

MIGRANT LABOUR & COVID-19 PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT:

India has faced various types of pandemic like Plague, Japanese Flu, Malaria, H1N1, SARS, MERS and Dengue during the period of last century and every time, Indian Scientists and the Government fight together and after developing vaccine through continuous research is able to eradicate such virus and overcome from the acute critical situation. In the beginning of 2020, India and other countries on the globe faced severe pandemic effect of COVID-19 and lakhs of peoples are suffering from the same on account of their Financial Position, Socio-Economic Status etc. The migrant workers becomes the key issues for the Indian Govt. the Govt. has successfully tackled this problems. This research paper tries to provide brief idea on the subject.

KEY WORDS: Migrant workers, COVID-19, Plague, Japanese Flu, Malaria, H1N1(Swine Flu), SARS, MERS, Dengue, Aatam Nirbhar Bharat.

INTRODUCTION:

In December, 2019, a deadly virus was found in WUHAN City of China and due to crooked attitude of China, it was spread throughout the world within very short span of time. It had started effecting Indian Populations from the start of march, 2020.

Due to COVID-19, Nationwide Lockdown was imposed w.e.f. 24.03.2020, consequently the migrant Workers have faced various types of difficulties and excessive hardship situations. In MSME Industries and small factories, domestic workers became jobless because of no movement of materials and manpower resulting their workplaces become shut down, thereby millions of migrant workers lost their income and livelihood, had faced food grain shortages and uncertainty about their future. Many of Workers and their families become not only hungry but also income less and as there was no job or food facility at their work place, they started walking back to their state/district/village/home/town etc even without any transportation facilities^[1]

Considering this situation, the Central Govt. NGOs and State Governments have initiated and taken different measures to extend their help for providing them food and ration at their working place and in later stage of time arranged transportation facilities also so that they can reach safely to their hometown because out of thousands migrant Workers many had been died due to road accidents, starvation, exhaustion by walking, rail accidents, suicide due to hunger and due to domestic violence, police brutality and lack of timely medical health care facilities etc. Most of migrants in the country originate from Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh etc. The metro cities like Kolkata, Bangaluru, Mumbai and Delhi have the highest number of migrants Workers

While most male migrant workers moves from their hometown to metro cities for different purposes like working in domestic/industry/factory/Hotels/Entertainment/Auto Rickshaw/small self-employed business etc and whereas female migrant workers move for due domestic works/Ita Bhatti job and in small scale industry like candle making etc.^[2]

OBJECTIVE:

- A. To study and analyze the different problems occurred due to COVID-19.
- B. To suggest the remedial measures to overcome from the situation.
- C. To suggest alternate facilities during the period of lockdown.
- D. To suggest precautionary measures in dealing with effect of COVID-19.
- E. To create awareness for preparation for future to deal such types of situations
- F. To study the problems of the migrant worker and to suggest remedial measures.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COVID-19:

A. FOOD SUPPLY SHORTAGES DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN:

During Nationwide Lockdown it is seen that migrant workers stand in a queue for getting food at different locations of country. The Central Govt started “Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojna” in which 5 kg wheat or rice and one kg chana/ daal are given to each family members for approx 80 Cr population who are below poverty line and poor workers. This scheme shall continue till Nov, 2020.

As per the government clarification, there are sufficient food grains stock available at Food Corporation of India's godowns to supply the food grains to the poor under above scheme. When the central government schemes started ensuring the food grains for the poor & BPL peoples, there were some state governments could not provide relief to the workers because their distribution system got failed due to their interpretation that ration cards are “Area of Place – Specific” and fair price shops were largely inaccessible to migrant workers.

Considering the difficulties of some state government, the central Government brought the concept of 'One Nation- One Ration Card' and this system has been implemented in few states only before the lock down of country and new features are to be included in existing system of Fair Price Shops, however it is expected that the new scheme shall be implemented in all states during the period of mid of April'2021.

B. THE MOVEMENT OF MIGRANTWORKERS FROM WORK PLACE TO THEIR NATIVE:

Because of shut down and Nationwide lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic situation, many of migrant Workers rendered without work & money and due to lockdown restrictions on public transportation, thousands migrant Workers were started walking by foot or bicycling with their family members to reach their hometown. They were not having sufficient food or other resources for their survival while travelling from their work place to their hometown. Even, the Social distancing was not possible among them because they were travelling together in large groups^[3]. Many of them were died on the road/railway line and also from the corona virus after reaching at their own village. Some of the migrant Workers died because of hungry and excess of exhaustion by walking.

Around 26 nos. of migrant Workers were killed in an accident between two trucks carrying migrants in Auraiya on dtd: 16 May'2020. It is also seen that single mother has brought a son on scooty after driving approx 1200 KMs similarly a 15-year-old girl carried her ailing father on a bicycle for 1,000 kilometres from Gurugram to Bihar. She was praised by many prominent dignitaries and also received appreciation from Ivanka Trump from USA^[4]. Some heart-breaking incidents were also seen during lockdown where one mother carrying her 5-year-old son trolley suitcase and in another incidence, one child was playing with the body of his mother as he was not knowing that his mother has already expired^[5].

C. ATTITUDE OF NEIGHBOURS & FAMILY MEMBERS TOWARDS MIGRANT WORKERS:

Migrant workers who decided to stay back during the exodus, faced assault from their neighbors, who accused them of being infected with corona virus. They thus could not venture out to buy food and other materials. They were feared to be carrying corona virus from the urban areas where they had been employed. They faced assault and harassment from the people of their hometowns. Since many of them belonged to the lower castes, they had to face caste slurs also. Since this type of behavior was not acceptable, many state governments started campaigns to educate the people like, “Bemari ko bhagana hai bimar ko nahi”.

D. OCCURRENCE OF DEATHS DUE TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN & SHUT DOWNS

SITUATION IMPACT:

Due to the lockdown, more than 400 deaths were reported till 5th May'2020, with reasons ranging from starvation, hungry, jobless, money less, lack of water, transportation, Medicare, suicides, Exhaustion by walking, road and rail accidents, and non-availabilities of timely medical care. Among the reported deaths, most were among the marginalized migrants and migrant Workers^[6]. Around 80nos of migrant Workers died while travelling back to their hometown on the Shramik Special trains in one month since their launch.. It has been noticed that, on 8th May'2020, a freight train killed around 16 nos. of migrants and many were injured who had stopped to rest on railway tracks near at Aurangabad in Maharashtra. On 14th May'2020, again around 08(eight) nos. of migrant workers were killed and nearly 55 were injured when the truck in which they were travelling collided with a bus near Guna, Madhya Pradesh. On dtd 16th May'2020 around 24 nos. of migrant Workers were killed and many more were injured when a trailer carrying migrants (along with sacks of lime) rammed into a stationary truck, also carrying migrants in Auraiya district of Uttar Pradesh.

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As per the data collected by Save LIFE Foundation, an NGO working in road safety, around 198 nos. of migrant Workers were killed in road accidents till 2nd June'2020.

REMEDIAL MEASURES:

A.ACTION TAKEN BY THE CENTRAL & STATE GOVERNMENT:

Govt. of India Home Ministry Department issued^[7] an order to the state Governments to ensure properly that migrant Workers should not move on road or railway track during the lockdown period from their existing place to anywhere in India and permitted the state govts to use the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)^[8] for providing them food, clothes and shelter. The Central Government & State Governments issued orders that any landlords and house owners should not demand any kind of rents during the period of the lockdown. Moreover, different employers should pay the wages without any deductions of their employees concerned. However, this order was withdrawn as per the observation of the Supreme Court^[9].

The Central Govt also announced that those who have violated the lockdown rules/norms, and started their journey by walk they will have to be sent to government-run quarantine centres for 14 days and the state governments should set up immediate relief camps for the migrant workers returning to their native states.

In the month of May 16th, the central government announced the National Migrant Information System (NMIS)^[10] i.e. an online database created by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)^[11] for enrollment of names and details family members of migrant Workers for streamlining the movement of the migrant Workers, also, the same shall be helpful to the different states to find out the current number of stranded migrant Workers and their location. For the tracing purposes, the government planned to keep the migrant Workers updated by feeding their all data and phone numbers in the system for future.

B.TEMPORARY RELIEF CAMPS AT DIFFERENT PANCHAYATS:

As per directives of the central government^[12] in late March'2020, all state governments set up thousands of camps to house lakhs of migrant Workers and stop the exodus. Delhi and Jharkhand government provided free food around 4 to 5 lakh people every day, as of late March. Over 500 hunger relief centers were set up by the Delhi government and 460 Dal-Bhhat Kendra by Jharkhand Government. By 5th April'2020 more

than 70-80 lakh nos. of people were being provided food across the country in food camps run by different government and various NGOs. As of 12th April'2020, around 37000-40000 nos of relief camps and around 26000-30000 nos food camps had been set up in India at different locations. To cater to the needs of the migrant Workers and prevent them from leaving the camps, the government of Kerala changed the food menu being provided by adding north Indian dishes to the menu, providing Carrom boards and Phone recharge facilities for migrant workers as well as provided other medical essentials PPE assistance i.e. masks, sanitizers and medicines etc^[13].

C.SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES:

As of 28th May'2020 around 91 lakh nos. of migrant workers had travelled back home in government-arranged transportation facilities but, according to the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN)^[14], the migrants workers were confused about the exact procedures to register themselves for travel to their hometowns. Additionally, many state Govt. registration portals were either in English or in the local language of the states in which they were living and very few migrant workers could understand the language of the portal.

Further, general lack of information from the government to the migrant workers had resulted creation of middle men who had taken large sums of money to register them on State Govt. Portal^[15].

D.MODE OF TRAVEL BY BUSES:

Uttar Pradesh government brought back stranded student at Kota by their buses and also decided to arrange buses transportation facility at Delhi's Anand Vihar bus station to take the migrant Workers back to their villages/home towns with free travel costs. Thereby, huge crowds then gathered at the bus station Delhi, some of them got the buses but with the extension of the lockdown, many remained stranded till the last week of April'2020, when the Central governments started trains w.e.f. 1st May, 2020.

As of 23th May'2020 around 40 lakh nos. of migrant Workers were been travelled to their hometowns/villages through mode of buses operated by different state govts. to bring their workers from nearby states, however due to poor condition of buses and due to overcrowding the norms of social distancing was impossible and higher fares being charged them by bus operators, the migrant labours/workers faced lot of acute difficulties.

E. FINANCIAL RELIEF ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVT:

Soon after the nationwide lockdown was announced in late March, Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman announced around Rs. 1.7 lakh crore spending plan for the poor migrant Workers. This consisted of cash transfers and steps to ensure food security. By 3rd April'2020, the central government had released around Rs. 11,092 crore to states and UTs under the NDRF to fund food and shelter arrangements for poor migrant Workers^[16]. To help provide jobs and wages to the jobless and money less migrant Workers, the average daily wages under the MGNREGA were increased to Rs.202/ per day from the earlier price pf Rs.182/ per day as of 1st April'2020. Rs.1,000 crore from the PM CARES Fund was allocated for the support of migrant Workers on 13th May'2020. On dtd 14th May'2020, Finance Minister Smt. Sitharaman further announced free food grains for the migrant workers, targeting around 80-90 million migrant workers by spending around Rs.35 billion .

F. ARRANGEMENT OF STATE/HOME QUARANTINE:

Many states reported high numbers of positive cases of COVID-19 among the migrants returning home as lockdown restrictions eased. State governments opened thousands of quarantine centers to house them, with some states imposing mandatory institutional quarantine. Other allowed Home Quarantine to such travelers who were not having any symptoms or having mild symptoms. States also imposed strict measures for migrants to follow, either while leaving or after entering state borders^[17].

CONCLUSION:

Lakhs of migrant workers have faced lot of problem due to nationwide lockdown. The economy of the country crippled, thousands of workers lost their job. Therefore, protest occurred across the country for the reasons ranging from demanding transport, back home, food, shelter and job at their hometown. The Central & Sate Government have taken a numbers of measures for their relief. The central Govt. and on their direction the state

Govts. also taken remedial measures to shoot out the problems of migrant workers. The Prime Minister Shri.Narendra Modi ji again announce in the end of June'2020 that,25kg of staple food will be distributed to each family upto Nov'2020 as a pain reliever and economic booster doze.

The situation like COVID-19 occurs once in 100 years like in 1918, the epidemic of Japanese Flu had taken lives of millions of people, therefore, it has taught great lesson to the mankind, industry, financial institutions, different governments, medical fraternity and researcher in medical field and thus created a concept of Aatam Nirbhar Bharat.

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