



Impact of the Pandemic on the condition of Migrant Workers: An Overview

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Abstract:

Pandemic a word that has generated fear in the minds of human beings. The worst affected individuals during this Pandemic were the Migrant workers. The Pandemic situation has put forward certain demanding regions that need to be addressed well for a smooth and healthy work environment promising the dignity and worth of an individual. For presenting this analysis, the researcher has tried to cover the views of all the important stakeholders (Standard News Articles, Government, Supreme Court) catering to solve the situation of migrant workers in this Pandemic situation. Effective social dialogue with the mediation of a professional stakeholder is the need of the hour.

Keywords- Migrant Workers, Professional Social Worker.

Introduction:

The outbreak of coronavirus infection 2019 (COVID-19) has made a worldwide wellbeing emergency that has deeply affected the manner in which we see our reality and our regular daily existences. (Frontiers, 2020). In a roundabout way, Billions of individuals are enduring the effects of this pandemic. The worst affected individuals during this Pandemic were the Migrant workers. Article 11(1) of the Convention 1949 of the International Labour Organisation, defines migrant for employment as a person who migrates from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his or her own account. "With neither food nor cash, migrant workers have been pushed to the brink of starvation, alarming levels of vulnerability and extreme indignity." (Pandey, 2020)

As indicated by the recent Periodical labour Force Survey conducted by NSSO in 2017 that there are more than 81 lakh migrant workers who had vulnerable jobs. (Ramani, 2020) More than four out of five people (81%) in the global workforce of 3.3 billion are currently affected by full or partial workplace closures. (The Hindu, 2020)

Therefore, to assess the situation of migrant workers during this Pandemic, the researcher has undertaken this study. This study will help in identifying the role played by both the management as well as The Government on the situation of migrant workers and the efforts taken by them to cater to the problems of migrant workers during the Pandemic. Also, this will help the future social workers to assess themselves and prepare themselves for the diverse issues coming their way.

Methodology:

The focus of this study is basically to look into the conditions of migrant workers during lockdown resulted due to COVID-19 outbreak. The researcher for presenting this paper focussed on the secondary data. To assess the views of media, different news articles from March-May 2020 has been included. For assessing the Views of the Government, Official press releases and reports from March-May 2020 has been consulted.

Challenges faced by Migrant workers during the Pandemic: A Review of the Assertions by Standard News Articles.

The population of 100 million internal migrant workers, who are estimated to form 20 percent of India's workforce, have been the worst sufferers in the unplanned lockdown that started on March 25 (Basu, 2020). The overall unemployment rate showed a sharp increase in the two weeks following the lockdown. (Radhakrishnan, 2020).

Contract workers are usually the most vulnerable and the first to be laid off in the event of such downturns. (Nahata, 2020). The study conducted by Jan Sahas, which surveyed 3,196 migrant workers across northern and central India 27-29 March 2020. Pointing that, a major reason for the food and financial insecurity is the low wages the migrants earn. Owing to the highly informal and exploitative nature of the world, laborers are most frequently paid much below the wage rates prescribed by the local administration.

Over 40% of migrant workers surveyed didn't have any food supplies, commonly referred to as ration in India. (Kapoor, 2020). Understandably, these numbers indicate that the current nationwide lockdown has been the biggest job-destroyer ever in the history of the country.

Older problems such as forced labour and exploitation are likely to show cascading effects in the time to come as another concern is that more than 90 percent of labourers in India are in the informal sector and are casually employed, being unprotected by any law. Arising as a threat from the same situation, the burden of forced labor may get further heavier and the workers may have to work overtime for which there is hardly any perk. (Sharma, 2020).

Lack of job security, paid leave, or job contract makes them vulnerable to vagaries of the labour market. The informal sector leads to a state of destitution, hunger, starvation, and even death, if not protected with an immediate social safety net. (Khan and Mansoor, 2020).

Efforts of Government to Ease out the plight of Labours during Pandemic (COVID-19)

To the unpredicted challenges faced by humans during this pandemic situation the worst affected were the migrant workers. So to help the migrant workers during this pandemic situation, the Government has taken certain meaningful steps to curb the problems.

Home Ministry issued orders for states and union territories to set up immediate relief camps for the migrant workers trying to reach their domicile states. As per the guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shramik Special trains run since 1st May 2020. Railways clarified that more than 2,813 such trains carried over 37 lakh passengers including migrant workers to their domicile states. Further to minimize inconvenience to the passengers, the railways had procured resources to provide them with meals and other supplies during the journey.

For monitoring purposes, the ministry has set up a 24*7 control room to look at the situation of migrant workers.

Under the auspicious of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Government of India with Food Corporation of India to provide free of cost food grains to about 8 crore migrant workers not covered under the National Food Security Act for May and June 2020. The government of India will bear the entire cost of Rs. 3500 Crore.

For assuring national portability the scheme of one nation one Ration card will be enhanced to allow the migrant workers to access food in other states as well. This enhancement scheme will be completed in two phases- about 83 percent by August 2020 and 100 percent by March 2021.

For the organized sector, the government will pay a provident fund contribution of both the employer and the employee put together at 24% for the next three months. This is for those establishments with up to 100 employees and 90% of them earning less than Rs 15,000 per month.

The EPFO regulation will be amended so that workers can draw up to 75% of the amount for their contingency expenditure. This will benefit 4.8 crore workers. Also for 3.5 crore construction workers, state governments have been directed to use the welfare fund for building and construction laborers which has about Rs 31,000 crore to help those who are facing economic disruption because of the lockdown.

Enhanced MNREGA scheme by increasing the wage rate Rs 182 to Rs 202, amounting to an increase of Rs 2000 per worker. This will benefit 5 crore people.

Efforts of State Government to help migrant workers

1	Uttar Pradesh	<p>1000 rupees compensation to Migrant workers and labours.</p> <p>Medical teams for screening Migrant workers and labours.</p> <p>Skill mapping for Skill building of 18 lakh workers.</p>
2	Kerala	<p>To remove stigma, it decided to name migrant workers as Guest workers.</p> <p>Focusing on community kitchens to feed migrant workers.</p>
3	Telangana	<p>Government announced that they will provide food, shelter, medical as well as financial support to 3 lakh migrants.</p>
4	Odisha	<p>Launched helpline numbers and appointed nodal officers for contacting migrant workers stranded in other states. This move is helping around fifty thousand migrant workers.</p>
5	Jharkhand	<p>Launched mobile app for around six lac migrant workers stranded in other states belonging to Jharkhand.</p>

Intervention by the Supreme Court:

Looking at the recent plight of migrant workers during this pandemic the Apex Court had issued guidelines on 26 May 2020.

- The apex court asked the state government to have a collaborating approach in travel fares while planning journeys for migrant workers.
- The court asked the railways to bear the travel expenses of migrant workers trying to return home.
- It is the responsibility of the state to provide food, shelter, and water to the migrant workers waiting for transport.
- Assigned the responsibility to the railways of meals to migrant workers during the journey.
- In case of a journey by buses the concerned state where the workers started from had to take care of their meal.

- The states are advised to set up kiosk centers for migrant workers to speed up the registration process and to provide them effective transport facility for dropping their respective places.
- For the workers walking the distances to their places should be escorted to the nearest relief camp by the concerned state.
- It shall be the duty of the receiving state to provide necessary amenities like screening, transport, and health facilities free of cost.
- Advised the Government to take concrete steps for monitoring and transportation.
- The Apex court also urged for the uniform policy between the Centre and State government with regards to Migrant Crisis.

Social workers in Industries: A mediator between Government, Management and Workers

The situation arisen due to the Pandemic is new to the world. It has posted many challenges, but the challenges that it creates of migrant workers are harsh. Generally, the situation of unemployment accompanied by helplessness has the potential of breaking an individual's morale and confidence.

The circumstances of reverse migration, relaxation in many labor laws, and lost reliance on workers have created a situation of fear. In such a situation, normal help may not work effectively for catering to it a professional need is of utmost importance.

Analyzing the present scenario makes it clear that a social dialogue among workers and management is missing. For such subtle tasks, social workers are professionally trained, which includes micro and macro-level approaches for assessment of the problem, problem identification, and intervention.

It is time to revise that age-old provision of Welfare officers (Under Factories Act 1948) and replace it with the professional social workers. This can be done by merging both the posts- ascertaining the position as well as the freedom to work for the betterment of workers as well as management in the long run.

Professional social workers will be an asset to the organization as well as for the Government. His professional attribute in handling multiple tasks of helping individual workers, management in policies, planning, and

implementation, and as a representative of the Government for smooth operations will be a fruitful solution for many problems.

Also, this situation will challenge the profession of Social work to widen its scope and importance. For future students, effective training in industrial settings and Government Organisations should be made the compulsory part of their fieldwork curriculum.

Discussion and Suggestions:

The migrant worker that was a silent parody whispering a few months ago gets echoed in this push-up situation resulted out of Pandemic and its subsidiary problems. Discussion on the plight of migrant laborers reveals the position of Government to deal with such an unforeseen situation. This pandemic and its aftermath effects have not only raised the questions on the efficiency of Government but also uncovered the greed ridden industrial setups building profits on the shoulders of workers. For continuous two months, the plight of migrant workers was raised by the renowned media personalities, civil societies, Human rights watch and so on. This situation even compelled the Supreme Court to take Suo Moto cognizance of the situation.

Looking at the present situation, merely relying on short term measures to some extent may help in combating short term problems but to be called Self-Sufficient, should include long term structural measures.

For the time being the suggestions can be many and it should come from different brains to tackle this situation.

Some of them can be-

- A complete database of workers. A one-stop destination for registration. It should be made mandatory for each worker to register himself before accepting any work. Also, mandatory on the part of employers to get such workers registered.
- The process to register themselves should be made extremely simple and its importance can be taught through the advertisement.
- Training form the most essential part of awareness.
- It should be made compulsory for employers to provide shelter, security, and food during any unforeseen situation.

- Large-scale, integrated, policy measures were needed, focusing on four pillars: supporting enterprises, employment, and incomes; stimulating the economy and jobs; protecting workers in the workplace; and, using social dialogue between government, workers, and employers to find solutions. (The Hindu, 2020)

Conclusion:

The workers/laborers are considered to be an important pillar of the production process on which the Nation's economy is dependent. But, the actual situation of any category gets uncovered during an emergency, one that has crippled the world right now. India being a founding member of ILO has always pledged to provide justice to its Laborers. This unforeseen situation has led us to a position where we need to rethink solutions for the lower stratum of the society- the migrant worker, who in search of employment and food has traveled miles and settled in an entirely unknown place. There is a need for revising our policies and designing them with the participation of laborers and social stakeholders for reducing such unaccounted cruelties in the future. Effective social dialogue with the mediation of a professional stakeholder is the need of the hour. To carve the efficient picture of India on the front of the Developmental Indexes bottom-up approach and its actual representation is a necessity.

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