

Problems Faced by the Migrant Labourers during Covid Pandemic Lockdown

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Abstract

Last year lockdown had been implemented at the end of March. After announcement of lockdown, migrant labourers had been forced by their employers for leaving their working places. These migrant labourers had been worked in different states as daily or casual labour. They had been very badly affected by this lockdown. This article has been tried to portray their lockdown experiences. Very specifically through this paper I have been tried to explore their painful experiences of their return journey. I have been prepared this paper on the basis of secondary data which have been collected from various sources like-book, newspaper, internet, journal etc. I have been used 10 narratives for understanding their experience.

From the collected data I have understood that all migrants had been faced monetary and other essentials related problem during covid-19 lockdown and then transport facility was also unavailable to them and that had been created a big problem. In road they had been faced different problems like- road accident, police harassment, misguiding etc. In this way they had been tried to reach their home during that hard time.

Keywords: lockdown experience, monetary crisis, struggle, return journey

Introduction

Migrant workers are always been considered as the most vulnerable section of our society. They are poor, lower castes and landless. Increasing landlessness or joblessness in local areas had been pushed them in other works. Regions like- Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat and largely eastern UP are considered as the 'large influx of migrants'. So, these are the most popular 'source regions' of migrants. These regions are economically very much deprived. Therefore people are not able to collect their essential resources from those areas (the place of origin). Therefore they have migrated in different places (destinations). During lockdown they had been decided to move from their destination to source. Therefore we had been observed the horrible incidence of reverse migration (Dandekar and Ghai, 2020).

During lockdown they had been faced problems like-starvation, malnutrition, joblessness, food shortage, deficit of cash and so on. Then they had been decided to return their homes. They had decided to walk hundreds of kilometres for returning their home (Varma, 2020). So, they had started walking through highway. In some cases they hired expensive buses for returning their home. During their journey they had been violated the norms of social distancing (Kalhan, et.al. 2020).

Government had been totally ignored the existence of these marginalised migrant labourers. Though there are 14 crore migrant workers throughout India and amongst them 10 crore were inter-state migrants (Dutta, 2020). Employers have always looked them as 'commodity' not as "dignified citizens". Cities are also looked them as migrant workers not 'human beings'. But when they poured out of the same cities and started walking through the highways then "they became a phenomenon" which had been totally impossible to ignore by the civil society. That was observed in different metro cities like- Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, etc. (Bates, 2020).

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Method

For preparing this paper I have been used qualitative method. I have been used narratives for exploring their experience. In this paper I have been used ten narratives (individual and community both). I have been collected those narratives from different secondary sources like- websites, newspapers, journals, articles, etc.

In the following I have been discussed about those narratives:

1. Surat Ram Kushwaha is a migrant labour who had been worked Amritsar as a mason. After the announcement of lockdown he walked over 600 k.m. from Amritsar with other migrants. In an interview he said, he had nothing to eat or drink during that journey (Chakraborty, 2020).
2. Sanjay Kumar Singh is a migrant labour. In a firm of Ambala he had been worked as an electrician. He said on 1st May, 2020 their contractor had forced them to leave that place. Taking his all things (like-LPG cylinder, stove, table fan, cot, table and bed, etc.) he had given him only Rs. 2000 and an old bicycle. He also did the same with other workers. In road police had been stopped them and arranged a bus for them and by selling their bicycles they had been arranged bus fare (Srivastava, 2020).
3. On 28th April 2020, Dharamveer (age 32) started cycling from Delhi to Bihar. On April 29, the Centre announced conditional movement of migrants (Wednesday) by bus. Then he decided to return his native place by cycling. On Friday night (1st May, 2020), he had been collapsed near UP's Shahjahanpur and died (Singh, 2020).
4. Tabarat Mansoor (age 50), started cycling on April 25 from Maharashtra for reaching his home in Uttar Pradesh. He cycled over 390 k.m. and reached Madhya Pradesh. Thereafter he died on 30th April (Ninan, 2020).
5. Jamlo Kadam (age 12) started walking from Telangana. There she worked in a chilli farm. On last 15th April, 2020 she had been decided to return her home in Chhattisgarh. The distance between her working place and home was 150 k.m. For reaching her home she had been started walking on April 15 and thereafter on 18th April she died just 50 k.m. far from her village (Chakraborty, 2020).
6. 10 migrant labourers of East Burdwan (West Bengal) had been started walking from Madhubani, Bihar on last April, 27. Approximately it was 580 k.m. journey. Over five and half days they had been able to cover 220 km. Then they had decided to ride train and they did that. Unfortunately they were misguided by the rail police and travelled in the wrong direction (Patnaik, 2020).
7. 12 migrant labourers of East Midnapore district of West Bengal had decided to come back their home from Agra. They had been started their journey from there on last 11th May. In their way they had also been misguided by the rail police and thereafter, finally on last 13th May they had been reached their home (Ghose, 2020).
8. On last 16th May three migrant workers had been tried to reach their house in Purulia through walking. They had been worked for a contractor in Kolkata. After implementation of lockdown measurement all had been stopped. Even their contractor had been ignored to give them some money for their return (Purohit, 2020).
9. Ramu Ghormore is a 32 years old migrant labour. In Hyderabad he worked as a labourer under a contractor. After the implementation of lockdown measures he had lost his job. Then it was difficult for them to arrange two meals a day. So, he had decided to come back his home at Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh (Elsa, 2020).
10. Migrant labourers who had come through Shramik Special Train also faced different types of inhuman experience. Last 27th May 2020, Ranjit Tamang and his family (along with his wife, wife's sister and her husband, his mother-in-law and son) had boarded the NJP bound Shramik Special Train in New Delhi but their happy journey turned into sad when his mother-in-law had died in Shramik Special (Chhetri, 2020).

Results

From the above narratives we have understood that the lockdown phase was really hard for them. Nationwide complete lockdown was a sudden decision and after implementation of lockdown all kinds of important activities had been totally stopped throughout the nation. Inter-national air travel, train, bus all these had been stopped suddenly. So, the migrant workers were not get the opportunity to return back their home. Even at the very first stage of lockdown they didn't able to imagine its devastative effect because the first phase of lockdown was announced only for 21 days. There after it had been extended for several times.

Their earnings had been totally stopped from the first phase of lockdown. In some cases their employers had not paid them for March, 2020. Many were deprived from their fair wages. Though they had been tried to cope with that situation with their small savings but gradually the situation had been changed and it had been taken much more complex form. So, finally these migrant workers had been decided to return their native place. During their journey they had been faced different difficulties. Even a good number of people had lost their life in road. They had never imagined about it but it happened. In this way they had been struggled for their survival (Vijayan, 2020).

Discussion:

The pandemic had been worstly hitted the poor, minorities and rural population including women. Different survey reports had been claimed that lockdown had badly affected the migrants of informal sector.

On last 18th August, 2020 International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Asian Development Bank (ABD) jointly published their report. The title of that report was "Tackling the Covid-19 Youth Employment Crisis in Asia and the Pacific". The report says 4.1 million Indian youths had lost their jobs during covid-19 pandemic and majority of them had engaged in construction and farm sectors (Singh, 2020).

Azim Premji University had been conducted a survey on migrant workers. That survey was conducted between 8th to 13th April 2020 among the migrant workers of different states which had been revealed that 90% migrant workers did not get their payment from their employers, 96% migrant labourers did not get ration from the government and 70% migrant labourers did not cooked food (Azim Premji University, 2020).

From the mentioned narratives we came to know that many migrant labours had been decided to return back their native place through walking. Govt. had been also arranged Shramik special trains for them but that experience was not smooth.

Conclusions

Mainstream society always have been looked them as commodity. Even they have no right to enjoy the status of citizen. Cities are always looked them as migrant workers not 'human beings'. Therefore mainstream society doesn't bother about them but when they had been started walking through highways then we suddenly discovered them. We have never observed it before. So, it's a newly emerged research area and the problems of migrant workers are basically multi-dimensional and interested scholars can explore its different perspectives in their own way.

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