



Impact of Lockdown during Covid-19 on Migrants in India : A review

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Abstract : As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, several nations, especially those in underdeveloped regions, have been severely affected. This global crisis has "clearly worsened poverty and within-country inequality," according to the World Economic Situation and Prospects, and it is expected that "will leave long-lasting scars on labour markets, while reversing progress on poverty and income inequality in many economies." In this sense, the situation in India is complicated.

Human rights official Michelle Bachelet warned about the consequences of a "sudden announcement" of a lockdown in the nation last year. To address COVID-19, she emphasised the need of taking steps that do neither "exacerbate existing disparities and vulnerabilities," nor are they discriminatory in nature. Later in June 2020, two UN Special Rapporteurs raised concerns about the "well-being of more than 100 million internal migrant workers who have been compelled to walk great distances home, often on foot," due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Keywords : Covid19, Migrant workers, Indian economy, Lockdown, Plight Policy measures.

Introduction : The coronavirus epidemic, which may also be referred to as a black swan occurrence, has halted nations' fast economic progress. The Spanish flu of 1918 had a devastating impact on the globe, resulting in the deaths of between 50 and 100 million people worldwide, with India suffering the greatest death toll of 18 million. The Indian Government ordered a statewide lockdown on March 25, 2020, in order to minimise the impact of a pandemic on people's lives. Lockdowns have the unfortunate side effect of halting all economic activity.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its World Economic Outlook (Kaur 2020) predicted that India's 2020–2021 growth statistics would be 1.9 percent based on a lack of economic activity. The World Bank expects that India's economic growth would be in the range of 1.55 percent to 2.8 percent this year because of interruptions in demand and supply chains.

The lockdown has been extended four times due to an increase in the number of coronavirus infections in India, and it is now in effect until May 31, 2020. The early announcement of a shutdown by the Indian government aided in slowing the infection's spread throughout the



nation. Inequality problems have been highlighted by the lockdown and its multiple extensions, which has resulted in the disruption of everyone's daily lives. Millions of people were stranded at home as a result of the emergency shutdown. Workers in both the official and informal sectors were adversely affected by the shutdown of businesses throughout the nation and the cessation of practically all economic activity. After the lockdown was announced, construction sites were deserted. Meanwhile, the majority of residential societies and colonies locked their doors to everyone save the occupants during this time period. Construction and building, manufacturing, trading, transportation, and hospitality are some of the major employers of migrant workers who are mostly part of the informal economy. As well as domestic assistance, street sellers, small- and roadside-business employees (such as those in tea shops and dhabas), and salon and gym assistants are some of the other options for these migrant workers.

There were an estimated 122 million unemployed persons in India at the end of April 2020, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).

For the most part, people work as day labourers and small-time business owners. As a consequence, migrant workers are in a state of extreme difficulty and dislocation.

According to the 2018–2019 Economic Survey, 93% of the workforce is employed in the informal sector. An internal population of 450 million was estimated by the 2011 census.

India is a destination for migrants. There is a good chance that the real numbers are significantly greater than these estimates. Most people in India migrate in one of two ways, either permanently or seasonally/circularly, depending on their circumstances. The first is long-term migration, which is defined as moving from one place to another permanently or seasonally/circularly. Indian migrants in the informal sector make up around 175 million of the country's migrant population. Many states' economy are dependent on them. These employees and their families have been forced to seek refuge in government-run relief camps for food and other necessities because of the epidemic and ensuing lockdowns. Additional relief camps have been put up by the Indian Central and State Governments. Migrant workers are returning to their villages in large numbers after enduring immense mental, financial, and emotional distress in metropolitan centres and industrial belts. Many factors have contributed to the suffering of these employees, including a lack of employment and a means of subsistence, the absence of social protection, and the fact that they are stuck in a foreign city and state. Because of the



lockout, these trapped migrant workers had no choice but to attempt the hundreds of kilometres back to their home country on foot or bicycle.

Characteristics of Migrant Labourers

The Economic Survey of India (2017) attributes China's strong economic growth rates to widespread migration from rural hinterlands to metropolitan centres, particularly near the coast (Ministry of Finance, Government of India 2017). It's possible to replicate the Chinese model in India, according to the poll. Thus, between 2001 and 2011, inter-state labour mobility averaged 5–6 million people per year, resulting in a population of about 60 million migrants and an inter-district migration of up to 80 million, totaling 140 million (14 crore) migrants in 2011 according to a new cohort-based migration metric (CMM) (Ministry of Finance, Government of India 2017). The Indian government implemented the world's greatest democratic nationwide lockdown in March 2020 to control the new Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) epidemic. In phase 4, which finished on May 31, 2020, it was originally planned to extend until April 14, 2020. People's daily routines and access to medical treatment in India have been significantly disrupted as a result of the shutdown.

There have been 266 598 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in India as of June 9, 2020, with 7471 confirmed deaths.³ COVID-19's impact on the world's 1.3 billion people extends well beyond the disease's spread and containment attempts; it also has political, cultural, and societal repercussions.

Workers and their families are moving from metropolitan cities to rural areas as a result of lockdown measures in the nation. Millions of people have been moving from rural areas to cities for decades in search of better prospects and a better life. For better jobs, higher earnings, and a higher quality of life, rural Indian migrants work as domestic help, construction workers, and other types of industrial and agricultural workers in cities around India. The unexpected imposition of lockdown by the Indian government after a 14-hour Janata curfew on March 22, 2020 harmed already vulnerable communities by restricting people's ability to leave their



homes. Travel on all modes of transportation was halted; this included transportation to and from businesses including hotels, schools, and factories. Millions of migrant workers had to contend with the loss of income, food shortages, and an uncertain future when industries and businesses shut down. Depending on where you live, or how big your city is, the scope of this problem varies. However, it has created global havoc. The migrant labourers had no choice but to return to their communities since they had no money, no job, and no idea when the lockdown would be lifted. Humanitarian and health security concerns have been compounded by their widespread exodus from functioning nations.

For them, this sparked the following issue. How do they go back to where they belong? With no transportation options available, they decided to walk back to their lodgings. Images of migrant workers, many of whom had nothing except a desire to return to their family, marched through the streets. People have made perilous excursions, trekking for days on end without food or money to cover distances of up to 1000 kilometres. Many people were detained for breaking the lockdown, while others perished from fatigue or car accidents.

Migrant workers, their children, and their families are all depicted in heartbreaking images on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp). These images show migrant workers walking barefoot, with deep ulcers on their feet, women carrying their children on their waists, mothers dragging their babies on a suitcase, and more. For several days, migrant labourers have gone without food, water, pay, or shelter because of the heatwave. These images raise issues about the state governments' plans for their well-being.



Migrants in the state were given free transportation back to their communities by the state administration. Migrants were clinging to footboards and clambering over roofs to get a space in these overcrowded facilities. A group of migrants attempted to hire people carriers, but returning migrants were put at risk by Indian roadways. In India, being hit by a car is 10 times more likely to result in death than being infected with the coronavirus is. Coronavirus-infected patients are dying at a rate of roughly 3.2 percent, according to Aarogya Setu, the mobile contact tracking COVID-19 of the Government of India as of May 23, 2020. ⁵ It is estimated that 381 persons have been killed in 1200 road accidents as reported by the non-profit non-government organisation Save Life foundation. ⁶ This equates to a 32 percent mortality rate. Migrants were responsible for a third of these deaths. Speeding was the most prevalent cause of a car collision, according to the data.

A unique 'Shramik Special' train service was launched by the Indian government on May 1, 2020, for migrants. A total of more than 20,000 Shramik special trains have carried 3 million migrant workers since then, but 70 percent of them are still awaiting trains that would take them back home. Thermal screening is required for migrants before they can board their next flight. Migrants are forced to wait through long lines at screening centres because of a huge rush and a lack of trains. Between May 1 and May 21, 2020, at least 24 expectant women gave birth.

Homecoming has been bittersweet for many migrants who have crisscrossed the nation in search of a better life. They are confronted with a new problem. There is a large lot of fear and accompanying violence because of the stigma connected with being labelled a 'virus carrier,' which is what sparked them to move. Under their minds, migrants imagined they would be able to return to farming or work in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005 programme when they returned to their hometowns. ⁷ State



governments are attempting different employment efforts to help these returning employees, but it has been incredibly difficult to create programmes and accommodate thousands of people returning to their communities in such a short period of time.

Workers returning from urban 'hotspots' to rural communities are a major source of worry because of the potential for viral infection they may bring with them. The rural system lacks the capacity to quarantine all of the people who are still returning to their communities on a daily basis. COVID-19 testing facilities are also in low supply. In these conditions, the principle of 'test, track, and contact tracing' to prevent the spread of coronavirus looks to be difficult to implement.. The fear is that the number of COVID-19 cases would soar in the areas that a 'second wave' of the epidemic will occur.

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