

Title of the paper: Pathetic and Inhuman conditions of Migrant labours in India during Covid 2019 – A Sociological Study

Dr. G.K.VENUGOPAL
Asst. Professor of Sociology,
Sri Mahadeshwara Government First Grade College,
Kollegala -571 440. Mobile No.9986987425
Email: gkvenugoopalblr@gmail.com

Introduction

India experienced rapid urbanization between 2001 and 2011 for more than a decade, with an estimated 31.8 % rapid growth. Migration is one of the components of India's urban growth is expected to increase in the anticipatable future. It is shocking to know that internal migration is expected to cross 550 million by the end of 2021. Central government and State government policies, strategies and National Smart Cities Mission have also contributed to the occurrence. During the period 2001-2011, India saw an escalation of 139 million to its migrant labor force. The internal migration almost doubled during 20years i.e., from 220 million in 1991 to 454 million in 2011 .

Migrant Population in India

The total population of India, as recorded in Census 2011, stands at 1.21 billion. But according to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation 17th May 2020 the total population in India is estimated at 1.366 billion or 136.6 crore. Internal migrants in India number 454 million or 37 % of the total population.

India's Migration Rate

For the first time in the history of the country, the Economic Survey of India 2017 stated that an average of nine million people migrated between States every year either for work or for the education. States such as Odissa, West Bengal and Bihar which contributes a large number of share of migrant workers, have taken some measures to protect migrants in the destination states. The general movement of labor is from the North and East India to the West and South. Some of the prominent labour-sending states are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarkhand and Odisha. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala serve as the key labour recipients

Statement of the Problem

India always had an internal problem of migrants. The COVID-19 pandemic has only made it worse. More than 10 crore people are estimated to be migrant workers in India. Many of them are however stuck at borders, including state, district and at national border area. There are the most marginalized sections of the society who are dependent on daily wages for their living and in times of such distress need sympathy and understanding of the society. Immediate concerns faced by such migrant workers relate to food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, loss of wages, concerns about the family, anxiety and fear. Many a times they also face harassment by the Police Officials, Revenue Department, Forest Officers and negative reactions of the local community.

Methodology of the Study

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary sources material relates to the field survey conducted in Mysore and Bangalore railway stations, where migrant labors were proceeding towards their native places from Mysore, Chennai and Bangalore construction sites to their home town Bihar, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The secondary data was collected from the Magazines, Journals, Periodicals, Daily Newspapers, etc.

Inhuman condition of India's Migrant labours during COVID-19

India's nationwide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 PANDEMIC has critically dislocated its migrant's population lacking jobs and money and with public transportation shutdown hundreds of thousands of migrants were forced to walk hundreds of miles back to their home villages-with some dying during the journey. Their problems were discussed in the following:

1. **No Salary paid for more than 2 months:** Majority of the labours i.e, 80 per cent of them alleged that their owners have not paid any salary for the lockdown period. Without job, running out of their paltry savings and with big families to feed were felt they do not have any hope of the future. And nearly 65 per cent of the migrant labours replied that they have less than rupees 200 left with them. So with no work and no money and instead of dying with starvation, migrant workers want to return.

2. Barely afforded to buy the food items: The central government imposed the lockdown and closed businesses when India reached around five hundred cases of COVID-19. Local authorities followed with measures such as creating strict containment zones to close off hot spots, which left millions of migrant's workers stranded. With their daily wages have dried up, most of them can barely afford rent or even food. The migrant labourers replied, in the beginning few Samaritans and local administration gave them rice, dal and vegetables which remained for a week. Later on the migrant labourers were in a state of great hunger

3. Migrants walked hundreds of kilometers: After exhausting all their hard earned money during the Covid-19 lockdown and finding no other option for survival, migrants workers started to walk hundreds of kilometers to reach their homes. When virus started to spreading and the ration shops closed down the migrant workers were having only two options staring at them- either face the disease on an empty stomach or walk home. Hindustan times, New Delhi reported 14th 2020 that 6 migrant's workers walked almost 1800 km from Mumbai to reach his home in Chaibasa district in Jharkhand, trekking up to 45 km a day.

4. Hostage like Situation for migrant workers: On 02 May 2020 Ministry of Home affairs clarified in its letter that Shramik Trains are not for migrant workers. Only persons temporarily stranded away from home can use these. Workers can't use it to go from their workplace back to their home. There are reports from several states of local authorities persuading the workers not to go back. In Karnataka, the chief minister held a meeting with the leading real estate developers and sudden decided to withdraw request for all the special trains.

5. Migrants were forced to stay in unclean environment: In many parts of the states it has reported that migrant's workers including men, women and children have claimed they were being held in shelter homes forcibly. They allegedly rounded up by the police on false pretexts and locked up at the shelter. Where they were forced to live in punishing conditions. They claim that they sleep on the floor where they are bitten by mosquitoes all night and also complained about unclean toilets and having no access to clean water forget about the sanitizers and soaps.

6. Migrants living in Similar to Detention Camp: There are reports of migrant workers stuck in informal settlements akin in to detention camps. Health officials using hosepipes to douse migrant labourers in disinfectant. As per the WHO disinfectant should not be sprayed on

the human beings directly but it has been done with horrifying manner. In fact, those who huddled in to the detention camp, were walked hundreds of kilometers, without bothering about the actual condition, authorities resorting to cramming people into buses and into relief camps and homeless shelters. By cramping the migrant workers, instead of check the virus, the authorities facilitated the spread of the Covid Virus.

7. Many states were reluctant to receive migrant labourers: Home states such as Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat have been skeptical in receiving migrants from other states. Bihar had withdrawn its blanket approval for all migrants coming from Maharashtra. It has decided to give permission on a case-by-case basis. West Bengal said it would not accept any migrant back from Maharashtra. Corona scare is dictating the terms to the governments in deciding on migrants, who are currently suffered a lot after walking hundreds of kilometers in the sweltering heat.

8. Migrant workers were crushed to death: As per the Times of India, Mumbai reported in April 2020, total 378 people had died since the lockdown was imposed due to reasons other than the disease. Of them 69 people died in rail or road accidents while walking to their homes. In these deaths the most pathetic incidents were the 16 migrant workers were crushed to death by goods train. After walking for several hours, the 16 workers were exhausted. They sat down to rest and fell asleep. An oncoming goods train ran over them at around 5.20 am early morning. Bodies were crushed beyond recognition. Apart from these scores of migrants were killed in road accidents while reaching their homes.

9. Denial of Medical Treatment to the Migrant females: The times of India reported in April 2020 that a pregnant Migrant woman in Telangana was turned away by six hospitals. She was tested for Covid-19 and was admitted to a Government Maternity Hospitals only after the results came back negative. Due to the delay, the baby was born with complications and died. A day later, the women migrant women were also died.

Suggestions to improve the migrant's life'

Migrant workers faced with the situation of spending a few days temporarily shelters, which may be quarantine centers, while trying to reach to their native places, are filled with anxieties and fears stemming from various concerns and are in need of psycho-social support. As part of such support, following measures can be adopted:

1. Treat every migrant worker with self-respect, respect, kindness and compassion.
2. The respective State Governments must listen to their concerns patiently and understand their problems, as they contribute to the greater economy.
3. The State must recognize specific and varied needs for each person/family.
4. The State and Non-Governmental Organizations must counsel and assure them that normal life is going to resume soon.
5. NGO's inform the migrant laborers about the support being extended by Central Government, State Government and Health care systems.
6. The State must stress on the importance of their staying in their present location and how mass movement could greatly and adversely affect all efforts to contain the virus.
7. The NGO's must work to realize the importance in the community and appreciate their contribution for the society.
8. The State government must encourage them that even if their employer fails to provide job, local administration and charitable institutions would extend all possible help.
9. Remind them that even if they infect with Carona Virus, tell them that the condition is curable and they will recover in a swift way. Assure them that State Government will take responsibilities of the medical care.
10. Tell them if they stay away from their families, it is better for a temporary period of time.

Conclusion

The problem of migrant workers may not be entirely unique to India, but the absolute scale- there are more than 40 million migrant laborers across the country, makes it difficult to provide relief to everyone. From road and rail accidents to starvation, denial of medical care, police brutality, exhaustion and suicides, there have been hundreds of reported non-corona virus deaths. Odisha has been a model State in terms of protecting the migrant workers in the destination States. Many of them are however stuck at borders, including state, district and at national border areas. These are the most marginalized sections of the society who are dependent on daily wages for their living and in times of such distress need sympathy and understanding of the society. Immediate concern faced by such migrant workers relate to food, shelter, healthcare, fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, loss of wages, concerns about the family, anxiety and fear. Sometimes, they also face harassment and negative reactions of the local

community. All this calls for strong social protection. So that migrant workers can lead a fresh lease of life.

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