

Covid-19 and Returning Migrants to Villages: States Responses and Responsibility

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Abstract:

The response of the right wing Indian government to announce a nationwide lockdown has been dubbed amongst the most stringent across the world. However, in comparison the accompanying economic package and other measures of food security to ameliorate the conditions of the most deprived sections of the country in this period of near complete stalling of productive activities has been piteous. The ensuing humanitarian crisis and desperate conditions of the working class is inevitably leading many to take the difficult choice between a health risk and dying out of starvation. COVID-19 has caused extremely difficult and uncertain times for people around the world. But it is hardest for the poorest, most marginal, historically oppressed people. Among the poor in India, the women and children are the worst hit due to their invisibility and high incidence of under-nutrition. What is most heart-breaking is to see and read about the horrendous difficulties faced by the poorest migrant families, including their children. We see the breakdown of humanity, whilst hordes of migrant labor undertake the long march to 'home'. Except they end nowhere, belong to no one. The seasonal migration of agricultural labourers is not a new phenomenon in Karnataka and in India. This article looks particularly at the impact of the pandemic and resultant lockdown on migrant agricultural workers, the most deprived of the rural society in India. In this backdrop the paper on migration will review the literature and bring out the policies and measures taken by Government of India and Karnataka State for protecting the rights of migrant workers during the period of lockdown and post lockdown of COVID-19 Pandemic. The challenge is harder as the social consequences of the rural people towards a protection of their health and wealth is a herculean task in India.

Key Words: COVID-19 Pandemic, Migrant Workers, State Responsibilities, Skilled and Unskilled Labour

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Introduction and Types of Migration

Migration is a multidimensional phenomenon, which can have many positive effects because it expands the opportunities for productive work and leads to a wider perspective on many social issues, among migrants and among the population of host countries. But it can also have negative aspects, dominantly in the nature of work and work conditions and possibilities for abuse of migrant workers by employers and others. Migration has a complex and multi-layered relationship with human development: while conditions of human development in the home country determine both the need for and the nature of economic

migration, the process itself generates many and often differing human development effects upon the home country and the host country.

Migration is a both old and new human practice. There is no place or time, in which migration does not occur. However, the scale, type and implications of migration vary greatly between individuals and societies. Arup Mitra and Mayumi Murayama (2008) due to the vast size of the country and large differences in physical and human dispositions across the country, migration trend in India shows some specific features. First, among the four types of migration direction-wise, i.e., rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural and urban-to urban migration, rural-to-rural migration has been dominant. Second, with respect to the distance of migration, intra-state migration is predominant more than a half of migration took place within the district and the incidence of migration decreases as the distance becomes longer. Thirdly intra-state migrants migrated from rural to urban destinations. Fourth, migration streams in India have been dominated by females. Women constituted 66.5 per cent of total migration flows (duration 0-9 years). Women outnumbered men in intra-district as well as intra-state migration flows, thus, the longer the distance of migration is, the higher the share of male migration becomes. Of the total female migration, more than 60 per cent moved within the district. Therefore, short distance migration is the dominant form for women. Fifth, it is noted that if we take a look at the rural-to-urban migration during the last 10 years, the number of male and female was almost equal in total rural-to-urban flows. While women outnumber men in intra-state rural-urban flows, the number of male was significantly greater in case of inter-state rural-urban migration.

2011 Census Data on Migration

Sl. No.	Intra-District	Inter-district	Inter- state	Inter-region
01.	Work/business	35.1%	34.7%	30.3%
02.	Education	53.8%	32.4%	13.8%
03.	Marriage	65.4%	26.6%	8.1%
04.	Afterbirth/with household	54.8%	29.2%	15.9%
05.	Others	73.7%	18.0%	8.3%

In an era of globalization, economic or labour migration is on the rise. Due to lack of employment opportunities in developing countries and increased demands for low-wage workers in developed countries, youth, women and men are pursuing work in other countries in order to support themselves and their families back home. The above table describes the

Migration according to Census of India 2011 on Inter-district; Inter-State and Inter Region Migration on Work or Business which is the major contribution towards migration and followed by Education; Marriage and afterbirth or with household Categories. It can understand from the above table that Inter-district migration is more in percentage.

TOI (2020) According to a study, Bangalore gets lion's share of educated migrants. Bangalore, at 47.7%, got the lion's share of "highly educated migrants" (graduates and post-graduates), followed by Chennai at 36.6%, Kolkata at 36.2% and Hyderabad at 29%. Delhi is not part of the study perhaps because it was classified as a state rather than a megacity. The study, called 'How to govern India's megacities: Towards needed transformation', which was recently released by the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, was carried out on the basis of data that was available between 2001 and 2008. Bangalore tops intrastate list also According to Prof S Parasuraman, director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the results of the survey could be partly explained by the fact that though Mumbai still continues to be the hub of the manufacturing industry, the latter has become high-tech and capital-intensive and hence does not require highly educated people but smaller workers in its ancillary units. "Cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad, on the other hand, have recently come up as IT cities, which need more qualified people," he said. "Hence the migration of educated people to these cities is more than to Mumbai."

Another face of migration that the report looks at is intrastate migration (movement of people within the same state or from surrounding districts into megacities). Here too, Bangalore attracted the highest percentage of highly educated migrants (33.8%) followed by Chennai (29.2%) and Hyderabad (25.3%). Mumbai stood fourth at 20.2%, a whisker ahead of Kolkata (19.6%). The report said an accurate analysis on this line would have to await migration figures from the 2011 census which are not expected to be available before 2014. However, a limited exercise has been carried out using the data available from NSS. "The analysis also showed that while migration continues to be a significant factor in the growth of these metropolitan regions, it is still not a predominant factor. Further, much of this migration is from within the state and not from others states," the report stated, pointing out that the overall contribution of migration to urban growth in the 1991-2001 inter-census period was only about 21%.

Review of Literature

As with the literature on migration, there is no coherent theory of international migration, nor is there an agreement on the ways in which migration is a gendered process (Anne Genereux 2007: 10). Migration theories are primarily economic in nature, yet work on different levels of analysis - the individual, household, national and transnational -- and thus result in identifying different explanatory mechanisms and implications for policy. A neoclassical understanding of migration is a classic push-pull model in which wage and employment differentials are essential, that migration is about supply and demand with rational actors trying to maximize their income. The new economics of migration challenges this view by focusing on how families use migration as a strategy to minimize risk, diversify income sources and ultimately provide for larger units of related people. Dual systems theory focuses more on the pull or demand side; 'immigrants fill a demand for labor that is structurally built into modern, post-industrial economies and influencing this demand requires major changes in economic organization' (Massey 1993: 444).

According to the Uma, Madhu, Mahammad Habeeb (2013) there is two main types of migration: first, internal migration, i.e. migration within one country, and secondly international migration, which means the movement from one country to another. Agriculture labour migration is also one type of labour migration from one place to another place for their livelihood. Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional ways. Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they never had the courage to assert themselves. In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory; moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting. This movement has some time helped them to get the benefits of growth and development.

In the last twenty years, there has been an increasing amount of research on women and migration, which has begun to fill the gap created by the earlier focus on the stereotypical male labor migrant (Carling 2005). Women in earlier migration research were seen as companions to men, passive non-decision-makers in the migration process (Morokvasic 1984; Ong 1991). Currently, women migrate at same rate as men (United Nations 2006), so some of the inspiration to fill the gap arises because 'the invisibility of women in

international migration scholarship does not correspond to the reality of international migration” (Pessar and Mahler 2003: 816). Further, women’s migration experiences often differ significantly from men’s (Pedraza 1991). Manon Domingues, Dos Santo Thiser analyses the dynamics of migratory flows and growth in a developing economy. We show that when workers freely choose their location, some natives can rationally decide to return to their home country after they have accumulated a certain amount of knowledge abroad, while some prefer to stay permanently in the same economy (either at home or abroad). We point out that worker mobility can have an expansionary effect on the developing economy. Moreover, we show that in the long-run, as the sending economy develops, fewer natives are likely to emigrate and more migrants are likely to return.

In Asia, women migrants have come dominantly from three countries: the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In the Philippines, women migrants have outnumbered their male counterparts since 1992, and in all these countries women are between 60 to 80 per cent of all legal migrants for work (Asis 2003). This is because making it more difficult for women to find legal means of moving may force them to look for informal channels and smugglers, with greater risk of their own exploitation by such middlemen (Raymond et al). The world's second most populous country also has a vast diaphora spread across nearly every continent. Daniel Naujoks provides a broad overview of Indian migration flows and major populations worldwide, and discusses India's diaphora policies, refugees and asylum seekers from the region, and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Migration for Work

While the driver of the supply of migrant workers may be similar across men and women, the basic demand forces driving women’s migration for work are quite different from those of men. This is particularly true for short-term cross-border migration for work, because so much of it is driven by gender-differentiated demand for labour, determined in turn by the gender construction of work roles in most societies. This is what determines that male migrant workers tend to be concentrated in production and construction sectors, while women migrants are usually service workers. Since female migrant workers are dominantly in the care and entertainment sectors, demand for such workers is less dependent upon the economic cycle and more dependent upon longer run demographic and social tendencies in the receiving countries.

Social norms and conditions are crucial in determining the ability of women to migrate alone. Many societies have very strong social controls on the movement of women, and these may be combined with legal bans or constraints on women's out-migration, based on such attributes as age, marital status, pregnancy or maternity status, requirement of permission to migrate from the male head of household or other male relative, and so on. In addition, the nature of gender relations in the sending society is a crucial determinant of both the ability of women to migrate and the pattern of migration. In a study based on Census data of five Latin American countries that lie along a continuum of gender relations ranging from patriarchal to matrifocal systems, (Massey, Fischer and Capoferro; 2006) found very different patterns of female migration relative to male migration. In the two highly patriarchal societies (Mexico and Costa Rica) female householders displayed very low rates of migration compared to males, and marriage dramatically reduced the chances of female out-migration. But in the more matrifocal societies of Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, the ratio of female to male migration was much higher, in some case exceeding their male counterparts, and marriage or cohabitation seemed to have no effect upon the probability of female outmigration. Puerto Rico, which occupied a middle position in terms of gender relations, also seemed to blend the two migration patterns.

The data in the above table below on Migrants and Crises of Migrants at international level of the countries can be observed from the above table. The Human Development Rank of the International Migrants are very important to understand the migrants problems faced during lockdown period and also in the post lockdown period in the world. All the major countries who are economically strong falls under the category of Very High Development Index followed by High Development Index; Medium Human Development and Low Human Development respectively.

International Data on Migrants and Crises

Sl. No		Country	HDI Rank, 2018	International Migrants, 2019
1	Very High Human Development	Australia	3	7,549,270
2		Canada	12	7,960,657
3		USA	13	50,661,657
4		Belgium	17	1,981,919
5		Japan	19	2,498,891
6		Israel	22	1,956,346
7		Italy	28	6,273,722
8		UAE	34	8,587,256
9		Chlie	44	939,992
10		Russian Federation	49	11,640,559
11		Malaysia	57	3,430,380
12		Iran	60	2,682,214
13	High Human Development	Costa Rica	63	417,768
14		Turkey	64	5,876,829
15		Serbia	67	820,312
16		Mexico	67	1,060,707
17		Venezuela	78	1,374,690
18		Lebanon	80	1,863,873
19		Thailand	83	3635,085
20		Ukraine	88	4,964,293
21		Libya	108	818,216
22		Medium Human Development	South Africa	113
23	Egypt		115	504,053
24	Indonesia		116	353,135
25	Tajikistan		127	274,071
26	India		130	5,154,737
27	Bangladesh		136	2,185,613
28	Congo		137	402,142
29	Kenya		142	1,004,854
30	Nepal		149	490,802
31	Pakistan		150	3,257,978
32	Syrian Arab republic		155	867,848
33	Nigeria		157	1,256,408
34	Low Human Development	Sudan	167	1,223,092
35		Cote dlvoire	170	2,549,141
36		Ethiopia	173	1,253,083
37		Democratic republic of the Congo	176	963,833
38		Yemen	178	385,628
39		Mali	182	486,230
40		Chad	186	512,230
41		South Sudan	187	865,552

Source: World Migration Report 2020

The population of 100 million internal migrant workers, who are estimated to form 20 per cent of India's workforce, have been the worst sufferers in the unplanned lockdown that started on March 25. They have been stranded in the cities and other locations of work, without wages, money and food. The images of migrant workers walking hundreds of kilometres to reach their villages during the lockdown brought this otherwise invisibilised population under public eye.

Ranjini Basu (2020) The Indian statistical datasets have been inefficient in capturing actual extent of short term circular migration. Therefore, the estimations of worker population migrating for different occupations have largely remained under-reported. However, there have been definitive trends of increasing number of internal migrants moving from rural to urban areas for work between the decadal census findings of 2001 and 2011. Studies using railway data found that between 2011-2016, an average of nine million workers undertook interstate travel. This trend has been directly commensurable with the heightened agrarian crisis in the countryside, which has been marked by falling farm incomes and increasing indebtedness whose most disturbing ramification although not a robust measure has been a sharp rise in incidences of farmer suicides.

Among the various categories of migrant labourers in India, one category is of the seasonal workers employed in agriculture and related activities. Data shows that the agricultural labourers, who take upon rural to rural inter district and interstate seasonal migration, predominantly belong to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories, making them one of the most deprived strata of the rural hierarchy. With their mobility restricted this very section faces one of the greatest brunt of the pandemic lockdown.

In order to fully gauge the harshness of the blow that has befallen on these agricultural labouring classes, the pandemic has to be situated within the context of the pre COVID-19 economic conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis comes at a time when the Indian economy was already reeling under an extended period of stagnation, and fall in demand. The slump in consumption was most evident in rural India in the months leading up to the pandemic, all through last year with the same trend continuing well into this year, showing no signs of recovery. This demand crisis has been attributed prominently to the fall in days of employment available to manual workers along with a slowing down of the wage rates. Research shows that real wage growth for rural labourers plunged from 14.6 per cent in

2014 to a mere 1.1 per cent in 2019. Women labourers fared even worse receiving four fifths of the wages that were paid out to men in the harvest and post-harvest agricultural operations. Under such conditions, the present agricultural season was even more crucial for the rural workers to fight their daily battles of hunger and destitution. Village studies have come to show that in the Indian countryside there no longer exists a pure class of agricultural labourers as a result of declining days of employment available in agriculture. However, there is a class which can be classified as manual workers, who shift from seasonal agricultural work to non-farm manual work in the lean season. It is this same class that the migrant agricultural workers belong.

COVID-19 and Impact on Migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented health crisis world-over, where we are still grappling with the unknown characteristics of the virus. This is also an economic crisis of such scale that many wonder whether the world economy will ever revive back to its pre pandemic days. This health crisis has laid bare the fissures of the neoliberal economic regime and the widening inequalities of the last three decades of its domination. The health crisis has acted upon these pre-existing inequalities and made it more brutal for those belonging to the marginalized classes, social groups and gender. Then impact of Covid-19 on Migrant Workers in India is miserable to see and unexpected migrant workers have started moving towards their home town during the lockdown period. India's nationwide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 pandemic has critically dislocated its migrant population. Lacking jobs and money, and with public transportation shut down, hundreds of thousands of migrants were forced to walk hundreds of miles back to their home villages with some dying during the journey. The central government imposed the lockdown and closed businesses when India reached around 500 cases of COVID-19. Local authorities followed with measures such as creating strict containment zones to close off hotspots, which left millions of migrant workers stranded. The country's rapid response slowed down the spread of the disease, but also raised concerns about exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. As India has started to relax some lockdown restrictions, speakers discuss the impact of the COVID-19 virus and containment measures on the most vulnerable groups in India, and explore the social policy measures and employment opportunities that can protect informal and migrant workers from hunger and extreme poverty.

Top Destinations and origin of Migrants in India, 2011

Sl. No	Top Destination	Migrants (Million)	Top Origins	Migrants (Millions)
1	Maharashtra	9.1 (17)	Uttar Pradesh	12.3(23)
2	Delhi	6.3(12)	Bihar	7.5(14)
3	Uttar Pradesh	4.1(7)	Rajasthan	3.8(7)
4	Gujarat	3.9(7)	Maharashtra	3.1(6)
5	Haryana	3.6(7)	Madhya Pradesh	3.0(5)

*Figures in parentheses represent the share (%) of total interstate migrants in India.

Source: Economic and Political Weekly-2020

The top destinations and Origin of Migrants in India can be observed from the above table. Maharashtra state is the top one Destination for Migrants in search of their livelihood and for skilled and unskilled opportunities which are found abundant in Maharashtra State particularly in Mumbai City.

COVID-19 has ground the country to a halt creating more uncertainty for the already vulnerable population of domestic migrant workers and their families. The construction industry, manufacturing, trade, transport, and hospitality sectors are major employers of migrant workers. Many also work as domestic helpers, handymen and street vendors. These workers usually end up in the informal economy, earning \$2 on a good day. Post COVID-19, their situation has worsened. Devoid of homes and food, many of them have been forced to take shelter in government-run relief camps. Kerala, so far, has the largest number of government-run relief camps for migrant workers (15,541 out of the 22,567 across India), followed by Uttar Pradesh (2230), Maharashtra (1135) and Tamil Nadu (175). Apart from the existing camps, the government has given orders to set up additional relief camps to prevent the mass exodus of migrant workers from cities to villages. However, camps and government shelters are just interim solutions. The Indian government has unveiled a 23 billion US\$ economic stimulus plan which would cover around 800 million people over the next three months. The package entails 5kg of wheat or rice per person every month, a gas cylinder per month for poor families, and some cash subsidies; however, these will likely not reach many migrant workers who are far from their registered addresses. In addition, over 100 million people are possibly excluded from enrollment in the public distribution system (PDS) because the state-wide numbers of eligible persons for subsidised foodgrains have not been updated to reflect population increase. Under the National Food

Security Act (NFSA), the per-state allocation is still being calculated on the 2011 census figures.

The lockdown has caused a serious crisis in the lives of migrant workers. While the government has announced some relief measures for migrant workers, they have not yet reached the public due to deficits in their implementation. Social distancing doesn't work without social security. And as state governments and urban municipal bodies have evidently failed to take care of them, going back to their villages, even on foot, is their only option. Left with no choice, a large number of workers and their families have been [26] travelling enormous distances to reach their homes. The mass exodus of workers from Delhi and Mumbai, two of the states that receive the largest number of workers, revealed the palpable fear among the migrants and their families. Even though no one can say with absolute certainty what the current pandemic will spell for the Indian economy, the present conjecture points to a world where the future for migrant workers looks grimmer by the day.

A widely-quoted figure based on the 2011 census and on NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) data, asserts there are 65 million inter-state migrants, of which a third are workers so around 22 million. By conservative estimates, 30 per cent of these depend on daily work, and an equal number are employed on a regular basis, but in the informal sector. Anil Dharker (2020) right from the start, the fight against COVID-19 has suffered from the invisibilising of the poor. When the PM asked people to fight the virus with thaalis and light from their balconies, he forgot that the poor don't have balconies. When social distancing was made a central point of the campaign, the impossibility of it in slums was overlooked. Worst of all, was the lack of the anticipation that without work, savings or food, migrant workers and their families would want, and attempt, to rush home. When the rush could no longer be ignored, it still took five weeks to announce the resumption of trains. But even this was conditional for migrants: Their origin state (say Maharashtra), should first want the workers to leave, and then the destination state (say UP), should agree to have them. Such an arrangement was bound to fail, and it did. In announcing the lockdown, the central government had invoked the Disaster Management Act, which overrode state governments' powers: But when it came to the migrants' transportation, suddenly, without notice, why was the onus transferred to the states? The chaos this caused could be gauged from the desperate crowds at Dadar and Ghaziabad, and other stations. So, again the decision was reversed, but only on May 19. Further, it has taken the central government 53 whole days to set up NMIS

(National Migrant Information System), an online dashboard for the states to put up figures so that they can monitor the movement of people. If policy-makers had abandoned their middle-class value systems and thought of our country's invisible multitudes in time, they would have commandeered the whole rail system on a war footing, organised buses and trucks, food stations en route, and put cash and essential rations in each starving hand.

Government Initiatives taken for Migrant Workers

The lockdown was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 for 21 days in a bid to combat the coronavirus endemic. While extending the lockdown till May 3, the Prime Minister declared that select activities will open up from April 20 in identified areas. Soon after the lockdown was first announced, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from different parts of the country were stranded in India. Framing a National Employment Policy to look into labour welfare, setting up of a 'Migrant Workers Welfare Fund' and enrolling them under Ayushman Bharat these are some of the measures suggested by a ministerial panel to motivate the workers to get back to work.

According to sources in the government, a group of ministers (GoM) led by Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot has recommended to the Modi government a slew of measures to encourage lakhs of migrant workers, who have returned or are returning to their native villages after losing jobs due to the Covid-19 lockdown, to come back to the cities and resume work. The panel has also suggested setting up a 'Migrant Workers Welfare Fund' under which every migrant worker should be automatically enrolled into the fund that will operate on equal contributions from the worker, employer, home state government, destination state government and the central administration. The migrant workers leaving the big cities has resulted in a huge shortage in the workforce, threatening to cripple businesses and industries where they worked before the lockdown. "The labour force was one of the most crucial links in the supply chain. With them gone, work has been affected all over, in industrial and manufacturing units, small and big businesses, retail chains, etc. There will be damaging consequences if the migrant workers don't return."

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