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Migrants in India After Covid- 19 Pandemic: A Journey of Survival

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Abstract

Key Words- Migration, endurance, Starvation

No one imagined once the time will come and there will be the battle for back to home? Everything is scattered within minute, they leaved their birthplace for bread but now the time comes that they have to choose amongst two alternates only, to die or let them die in struggle of reverse migration. As we know Pandemic continuously widespread all over in the world. We can't avoid the issue of same in India which has drastic and terrible impact on human lives but particularly on migrant workers. Millions of people have migrated from state to state and some come to shores abroad have now wish to return back to their birthplaces. But they have brought forth the severity of the ruthless lockdown and the painful journey starts. On 25th March 2020 the lockdown started, the factories, companies were suspended, jobless labors have big question of bread, shelter and economic source to fulfill their daily needs. Many pictures in Daily News Papers tell the painful story of each one. Due to the inaccessibility of transport system some were decided to lock them in a container, some were choose their own two wheeler, bicycle and some were decide to go by walk. Some were reached their hometown but many have suffered lot in this journey. Many of them lost their lives by starvation, long walk, sunstroke and sometimes accidents. Many wounds and problems of the people were ineffable. Tired workers sat on railway line which they chosen as a safer side to escape themselves from police force have crushed by the train unknowingly. Millions of people greeted, lots of children starved and they all tried to fight for survival and endurance. Government took action for these people, tried to build up the supportive system for them but frightened workers lost their patience and have decided to go back home in any condition. Women have faced many problems, even though the pregnant women have also the members of this painful journey. The story never ends, it continues, what will be the next?

Poverty never knows any rules, it has minimum needs bread, shelter and clothes. Sometimes no shelter, no sufficient cloths but bread they want, it's the unavoidable need of life. No one can wish to die, whatever he do for hunger he will. Hunger never stopped by education, philosophy, spiritualism and law. India is a country where millions of people fight for hunger. More than 800 million people in India are considered poor. Most of them live in the countryside and keep afloat with odd jobs. The lack of employment which provides a livable wage in rural areas is driving many Indians into rapidly growing metropolitan areas such as Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore or Calcutta. There, most of them expect a life of poverty and despair in the mega-slums, made up of millions of ridged ironworks, without sufficient drinking water supply, without garbage disposal and in many cases without electricity. The poor hygiene conditions are the cause of diseases such as cholera, typhus and dysentery, in which especially children suffer and die. The effects of poverty on child health and well-being can begin during pregnancy, as low-income women are more likely to experience starvation and stress, and are less likely to receive adequate gravid care. Children who face economic hardship when they are young and have experience deep and prolonged poverty. They are major part of risky life in young age which age is the age of build up the future. But they never seen the ways. The effects of poverty and the stress associated with, it can be lasting supplying to increased risk of dropping out of school, poor adult health, and poor employment outcomes, among other adverse ramification and the impacts extend beyond individuals, too. As in the poem, 'A Morning Walk' by Nissim Ezekiel, he describes the worst situation of poverty in mega cities early in the morning. He writes,


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*Barbaric city sick with slums
Deprivation of Seasons, blessed with rains
In hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgational lanes,
And child-like masses, many tongued
Whose wages are in words and crumbs*

Poverty is considered the most common and general cause of homelessness because everything else is linked to it. Had someone not been poor, loss of his job wouldn't land him on the streets; similarly lack of public assistance is only a problem if you need it. In other words, when a person loses his job, or seeks public assistance or looks for affordable housing, he is doing it because his income is unable to help him meet his expenses. For this reason, he can be categorized as poor. Thus many poor people are forced to end up on the streets. Unfortunately a very significant portion of this population is composed of innocent children who are unfortunately trapped in it. Migrants are more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation as many of them are poor, illiterate and live in slums and hazardous locations prone to disaster and natural calamities. There is a lack of urban policies and programmes catering to the needs and settlements of migrants. Migrants cannot admittance various health and family care programmes due to their temporary status. Free public health care facilities and programs are not manageable to them. For women workers, there is no provision of maternity leave, forcing them to resume work almost immediately after childbirth. Workers, particularly those working in tile factories and brick kilns suffer from occupational health hazards such as body ache, sunstroke and skin irritation (NCRL, 1991). Migrant labourers do not have social capital and social support structures in the place to which they have migrated. They move on themselves from their native place and move to a totally new environment, and initially, they face problems adjusting to the new socio-cultural milieu. This gives rise to a good deal of psychological anguish. The absence of strong social support perpetuates the psychosocial distress and has an adverse effect on the migrant laborers' mental health (Rogaly B et al, 2002). They are forced to live on streets because their parents cannot afford a house. Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata are the largest destinations in India for internal migrants. Poverty and migration of these people for getting daily wages is the reason behind their pain. Social structure in India has shown in Indian literary world, harassment of these people is not today's problem, its came from many years and still now they have. As rightly pointed out by Laxminarayan,

"Poverty and hunger, the twin curses of mankind, debase men and women to such low levels that their sensitively dies and nothing remains sacred or respectable anymore. Human relationships lose all their significance and people merely exist: the struggle for survival consumes a life-time bereft of all hopes!"

Many of the migrants to these cities are intrastate migrants, relocating from rural areas of Maharashtra and West Bengal. And regrettably these poor migrants are attacked by lockdown policy due to COVID-19. They are less aware about the rules of Govt. regarding it. Lack of education they are unable to understand the reason behind lockdown and started reverse journey to their nest and had lot of troubles they have faced. As Sanjay Pugailia constructs their painful journey in words,

*Blue skies
Tall buildings
Wide, shining road
Green trees.
It is all so beautiful
My magnificent India.*


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What I did not see in these videos?

Helpless and ugly poor

Tired of the city

Running hungrily towards their villages.

These homeless are probably baseless

Without data, hence, invisible to me.

What I did not hear in these videos

Is that they will be walking hundreds of kilometers.

A mother and her differently-abled daughter

Countless people.

What I could not see is that

They were without transport.

Since now there is no rally

They are unimportant.

The poem has the portrayal of these migrants who walks thousands of kilometers without any facility. They walked with the fear of CARONA, lockdown and police files. They have faced multiple sufferings. Many factories and workplaces shut down due to the lockdown forced in all states of India. Millions of migrant workers had to arrangement with the loss of income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future. Resulting this, many of them and their families went hungry. They are not assure about next day's food for their family so thousands of them then began walking back home, with no means of transport due to the lockdown. In response, the Central and State Governments took various proceduresto help them, and later arranged transport for them. Many migrants were died due to the lockdown, with reasons ranging from starvation, suicides, overtiredness, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care. Governments are doing everything as they can still now, but daily wage laborers' are not watching news. When they found out and decided to leave it was too late. Some couldn't leave, others who realized to leave were stopped around border areas and were told to go back where they came from. Its horrible experience for them. The plight of stuck migrant laborers' across the country in states including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana has been splashed all over newsprint and TV screens, as social media was simultaneously exploding with maudlin testimonies of daily wage labourers who have travelled thousands of kilometers to find work and are now stuck without food or shelter. Sprawled together, men, women and children began their journeys at all hours of the day last week. They carried so many things with them, which may be worthless for us but its valuable and needy things for them. The young men carried tatty backpacks. When the children were too tired to walk, their parents carried them on their shoulders. One of the migrant 26 years young Ranjish explained to a journalist Mr. Dutt: that he is automobile worker who walking 250km (155 miles) to his village in neighboring Uttar Pradesh. It would take him four days. He said, "We will die walking before coronavirus hits us."

They went out without knowing its bad effects, they never thought about all rules and its necessity to fight against CORONA virus. Social distancing was highly impossible for these migrants even though they travelled together in large groups. According to some of them, they would rather die from the virus at their own village than starve because they have no work in cities now. Their children are paining by starvation, they can't see this worst condition. So they have chosen his way to back to home in any condition but they were caught at inter-state borders, forests between states and even on boats to cross rivers, some were arrested due to their violent behavior. Some of the migrants died of tiredness, some were died in accidents on the roads after walking or hiding in vehicles.

Without noting the instructions of government these workers have chosen to leave the workplace in any cost, they tried to escape themselves from the rules which are made in this critical situation Covid-19. All these are unaware about government policies which are made for their security and


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comfort journey. They are in hurry so majority have left the cities and lost their lives. Notably, on 8 May, a freight train killed 16 migrants who had stopped to rest on railway tracks near Aurangabad in Maharashtra. On 14 May, eight migrant workers were killed and nearly 55 injured when the truck they were in collided with a bus near Guna, Madhya Pradesh. On 16 May 24 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. According to data collected by Save LIFE Foundation, an NGO working in road safety, 198 migrant workers were killed in road accidents, as of 2 Ju On one May, the central government permitted the Indian Railways to launch "Shramik Special" trains for the migrant workers and others stranded. On 16th May, the government announced the National Migrant Information System (NMIS), an online database created by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). This was to help streamline the movement of the migrant workers. It will help states find the current number of stranded migrant workers and their location. The government planned to keep the workers updated by feeding their phone numbers in the system.

This pandemic has brutally attacked every system of nation. For the Indian health system, one of the most burdened and least funded in the world, this could be a critical moment; as government facilities are already overstressed in a highly broken, underfunded and geographically irregular health system. Every sector tried to control this worse situation, many NGO's, social activist, politicians, actors, industrialists and common people have also economically supported to government to help these migrants. Still now everyone is under pressure of it. Men, women, children, youngsters, old person, the whole system is in panic condition. No one is sure to say what will happen next moment and what can they do for it. Just now the time is, 'Wait and Watch' and follow the rules suggested by health department.

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