in the Life of Migrant Labourers: A Study of Aman Sethi's *A Free Man*

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Abstract: The paper discusses the notion of freedom in the life of migrant labourers through the novel *A Free Man* of Aman Sethi. The concept of 'freedom' is studied as a fundamental right and need in the life of every citizen and has emerged as the elementary requirement in the last few centuries, especially with the dawn of democracy. It is a very hallowed and glorified ideal in the life of human beings, but it has a very different meaning for migrant labourers. Many times, they do not have work. This 'freedom' is a curse in their life. They want freedom from hunger, deprivation and unemployment. They constantly struggle against starvation. The life of the itinerant labourers in Aman Sethi's *A Free Man* bears comparison with the crisis the labourers faced during the COVID-19 lockdown in March-June 2020.

Keywords: Freedom, migrant labourers, hunger, survival, deprivation, wages, lockdown

Introduction

In the well-known essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1969), Isaiah Berlin writes, "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own ways....since justice demands that all individuals be entitled to a minimum of freedom, all other individuals were of necessity to be restrained, if need be by force, from depriving anyone of it" (122-123). Throughout history, people have pondered and argued over the complicated and multidimensional idea of freedom. It is a broader and more



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problematic concept that goes far beyond the limitations imposed by the law. Fundamentally, freedom is the ability to act, talk, or think without interference from outside influences. It includes having the freedom to express oneself, make choices and live without fear of repression or pressure.

There are many different types of freedom, such as political freedom, which denotes the ability to participate in local or national governance, economic freedom, which refers to the ability to own property and conduct business without excessive government interference, and personal freedom, which includes a wide range of individual liberties like freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of association. Although freedom is frequently regarded as a good and desirable value, there are disagreements and debates regarding its limits and the obligations that come with it. As some argue that individual freedom should not be permitted to violate the rights and freedoms of others and that freedom must be balanced against the needs of society as a whole.

Freedom is a concept that many philosophers have debated for a long time. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Jean Jacques Rousseau were the political thinkers who addressed the idea of freedom. In order to determine if people are free, whether they should be free, what this implies, and what types of institutions should be created, it has been crucial forever. Freedom is essential for the development of the human and his interests.

In the essay “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1969), Isaiah Berlin interprets the idea of freedom and makes the main “difference between positive and negative freedom” (118). Later, in the article “Positive and Negative Liberty” (2003), Ian Carter defines the difference precisely, “negative liberty is the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints....positive liberty is the possibility of acting...in such a way as to take



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control of one's life" (1). Political thinkers believed that laws must be used to restrict people's freedom. However, they also acknowledged that a fundamental area of human freedom must be for development. In the context of 'what it is to be free', in *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes writes, "A Free-Man, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to doe what he has a will to" (148). And further, Hobbes brings the idea of 'liberty of subjects consisteth in liberty from covenants' and writes, "...by the laws pretermitted, men have the Liberty, of doing what their own reasons shall suggest, for the most profitable to themselves" (149). John Locke also acknowledged that individuals must have a protected fundamental area of freedom to their property and to their labour. In *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), Locke writes, "Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person'. This nobody has any right to but himself. The 'labour' of his body and the 'work' of his hands are properly his" (116). Positive freedom is assumed in the positive sense when it is "the part of the individual to be his own master" (Berlin 1969, 130). And one will "wish to be a subject, not an object" (Berlin 1969, 131).

The freedom of individuals is essentially contained by the same freedom of other individuals, in the absence of which there will be chaos. In "On the Rules of the Road", A.G. Gardiner writes, "Everybody would be getting in everybody else's way and nobody would get anywhere. Individual liberty would have become social anarchy" (1). It is considered a basic need in the life of every citizen and has emerged as the most fundamental right in the last few centuries, especially with the dawn of democracy. The term 'freedom' is acknowledged as the 'central value' of republican thought. Freedom of individuals within s



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society and freedom of various kinds for citizens within a country are two different notions. K. R. Narayanan writes,

The nature and extent of individual freedom is fashioned and conditioned by the structural basis of society itself...the problem of freedom in modern society cannot be properly understood unless we realise how and to what extent the scope of human activity is enlarged or limited by the way society is organized...freedom is not a legal abstraction, something ethereal and intangible. Freedom is palpable. (376)

People had their own purpose for living in a society, and they got a particular direction to go ahead with a perspective of making a society where the individual was free. They started believing in the strength of the union and considering themselves an essence of this structure. As John Locke mentions in his book *Two Treatises of Government*, “Nobody doubts but an express consent of any man, entering into any society, makes him a perfect member of that society, a subject of that government” (157).

A human being has its own nature and predicament. Living in a group, he becomes aware of the material world for his fundamental needs but with some limitations. To have a good life wealth becomes the first prime thing. It doesn't matter whether it becomes a reason for misery or not but strongly desired and valued. Amartya Sen, in his book *Development as Freedom*, provides a framework of freedom as development saying, “Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with-and influencing-the world in which we live” (14-15). Sen proceeds his idea, saying, “the



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freedom-centered perspective has a generic similarity to the common concern with “quality of life,” which too concentrates on the way human life goes (perhaps even the choices one has) and not just on the resources or the income that a person commands” (24).

In “Marx’s Concept of Freedom as a Normative Foundation of Dialectic in *Capital*”, Nakjung Kim discusses Marx’s idea of freedom, quoting Marx, “The concept of freedom as reconciliation between individual freedom and communal freedom: a positive transcendence of private property” (2). For Marx, freedom is to shape the understanding of human beings based on their social conditions and existence and to eliminate the impersonal power of alienated, and imposed social forces between man and society. Referring to the concept of freedom, Kim writes, “Marx claims the individual is a social being, the expression of his life, thus, is an expression and statement of his social life...for him, as human beings are essentially social beings, they can achieve their freedom by positively developing their concrete social relations” (5). There is a correlation between individual freedom and society. It leads to a positive manner and welfare purpose. Individual freedom, which is a basic requirement of humans, is considered essential in life. Freedom must be balanced with the needs of the community. There must be limits on how much freedom a person can exercise, and freedom must not be absolute. Rights exist from the societal perspective and not the individual perspective. It is so because the rights of one cannot infringe upon the rights of others. Therefore, the exercise of individual freedom must not be harmful to society.

Freedom in the Life of Migrant Labourers

Freedom is a very hallowed and glorified ideal in the life of human beings but it has a very different meaning for migrant labourers. They want freedom from hunger, deprivation and unemployment. They



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face these concerns in their daily life. The most significant concern in their life is employment. If they do not get work, they are not 'free'. Ironically, for daily wage earners, a day without work is not a 'free' day at all! They just want freedom from starvation and deprivation. In this context, Amartya Sen, in his book *Development as Freedom*, argues starvation to be caused not by a shortage of food output but by the 'nasty' distribution and terribly ill-managed system:

The contemporary age is not short of terrible and nasty happenings, but the persistence of extensive hunger in a world of unprecedented prosperity is surely one of the worst...massive endemic hunger causes great misery in many parts of the world-debilitating hundreds of millions and killing a sizable proportion of them with statistical regularity...foods output must be one of the variables that can, inter alia, influence the prevalence of hunger. (204)

The novel *A Free Man* illuminates the lives of countless migrant labourers in Delhi. The cover of the book reads "A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi". The book had won the Crossword Book Award in 2011 and the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar (2012) for best non-fiction. Aman Sethi is basically a journalist by profession. The novel grew out of a research project on homeless workers and interviews he conducted in 2005. In August 2012, in *Publisher's Weekly* interview on his book, he says, When I started as a reporter in 2005, I was surprised by the lack of [coverage] on Delhi's working class. The city had just won the bid to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games, and the government had begun a massive program of urban renewal in which hundreds of thousands of homes in slums and working-class neighbourhoods were demolished to make way for new infrastructure. I wrote a three-part series on "Working Delhi" to explore the lives – and capture the oral histories – of the workforce. The first part



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documented the lives of homeless labourers, and that's how I met Ashraf...and the other characters in my book.

In this novel, Sethi has portrayed the deprivation and starvation in the life of migrant labourers. It represents the workers' striving to overcome hunger and deprivation. As the writer says in his interview, "he wanted to write a book about Ashraf's life: a life organized along very different ideas [than mine] of friendship, solitude, and most importantly, freedom" (Aug 2012). The character of Mohammed Ashraf has not been portrayed as an artifact but it is beyond it. In an interview, Sethi says,

...for me Ashraf is more of a philosopher than someone who should have another life. Ashraf, as a person, has a kind of crazy, well-thought-out view of the world. Ashraf is free, but Ashraf is poor. You can't really say they are oppositional things, because Ashraf has chosen a life of making do with poverty, which allows him a certain world of freedom. And there is nothing wrong with that. I think that if you decide to leave the world behind so that you can discover yourself, then that is freedom. And if you decide to leave that world to be free, then you are actually in a world of incredible hardship. (June 2013)

In the novel, as an interviewer, Sethi visits Ashraf and his 'medium-type friends', the poor workers like Lalloo, Rehaan, Kaka, a tea stall owner, Kalyani and Satish Kumar, whom 'Ashraf loves like a younger brother', and other people who are connected in some manner to Ashraf's past and present. The narration of the text moves around a group of people who have left their native places to dwell on the pavements at Bara Tooti Chawk in the capital city, Delhi, as migrant labourers. The novel is divided into four parts, Azadi (Freedom), Akelapan (Solitude), Lawaris (Abandoned), Ajnabi (Stranger). All the titles represent the challenges of migrant labourers' life.



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In the first part 'Azadi', the protagonist Mohammed Ashraf works as a 'safediwallah' dwelling at Bara Tooti Chawk in Delhi. Sometimes he likes to earn money as a 'mazdoor'. Ashraf finds freedom in 'mazdoori' that's why he prefers to work as a 'mazdoor' on the basis of daily wages. Ashraf recalls his past when he was ten-year-old and came to Dr. Hussain's house. At the age of sixteen, he got admission under the guardianship of Dr. Hussain in a biology programme at Patna's Magadh University. All of a sudden, his bright dreams were shattered by the death of Dr. Hussain. It is estimated by his migration from one city to another and his search for steady life till the end, Ashraf has always been a courageous, keen observer and opportunistic person. He was born in Gaya, Bihar and went to Patna with his mother and younger brother Aslam, in 1975. After the death of Dr. Hussain, he moved to Calcutta with his family. In Calcutta, he married and started a business with his friend Raja. Due to some reasons, he had to leave the city with his family and came back to Patna. Later, he went to Bombay, leaving his family. Further, his migration continued from Bombay to Delhi, from Delhi to Bombay, from Bombay to Surat, Gujrat and finally back to Delhi. In the end, he decides to go back to Calcutta.

In the second part 'Akelapan', Sethi introduces the theme of loneliness and expands upon it in other parts too. In the opinion of Ashraf, the life of a labourer has equal parts of 'azadi' and 'akelapan'. Because they change places there in a lack of belonging, the migrant labourers have 'akelapan'. Rehaan, from Sitapur in Utter Pradesh, has various ideas for the business of goats and pigs and dreams of becoming rich. Unfortunately, he has to give up all his business efforts because of his conservative family and comes to Delhi in search of work.



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In the third part 'Lawaris', Sethi exposes the dismal condition of hospitals especially their behaviour toward poor people. Sethi reports, "With the hospital running at full capacity, every patient admitted means another booted from his or her bed and declared fit to go home. Patients are allowed ten minutes to plead their case. The lucky ones are put onto stretchers and bundled off into one of the hospital's many wards; the rest are asked to return when their condition worsens" (143-144). Satish, a TB patient and migrant worker at Choona Mandi, a 'lawaris', is admitted in RBTB hospital, the largest Tuberculosis Treatment Centre in Asia. Nobody knows where he belongs to. Due to the lack of care and treatment, he dies. As a 'lawaris', the lack of kith and kin results in an early 'freedom' from the chains of miserable life.

In the last part 'Ajnabi', Sethi continues the theme of loneliness and lack of belonging in the lives of migrant labourers. In the metropolis city, the migrant labourers are 'ajnabi', 'lawaris' and utterly uncared-

Sheher mein mazdoor jaisa dar-ba-dar koi nahin

Jisne sab ke ghar banaye, uska ghar koi nahin

(In the city, nobody is as displaced as a labourer

They build houses for others, but have no home of their own)

– Anonymous (*Outlook*, April, 2023)

After striving in all works, and skills and having a balance of 'kamai' (wages) and 'azadi' (freedom), Ashraf decides to go back to Calcutta for a steady life and work. He wanders, as a migrant labourer, from one place to another. He practices many professions throughout his life, "many things in many places: he sold lemons, eggs, chickens, vests, suit lengths, and lottery tickets. He worked as a butcher, a tailor, an electrician's apprentice" (21). He looks for his mother, without knowing her address and contact number.



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He is unable to find her. In Calcutta, he tries to restart his old business with his friend Raja who refuses clearly. Till the end of the book, all the friends of Ashraf have died. Ashraf also becomes a TB patient and is admitted to the hospital. After treatment, he recovers from his illness and starts living his life in a better way. In an interview, Sethi says that “when he went to meet Ashraf with one published copy of this book, till then he passed away” (*Newslandry*, 2012).

Bara Tooti is the only known place where labourers of different kinds of skills such as plumbing, carpentry, cooking or painting as well as unskilled ones, can be found. There is no certainty of getting work. No work means no food. But there are people like Ashraf who consider it as their choice, their ‘freedom’. Ashraf says, “Only the barsati mendaks (the rain frogs) work every day. Not lafunters like us. We work when we feel like it....The rain frogs of Bara Tooti are the seasonal workers from villages in Delhi’s neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan” (16). They come in search of work, when they do not have any work in their fields “after the winter crop has been harvested and the fields lie fallow, and return home in time for the sowing season in July” (16).

Ashraf and his fellow, Lalloo, continue sitting by the roadside shrine because they have no place where they can go and no family member waits for their return in the evening. As Lalloo puts it: “We are old frogs now, Aman Bhai, with nowhere to hop to...” (16). Lalloo used to work as a labourer but at present has a steel rod in his shin due to a road accident and is incapable of heavy work so he chooses to sell parathas to the labourers at the chowk. One morning he loses all his possessions like utensils, handcart etc. in a game of cards and sells off the remaining things in exchange for several bottles of alcohol. This is the kind of ‘freedom’ they have, lack of a tight schedule or compulsion to work every day. In the novel,



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Ashraf and Lalloo have been described as “work-oriented” rather than “work seeking”, since they work for a week at a time, followed by a week of leisure financed by their earnings, and sometimes they do not have a single rupee for an emergency. As Lalloo says: “Perfectly decent young boys, who neither smoke nor drink, have awoken to find their slippers stolen in the night. Who knows where money goes in the night? In the morning there is always mazdoori” (18).

Every other day they might get work based on their skills such as shops to be painted, walls to be built, loads to be lifted, and trenches to be dug but the good way of Ashraf, “the ideal job has the perfect balance of Kamai and Azadi (Wages and Freedom)” (19). He continues:

Kamai (Wages) is what makes work work. Without kamai, it is not work, it is a hobby. Some call it charity; others may call it exercise- but it certainly isn’t a job. A job is something a man is paid to do- and his pay is his kamai. Many of us choose jobs only on the basis of their kamai. Six thousand rupees a month! A man could get rich with that kind of money! But they forget a crucial thing. Azadi! Azadi is the freedom to deny the malik (owner) for any work when they want to. Because the owner owns our work. He does not own us. (19)

Ashraf continues talking about ‘kamai’ and ‘azadi’ with fellow migrant labourers. Ashraf forces them to realise that they are not slaves but they are just workers. They get wages based on their work and skill, not on the whim of the owner’s sympathy and charity. In an interview, Sethi also speaks about a perfect balance of ‘kamai’ and ‘azadi’, “It is a dynamic equilibrium as Ashraf points out. And I think that Azadi is what is the particular important thing and money will come in a point” (2012). Ashraf exhorts,



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Every morning a hundred contractors come to Bara Tooti offering permanent jobs for six thousand rupees a month. On the first day, the contractor will give two hundred rupees. On the second day he will do the same but on the third day, he will give only hundred rupees, and promise to pay the rest later. By the end of the second week, he will pay only a third of what he owes. And by the end of the month, you will realize that the contractor really does not pay his workers. But by now it is too late. You can't leave, since he owes you three thousand rupees already. You are now...A slave. A mule with neither kamai nor azadi. (20)

Thereupon, he prefers to earn, on 'dehadi' (daily wages) because in it if the contractor pays on the first day, one works for him on the second day. And if he stops paying, a worker stops working. That's why even if he is an unskilled person, he still has his self-respect and this is the most important possession in one's life. Ashraf shares his experience when he worked as the head of kasai (butcher) of Fauji Halal Shop in Malad, "he was a brilliant kasai – one of the best in Bombay" (77). After the busiest day (Sunday) of the week, he says "When he arrived on Monday – that too ten minutes late, he (proprietor, Javed Qureshi) slapped me – full on the face, in front of everyone...and bas, it was over. I turned around and never went back to the shop again" (79). He chose his 'azadi', his 'self-respect'. That's why he did not tolerate disrespect in the name of 'kamai'. Further Ashraf says "a slap means that's full stop. Once you get slapped like that in front of everyone, you can never work in there again. Your izzat (self-respect) is gone; no one will ever give you respect" (76). Money is money and only a useful thing but self-respect is the most important thing in life. Aristotle says in *Nicomachean Ethics*, as quoted by Amartya Sen in his book *Development as Freedom*, "Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for



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the sake of something else” (14). Ashraf, too values his ‘azadi’ and ‘self-respect’, over and above daily wage.

Migrant labourers leave their homes for a new place, but they don’t know how they will provide for their basic necessities. They have to struggle in order to get food every day. Ashraf had nothing when he came to Delhi:

Except one bundle of clothes and may be two or three beedis, when he arrived on the late-night train from Surat, Gujrat at Old Delhi Railway Station. The city was still a mysterious place of freedom, camaraderie, and possibilities. First, he ate, bought some beedis, unrolled his sheet, and fell asleep right there on the pavement next to a group of card players... He says that there is something Delhi gives, like us people- a sense of Azadi, freedom from the past. (34-35)

This is a ‘freedom’ many of the prosperous ones crave for! Freedom too, cannot be an ‘end’ in itself. It is always a means for something. Freedom without a sense of ‘belonging’ either to a place or a person would be useless and meaningless that’s why Ashraf goes back to accept his past where he started his journey from.

In the novel, Dr Nimesh Desai, an author of the study on the series of unlikely incidents in the city, reports on Delhi’s condition “a city of the exhausted, distressed, and restless, struggling with the uncertainties of eviction and unemployment; a city of twenty million histrionic persons resiliently absorbing the day’s glancing blows only to return home and tenderly claw themselves to sleep” (42).

Aravind Adiga also looks at the city of Delhi in a similar way, in his book *The White Tiger*. The protagonist Balram Halwai observes the condition of migrant labourers sitting on the pavements in the



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capital city where people breathe in the acid air openly and yet survive. He says “I could see multitudes of small, thin, grimy people squatting, waiting for a bus to take them somewhere, or with nowhere to go and about to unfurl a mattress and sleep right there. These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light – but they were still in the darkness” (138).

Balram continues to think of migrant workers and poor people who had come leaving their own homes, like him. While driving he is constantly thinking of the challenges that they face every day and for a moment, he imagines, “I was in the right city. But my father, if he were alive, would be sitting on that pavement, cooking some rice gruel for dinner, and getting ready to lie down and sleep under a streetlamp” (138). The residents of Bara Tooti, from the tea seller to the local person, along with Ashraf, share their experiences of living there as migrant workers. According to them, survival is the most realistic desire. They do not want any success nor specific aspiration in their life. They just have the aspiration to survive in the impoverished and invisible locality of a country.

The novel *A Free Man* is a world of labourers who share the pavement as their residence and struggle in the hope that someday they will get freedom from their various deprivations. As a migrant labourer, Ashraf lives his life on the pavement and hides his wages in a secret pocket that is stitched into his actual pocket. He says that “the life of the mazdoor is equal parts azadi and akelapan, or solitude. Freedom comes only from solitude” (53). Ashraf shares, what really bothers him, “he feels bored, even depressed, by the chowk, his life, everything. I have no friends here. In Dilli there is azadi, but there is also a lot of akelapan, the loneliness of being a stranger in every city. Har shehar mein ajnabi” (62). This freedom is a curse for him. In an article in *The Hindu*, Mukul Mangalik writes, “A Free Man’ (s) freedom is not completely empty



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after all, but only because of the incredible refusal by (un)free wage labour to give up on freedom” (March 2012). For Ashraf ‘Azadi’ means a sense of dignity which people like him conserve as a principle and a value while working for others. In an interview conducted by Majid Maqbool, Sethi says, “I think Ashraf’s approach to employment forces us to think beyond the binaries of permanent and contract work and to examine what freedom really means. In Ashraf’s world, freedom is not a comfortable space – but rather a hard-fought condition that calls for considerable sacrifice” (*Kindle*, 06 Feb. 2014).

Freedom During the COVID-19 Lockdown

How the notion of ‘freedom’ is rendered utterly irrelevant in the lives of migrant labourers has been witnessed during the COVID-19 lockdown. The challenges of migrant labourers grew multifold. The lockdown in March 2020 was declared throughout the country. Nobody bothered to think of the migrant workers in a metropolis like Delhi. They got stuck without any work or other means. They were trapped far away from their native place and family. Suddenly they realized borders within their own country and the homes where they lived, did not belong to them. During the lockdown, they were thrown into unimaginable sufferings. In that situation, they were totally free from their work, daily wages and any kind of employment. What does this freedom mean, if they do not get food once a day? Their hunger and poverty drove them back to their homes but it was not easy. Everything was shut down. They travelled miles from home to the city to earn a living and then they had to go back. In a large proportion, they left on foot walking their ways. They were doubly scared, of the disease and of starvation. The migrant labourers could no longer afford to be in a metropolis without any source of income. Before the announcement of the lockdown, there was no arrangement for those people who were far from their native places. Later, a



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few public transport and relief camps were arranged by the govt, NGOs, trustees, and people who came to help them but it was not enough. At that time, the news was being heard of the increasing cases of COVID-19 and innumerable death of people. The migrant labourers were most affected by it since they were already dying of hunger, thirst and heat on railway tracks, roads and the places where they stayed temporarily. They were not aware of 'social distancing' and kept on their journey. They were struggling against starvation. Arundhati Roy, in her essay "The Pandemic Is a Portal", wrote, "They knew they were going home potentially to slow starvation. They desperately needed a shred of familiarity, shelter and dignity, as well as food, if not love" (209). They kept on moving on their way with the challenges of transport, food, drinking water, blazing heat of May-June. Arundhati Roy says,

Many driven out by their employers and landlords, millions of impoverished, hungry, thirsty people, young and old, men, women, children, sick people, blind people, disabled people, with nowhere else to go, with no public transport in sight, began a long march home to their villages. They walked for days, towards Badaun, Agra, Azamgarh, Lucknow, Gorakhpur – hundreds of kilometres away. Some died on the way... As they walked, some were beaten brutally and humiliated by the police, who were charged with strictly enforcing the curfew. (209-10)

The same experience has been mentioned in Sethi's *A Free Man* where the residents of Bara Tooti live and sleep on the pavements. They sit there taking alcohol and sharing their experience every evening until they sleep. One day an incidence occurs in which some people are beaten brutally.

Who said you could drink on this pavement? Go drink in your house!

Where else can we drink, constable saab? The chowk is our house; this pavement is our drawing room.



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I'll make the police station your bedroom if you don't shut up right now. What's under that shawl? Whack, whack, whack - the lathi struck the pavement on either side of Lalloo.

Police saab, we made a mistake, forgive us, forgive us, forgive us. Lalloo stretched out on the pavement, his hands alternately touching the constable's shoes and covering his own head to ward off further blows.
(59)

Conclusion

Aman Sethi has tried to mirror the plight of poor and illiterate people who migrate from one place to another and how they struggle for their survival in the new workplace. It is an irony that on one side they want freedom from their hardships and on the other side most of them spend their hard-earned money on alcohol and cigarettes. Sethi has portrayed a vivid reality drawing an unforgettable portrait of the lives of the migrant labourers in one of India's largest cities. During the lockdown, the capital city of India, the Govt of India, and the various other governing bodies failed to take care of India's migrant workers that had 'built' the infrastructure/the edifice we are so fond of.

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