

Migrant Worker's Livelihood and Marginality: State and Non-state Actor's response to Pandemic Situation of COVID-19 in India

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has created a huge challenge in the lives of people for survival and especially for the state to deal with it. In a country, like India where a large number of people are living under poverty, migration has been the key livelihood strategy for survival. Migration and its impacts are not affirmative for those who come from the historical, structural underprivileged and disadvantageous group. Their lives and livelihoods are scattered around marginality. Migrants from poor socio-economic, distressed situations to meet the survival needs face a lot of challenges before and after migration. Considering these issues as background, this paper is to explore and analyze concerns and visibility of issues of the migrant worker, migration as livelihood strategy and struggle at the destination as well as at the source and; the state's action and civil society organisation's solidarity towards the migrant in COVID-19 pandemic lockdown e.g. (elsewhere) media coverage mention the lack of state policy addressing such migrant workers issues and their need to deal with COVID-19 situation.

This Paper follows digital ethnography, applies primary data from a PhD

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research study about the Musahar Community in Uttar Pradesh and data through telephonic interaction with migrant workers in Mumbai. Purposive sampling technique has been applied for additional data, considering the objective of the paper about marginality and migrants, through telephonic interviews of social workers in two slums of Mumbai in Jogeshwari and M-East Ward area. Author has also collected data from the five Musahar community members who migrated to Maharashtra. Paper has observed the voices of the community through the media dialogue. The paper also tries to bring analytical understanding from observations around the argument migrant work's marginality and contribute to the concerns of migrant issues of livelihood & marginality along with the state's mechanism; and explore alternative ways to address such problems.

1.Introduction

In rural parts of India, the majority of the workforce depends upon the agricultural sector for livelihoods. Among them, so called 'lower caste' communities in rural areas are mostly involved in daily wage work related to agriculture, construction, and other wage works for their survival. In the absence of agricultural or other wage work opportunities, a large number of employable workforces migrate to nearby or far urban workplaces to fill their stomachs and social needs. Such migrant workers in large numbers engage, in urban areas, who provide various manual and unskilled labour to mostly informal small or medium industries. This migrant group is different from those who migrate for higher income or better opportunities, as the latter group are mostly involved in trained or skilled service delivery. Jha and Sengupta (2020) mentioned 90 percent of the workforce are in the

informal sector. The pattern of migration of a former group of workers is not uniform, and many of them do not have any security in terms of accommodation, network as a social capital and state based policy benefit.

The breakout of COVID-19 outbreak has unpacked the reality of migrants in many cities such as Mumbai and Delhi where a large workforce are migrants. The announcement of complete lockdown from states and central government affected informal labour migrant workers at most. Media has also reported it widely; in terms of accommodation, food, travel, health, stigma on migrants and even family at home etc. This paper mainly focuses on the struggle of migrant workers' for livelihood, coping up with COVID-19 situations and to understand state's (Central and State governments) mechanism along with how non-state (civil society and individuals) actors' respond to the migrants and their situation. State's role in framing policies and ensuring quality implementation is an anticipated expectation of society. Socio-politically, India being a welfare state has a proactive role towards the citizens and especially for those who are at the edge of the poverty line. Robson (2018) describes various positions of welfare state, a form of society characterized by the system of democratic government sponsored welfare placed on new footing and guarantee of collective social care to its citizens. In a crucial aspect of such pandemic, state is a key decision-maker and caretaker for every member of society. India being the largest democracy of a dense network of the bureaucratic system has a lot of potential to deal with the situation.

There is a general consensus that the poorest suffer the most in any crucial situation, as, Buheji et al. (2020) highlight while talking about impact of

pandemic on the global poverty as repercussions all social classes people both in developed as well as in countries with extreme poverty, such as India. In the case of migrants, COVID-19 pandemic is another layer of marginality over the existing marginalised situations who face struggle on an everyday basis in their normal lives. Pandemic was like a social tsunami in their livelihoods. Nevertheless, in such a scenario, a question emerged over the state's role, mechanism and process to deal with the pandemic over the conditions of the poor and specifically migrant workers. This paper put light on the existing situation of migrant workers; their livelihood and struggle; and stress due to the pandemic for the migrants' livelihoods in the slums as a destination as well as their families living at source in the rural parts. This paper has an objective to highlight the concerns of the migrant worker's livelihood and marginality emerged during the lockdown in the pandemic of COVID-19.

2. Methodology, Objective and Scope of Paper

This paper, primarily, is based on secondary sources and specifically collected voices covered by digital media, social media, print media and telephonic conversation. Digital ethnography approach has been applied for empirical understanding. This paper has also considered primary data collected about the Musahar community in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh as part of the author's PhD research. This data consists of an in-depth interview of 40 research participants including 50 percent Musahar women among three hamlets of two villages. Additionally, the author has also collected data by applying purposive sampling techniques. The lockdown did not allow a sophisticated data collection, however, the author managed to interact with

five social workers in two Mumbai slums namely Jogeshwari and M-East Ward geographical area. Author has also collected follow up data, during COVID-19 lockdown, April to May 2020 from the four Musahar community members who migrated to Maharashtra. To substantiate empirical data, the author has observed and analyzed the voices of the community through the media dialogue. Author has also analyzed and reflected the contemporary situation based on his own experience, interaction with migrants among rural communities, migrants in slums through the telephonic conversation. The applied method is mixed in terms of content analysis along voices from the migrant worker, activists, individual researcher and experience.

This paper highlights the existing situation of migrant workers; their livelihood struggle; and impact of pandemic on the migrants' overall livelihoods both at the source and destination e.g. the slums and worksites as a destination while the rural parts as the source. This paper also brings the concerns of the migrant worker's marginality emerged during the lockdown in the pandemic of COVID-19.

Theoretically, this paper's contribution fills the gaps of policy gaps and ignorance of the most marginalised migrants. As migration has a positive relationship with the process of development (King & Collyer, 2016; De Haas, 2010). However, this paper has embarked from the perspective of those who do not fall in that theoretical premise, migration brings development as their marginality does not end by the migration; it persists at both places and even perpetuates more marginality in disasters like COVID-19. Hence, this paper also proposes an agenda to rethink the migration of such groups who come from historically oppressed under the social structure of caste

and ignored in policy implementation.

3. Migration and Marginality

Migration has been a livelihood strategy of the marginalised community like many other mainstream communities. Nayak & Kumar (2018) mentions that there are many push and pull factors of migration, however, the diminishing opportunities in rural livelihood in multiple locations in India forces the workers to migrate in search of employment. The push factor for the marginalised community¹ to migrate from their village to urban work sites for daily wage work is coupled with contextual realities. 'Urban work sites', a place where a migrant worker engages, is the only place to work and to live. Rarely, workers get an opportunity to experience mainstream society in urban areas. Their lives are confined to the worksite. However, considering their struggle in rural parts, the situation remains almost similar at the destination of migration.

Marginality at Source

In the rural parts, due to the factors such as poor education status, low employability skills and lower social status, force such communities to migrate. The push factor also includes the reasons based on fulfilling their basic needs. Migration is not only for better wages, in the case of Musahar, it is a social conditional, especially in the rural parts due to distressed, stigmatised and undignified lifeworlds. Rai (2000:274) cites Ombedt to describe the migration strategy of rural lower caste communities members due to limited work opportunities and expectation of upper-caste landed

¹ Community people belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and those who are living in poor socio-economic conditions.

farmers from lower-caste laborers to accept any work offered to them on the farmers' terms (Omvedt 1979). However, laborers can decline work due to their new found ability to migrate and accumulate savings (Rai, 2000:274). In rural India, many factors which lead the migration process as Kassie et al. (2017:4) describes the migration due to pull along with push factors. Pull factors have been categorized by some scholars as either "survival-led" or "opportunity-led" respectively (Kassie et al, 2000:4 cites Ellis, 2000; Hirzel& Le Lay, 2008; Reardon & Hopkins, 2006). Survival-led diversification, which is driven by push factors, mainly occurs when poorer rural households engage in low-return nonfarm activities by necessity to ensure survival, to reduce vulnerability or to avoid falling deeper into poverty (Kassie et al., 2017:4). However, in the case of the Musahar community, who suffered most for survival from centuries due to stigmatised (ex-untouchable), poor education status, limited agricultural work opportunities and caste and social status push them to follow migration as a survival strategy.

Post Migration Marginalities

Rai (2020) describes construction worker's struggle and perception about migration in the cities. Post migration, the situation is important to observe, Srivastava (2012:15) cites Gupta and Mitra, jobs in the urban informal sector are highly segmented and comprise the people of the same caste, religion and kinship (Gupta and Mitra, 2002). Social status is directly related to getting a job and kind of work engaged. Marginalised communities could migrate where they rarely get any facilities except wages without any security as per policy from the employers. Many times, social status and caste play a significant role to keep migrant workers away from facilities and

entitlements. Lack of social capital, among lower caste marginalized communities, creates more marginalities at workplaces. Many activists and academicians have raised voices for the migrant worker's situations. However, these concerns are rarely counted in the state's manifested policy debate and discussion. In this context, the paucity of data and literature on inter-regional migration in general, and on within the Indian subcontinent in particular, is striking (Vishnu & Narendran, 2013:6).

Social capital, as an aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986), is a concern among migrants due to their caste status. However, social networks help migrants to get various information (Nayak & Kumar, 2018:317 and Misra, 2008) about the work and other information. Garip (2008:592-594) defines social capital in many aspects but specifically in terms of information, available support for food, accommodation and even getting work. In difficult situations, migrants do not have the space to raise their voice due to illiteracy, unskilled and distant location from their village. Many migrants come without accompanying any of the family members and such migrants stay in groups of more than six to eight people in a small room. They do not have any social capital except contact, related to work. Burt (2000:347) cites Bourdieu to define social capital as the resources that result from social structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:119, expanded from Bourdieu, 1980). In the case of Indian context, social capital applies differently for different castes and religious groups. This is how those who belong to privileged castes or backgrounds, live normally and their situation is better even after migration and get a better place to live. While in the slum, it is learned

during the discussion with community people in two slums of Mumbai, those who come with the family members from difficult situations, they stay in harsh situations without the least basic amenities in urban areas. Such migrant workers with family stay longer at the destination place. However, their challenges are not less than those who are migrant singles. There is always invisibility about migrant's situations and policies that benefit internal migrants. Such marginality for livelihoods is part of migrants' lives either single or with family. COVID-19 has maximized their marginality without work and forces them to go back home during the lockdown.

Marginality and Covid-19

Visibility of marginalised communities' situation, including coping mechanisms amidst lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak, has emerged at a great extent. When the state announced a lockdown for the first 21 days without considering the situation of migrants and larger underprivileged communities, this was the state's only mechanism to address the pandemic. India has a diverse income group and migrant workers who work in the unorganised sector without any entitlements, are the least earning group (Srivastava, 2020). Migrants' situation and their livelihoods were not considered in the announcement. In the imposed lockdown, it was difficult for migrant workers to continue to stay at migrant places without economic support (Jha and Sengupta, 2020:159-160), and they started to walk for hundreds of miles to reach home. Lack of accommodation for migrant workers and food to survive; and unawareness of the situation, instructions and facilities were significant challenges socially and mentally for Migrants. Literally, at this time, migrants did not have a place called 'home' to stay. In this COVID-19

outbreak, 'stay home and be safe' was a common slogan used by the government, the corporate world, financial institutions and various service providers. This slogan highlighted an important message for everyone to stay at home undoubtedly for safety and the only way to deal with this pandemic situation. State's lockdown announcement was a step for good health of the larger society, as mentioned. However, it was equally significant to have a measure to deal with the people who were living without 'home' or 'Shelter' and in absence of 'resource' to survive at least for a few days.

Analysis based on images shown and shared in print media along with recorded footage on the multimedia news channels about the migrant workers were moving migrants on foot with language and holding children towards their hometown ignoring pain for walking a long distance. It was described migrant worker carrying children, clutching their meagre possessions, crowding disrupted transport networks, beaten and resourceless, and they also faced hunger, destitution, the wrath of the police and suspicion of communities and tragic death (Ghosh, 2020; Jadhav, 2020; Jha & Pankaj, 2020 cited by Jha & Sengupta, 2020:152). Migration and emerging marginality was so unavoidable that migrants could not follow the state's instructions for the betterment of all people in the pandemic of the COVID-19.

Mostly voices and literature emerged during COVID-19 highlighting the issues of migrants specifically about the multiple marginalities. However, there is a theoretical gap of literature about the marginality in the migration due to the caste of those who migrate to survive and end up facing a lot of struggles at both ends of migration.

4. Migration and Livelihood: A case of marginality from Musahar Community

Musahar, a landless agricultural wage labourer community, living in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. On the basis of the primary data, in the Musahar community, at least one member in the family has to migrate. Second, almost every community member migrates between the age of 18-20 years and ends before 30-35 years. Their migration to the workplace was a survival strategy. Three hamlets in two villages of study in Kushinagar district, their main source of income found agricultural wage work, brick-kiln work and other manual work related to construction or *poldari* (loading and unloading). Due to low education status, as per Singh (2016) almost 83 per cent male are illiterate, Musahar are unskilled labour; their income is not more than 300 to 350 per day at the source. Musahars faced seasonality, uncertainty of work, stigma and issue of low payment. In such a situation the younger generation prefers to go out for work. There were other community members who pushed Musahars to migrate for the benefit of commission. Musahars, many times even, did not have money for migration, so they borrow money for travel expenses.

Study found Musahar community people migrate for wage work in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Karnataka Delhi, etc. for work related to construction, textile and iron industries. They rarely get a chance to experience the city culture and its practices. Most of them stayed at the worksites, and they are not much aware of the surroundings of their workplaces and have no interaction with mainstream society at any level.

At the sources, uncertainty of wage work and large expanses caused migration as a livelihood strategy for survival. However, at the destination, the wages were not compatible to make them live in urban neighborhoods, and also allow them to send money at home so they stay at sites without work. Many of them were forced to migrate as per the contractor's wish. They came to urban workplaces when work was available and went back to source, once the work was over. Most of them came through the contractors so they were fully dependent on them. Many times, they got deceived by these contractors for not paying on time or the contractor ran away taking money etc. They live at the edge of survival and save some money to send home during the migration.

The COVID-19 outbreak where people were forced to shut down all the work, factories and workshops. In such a situation, for migrant workers, it was entirely out of their reach to live without work in these workplaces. In such a situation, migrant people like Musahar find it difficult coping with the pandemic situation and live without wage work.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, four Musahar youths of Kushinagar district in Uttar Pradesh got stuck. They were working as helpers in a Sugar-cane juice shop in Maharashtra. When the lockdown was announced, the shop owner took them to native place along with. Migrant workers faced many challenges like untimely food, limited amounts of food, stale food, no fan during high peaks of summer. However, these migrant workers were asked to work on a daily basis without any payment in agricultural work or their family business e.g. Mango orchids or selling some vegetables.

On asking for paying wages, shop owners mentioned work as a household chore against the stay and food. These four youths spent almost four months without any wages, struggling for food and accommodation.

There were many such individual Musahar migrant workers who got stranded in the pandemic lockdown and they struggled a lot for food and travel. In the case of Musahar, they generally migrate without family. However, family members have struggled a lot at home without income and support.

5. Migrants, State's Role and COVID-19

Like many migrant workers, Musahars who come to urban sites, and sell their manual labour to the employers in small- and large-scale informal industries, without any assurance of social and health security. However, they are recognised as migrant workers, with in-sufficient wages. Anyone whomigrates and works in formal and recognised institutes, are not tagged with migrant workers. Being migrant workers is like a stigma on them. Second, they are under-paid, so they cannot cope with any emergency and calamity, includingthe family at the source place. In such a scenario, it is important to understand, state's role, the policies and its implementations.

In general, the policy environment for migrants is hostile: city master plans aim to keep migrants out; rural development and agriculture policies aim to control out-migration; and migration is viewed as a socially and politically destabilizing process. The result is that the costs of migration are borne mainly by the mi-

grant and governments escape the responsibility of providing them with the basic needs.

(Deshingkar, 2004:2 & Khandelwal, R., Sharma, A., and Varma, D., 2012:199)

Considering the policy intervention, migrant workers have nothing except to work on a daily basis, in informal industries, with uncertainty of work and social insecurity. Industries or workplaces in urban areas like many, are unconcerned to follow the labour laws in terms, leaves, wages as per hours, provident fund or medical facility. Khandelwal, Sharma, and Varma (2012:199) describes that the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979, is aimed at safeguarding the interests of migrants; however, it is largely obsolete and is hardly enforced anywhere. There are many challenges in that as the basic provisions of the Act require the registration of the migrants by the contractor who hires them for work (Khandelwal, Sharma, and Varma (2012:199) which the contractor never considered due to attached liabilities. Mostly, the urban labour markets treat them with opportunistic indifference, extracting hard labour but denying them basic entitlements such as decent shelter, ration, subsidized health and education (Mosse et al. 2005, cited by Khandelwal, Sharma, and Varma, 2012:197). Many times, workers have to compromise with the wages or in some conditions, migrant workers have to pay much more than the local population for basic services (Breman 1996 cited by Khandelwal, Sharma, and Varma, 2012:199).

It was a force for a migrant worker to leave when there was no work due to

complete lockdown. To continue living in the rented house during the lockdown and pay rent was difficult for individuals as well as migrants with family. To vacate the house was a force from the state indirectly and the landlord directly because of due payments of rent. In such scenario, migrants probably chose to go back to the village. In absence of transport facilities, their determination to go by walking more than thousands of miles to reach home is not the matter of choice but a force due to their marginality, poor conditions and state's unawareness. It was difficult for millions of migrant workers in India to follow the slogan, 'stay at home and stay safe'.

Migrant conditions and implementation of policies are mostly overlooked and the state rarely cross-check through labour policy and its proper implementation. However, it gained visibility in COVID-19 pandemic situation. At this pandemic, many activists and the practitioners including academicians have raised these concerns of migrants. COVID-19 outbreak lockdown affirmed unavailability of work and dependency on either small saving or other's available support. In the matter of state's positionality towards migrants and action in COVID-19 enacted from multiple causes such as state's ignorance or unawareness of migrant workers, their livelihood & living conditions, their income, their survival conditions. The migrant worker's conditions were almost similar in almost every city, faced similar problems at multiple places and cities. Another list of reasons could be not having proper mechanisms or measures to deal with this situation and take a proactive initiative to make migrant workers reach home strategically and systematically but definitely not by walking. Eventually, the announcement of lockdown at 8:00 pm on 24th March, 2020 by the Indian Prime Min-

ister gave only four hours to the people to prepare everything. One can assume the government's decision, under the pressure of safety of all the nation's people, was not wrong. Nevertheless, the existing database about the migrant workers was quoted by many academics and was not visible in the state's announcement call. The media reported reaching home ultimate need to survive even by walking on foot. However, these twenty-one days lockdowns were not smooth for migrant workers to stay without work and survive.

After the first lockdown of 21 days, extension of lockdown till 3rd May, 2020 made a difficult situation for the majority of migrant workers. Multiple media news reported about the incidences of resurgence of migrant workers on the road to return home to places like Bandra station in Mumbai and ISBT² in Delhi. Thousands of migrant workers came out of their places in large numbers to demand for arranging transportation facilities to go back home. As media reported they were demanding to arrange travel to go back home. Even until their gathering it was not in the plan of the state to think about their travel.

6. Population, Migration and Actors (state and non-state)

Trends of urban population increment slightly more than rural as Srivastava (2012:10) in 2001 to 2011 and also highlight some of population increment debate (ibid). Bhagat (2014:05) mentions India's urban population is not a mere population growth rather it is migration that contributes to urban

² Inter State Bus Terminals

population which is almost 32 percent in comparison to 27 percent (286 million) from 2010 to 2011. This visibility about the migration from rural to urban in India can also be measured as Srivastava (2012:10) cites Bhagat's (2011) estimation about contribution of natural increase to urban growth during 2001– 2011 which has declined to 44 per cent. Contribution of migrant workers is large in the urban population; this is also mentioned in the data available at census and NSS and this is part of government data. The number of migrant workers and their families are occupying a large number in the urban setting. Many news sources have provided data about the migrant workers. There are around 40 million migrant workers who migrate from rural parts to urban settings from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh to Maharashtra, Gujrat and Southern part of India.

Migrants' conditions in urban areas are significant to put forth. As migrant workers come to urban cities for livelihood opportunities to make a family survive, they have to face multiple challenges for living along with getting work opportunities. Deshingkar, Khandelwal & Farrington (2008:2) share that caste, social networks and historical precedents play a powerful role in shaping patterns of migration while Srivastava (2012:15) describes those jobs in the urban informal sector are highly segmented based around people of same caste, religion and kinship (cited from Gupta and Mitra 2002). In urban locations, migrants live with their families limited resources and without social capital in rented housing with minimum facilities. Furthermore, in these marginal situations, migrant workers find it crucial to grow upward in their status in urban or in wealth or recourse due to limited wage and large expanses. The amount of remittance sent at home is meagre and confined to

survival only. Chinmay (2011:22) shares a proposition that households receiving domestic remittances are lower than in general average remittances to those households which belong to poorer economic status, households of disadvantaged social groups, and labour dependent households such as agricultural, casual income. Situation in urban locations is difficult for the migrant workers who belong to communities like Musahar and or any other community who live hand to mouth.

Lower income along above mentioned points, the visibility of migrants and their conditions were unaddressed in policies in the state's lockdown announcement. Nevertheless, it has been part of discussion among activists and academicians but never got enough attention from the state. This pandemic, due to COVID-19, has made the situation extremely marginal for them.

The livelihood losses have been less taken into account while shaping responses. The images of migrants walking miles to their villages, being sprayed with chemicals on bodies, occurrences of hunger deaths, migrants receiving physical abuses by police throw the state of this segment in these times. The responses to COVID-19 brings out the deeply hidden biases, discrimination, attitudes of the implementation machinery in dealing with the migrants.

Counter Currents³, 30th April, 2020

³ Headlines of Newspaper-Covid 19 and Migrant Workers_ Review of Borders of an Epidemic, Counter Currents, 30th April, 2020

This quote brings the focus of various media coverage about the state's mechanics and migrant workers' situation. State's sudden decision of lockdown without addressing the migrants and considering their issues and numbers can be considered the cause of the situation. This situation has shaken migrant worker's ground along with the multilayered marginality. State may have planned but migrant worker's numbers were perhaps not counted and the second state did not address the migrant worker's situation until they started to walk for thousands of miles. State raised concern over them when many of them have crossed half of the way by walking from city to home in the village. Though, a large number of migrants waited for government response to go home. Government could address issues of returning home after one and half months later during the 3.0 lockdown. That was also a haphazard manner of initiation and effort in the favor of migrant workers which created a lot of chaos among them. In the case of Mumbai, it was reported that Migrants had to stand in queues outside the police station to get the form which was a very complex process for many of them.

However, in this pandemic, non-state actors like NGOs, civil society and individuals played a significant role in resolving these complex processes to go home, passing information about travel and arranging food during travel. Many individuals, NGO workers and mainstream society have provided food and shelter with their own capacity to migrant workers while traveling back to home. As post announcement of a special train, during the travel migrant workers had to travel without food and water within the train, there was not much facility in the train as many media houses reported that this journey was sometimes more than 30 hours. State's vague mechanism

in the pandemic to address these migrant's issues and provide facilities to reach them home came after lots of chaos and with providing dignity to the migrant worker. Civil society organisations and individuals have raised funds to support migrant workers in this plight.

7. Migrant's concern in Covid and Livelihood

Migrant workers are not a homogenous group; rather, they are a mixed group who work in construction, textiles, security, service delivery and transport (specifically taxi and auto drivers) in the cities like Mumbai and Delhi. During Covid-19, all these kinds of work were forced to stop during. Specifically, those who were working in non-essential service delivery and construction workers were in challenging situations after complete lockdown. Most, migrants stay at the construction sites or respective workplace in various works. Considering the example of the Musahar community who are mentioned, when they come to urban locations, they continue to face challenges not due to lack of support but also because of ignorance of state and non-state institutions e.g. unorganised sectors etc. Institutions, in general, do not bother much for their safety, social security, accommodation, their wages, living conditions and their health conditions. For example, every Musahar has a similar story in their migration period when they have faced some kind of accidents in their migration.

During the lockdown, the majority of digital and print media reported concerns over the food, accommodation and transport for migrant workers to go home. This was very basic and a need of the hour for the migrant work-

ers. The situation of their food has been mentioned as very pathetic, food quality was not good provided through government centers. However due to the situation migrants were dependent on others for food and accommodation. It found that thousands of workers in metro cities like Mumbai and Delhi, were living under flyovers, streets and many other open places. Due to lockdown, they were unable to continue to live in these situations. Along with lockdowns in many places, civil society organisations started to support such migrant workers including state representatives. However, there were many places where the State presence was insufficient. This situation can be seen in newspaper reports.

70% workers surveyed across India said existing rations would last them only for two days. In Uttar Pradesh, 100% of the migrant workers said that rations would last them only for 2 days. In Maharashtra, 90% said the same in Delhi and Haryana, 82% said the same.

The Hindu⁴, 29th April, 2020

Another concern is about their social status. They belong to either Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes or other backward classes and poor social strata with poor education status because of their historical struggle and caste based reality and they are also away from mainstream society. State's ignorance and their invisible position make them farther. They are not able

⁴ Headline of the Hindu-- 96% migrant workers did not get rations from the government, 90% did not receive wages during lockdown survey - The Hindu, 29th April, 2020

to make many decisions about their life, livelihood and future.

The wave of discussions and debate has emerged during the COVID-19 over the concerns related to food, shelter and transportation of migrant workers. In this scenario, many groups of people including individuals came forward in the solidarity of migrant workers and they provided food and shelter to several migrant workers in metro cities. This effort to support migrants was an act of appreciation and demonstration of social responsibilities of society in this challenging time. However, the story of the migrant worker did not end at this point. It was not just about surviving during this lockdown; instead, it was also related to pre-COVID-19 situation, during the lockdown and post lockdown about their families, children's education, food for family members and health of dependents.

8. Solidarity: State versus Non-State Actor

Transportation, food and shelter have been the major concerns of migrant workers who were stranded in the urban locations. State's role for the welfare and better health of all states justified the state's role to announce complete lockdown which was also observed globally as recognised by WHO representatives and many other institutions. Lockdown was a step as an urgent call for the entire country. Along with it, many steps which seemed in the favor of people like starting cash transfer in the accounts of *Jandhan Yojana* and providing rationing without any payment. However, there were also such steps which were taken without proper consideration of concerns and contexts of Indian society that were visible in the announcement. It has

emerged from news coverage that the state was kind enough for the people who were working a step ahead for health safety and physical security. There was some budget allocation as part of the state's action to appreciate and motivate specifically people who were engaged in the health, police to make necessary arrangements and also those who were providing essential to survive for society in the pandemic. However, considering this as an applause announcement was enthusiastic but a very early call during the first lockdown. It was also only for those who were immediately impacted by the COVID-19 for the issues. Nevertheless, migrant workers were not part of the process and announcements. Larger society also did not realize much about the migrant workers in the early phase.

State as a responsible actor had later played a significant role in providing cooked meals and dry grain to the people who were engaged in daily based livelihood. Local self-governing urban bodies started to cook food in larger amounts and started to provide those who were in the need of food. This was almost every society facing as a step to supporting institutions for the people. However, there were many complaints and the critics about the quality of cooked food and dynamics in distribution under the favoritism impression. This was visible in the various locations, specifically in the urban slums.

Larger step which was initiated by the local civil society organisations, individuals and groups of people was a solidarity step in the favour of migrant workers, their families and those who were living in the various locations. These organizations and individuals have taken extra effort to provide food

and shelter to the stranded migrant workers. There was huge coverage on various multimedia news coverage as well as social media coverage where people made dry grain and essential packets to provide for needy people. This action not only addressed the migrant worker rather they were providing food to anyone who was in need.

Non-state actor's support was a big step in the favour of migrants and all those who were living a daily based livelihood. Again, the state and its representative's role was very limited that had been addressed in the media, however various active individuals, NGOs and many other civil society-organisations walked an extra-mile in comparison to the state's inefficient effort. State's role in this entire pandemic is not appreciable but in the views of those who were migrants and those who were based on daily based livelihood was limited.

9. Conclusion and policy suggestions

De Haas (2010:230) points out that In the perspective of “balanced growth”, the re-allocation of labor from rural, agricultural areas to urban, industrial sectors is considered as a prerequisite for economic growth and, hence, as an constituent component of the entire development process (Todaro, 1969:139). So, the migration in a way can be considered as a livelihood strategy for the development process and impacts on the larger society and individuals. As per Scoonse (1999) among the rural community especially living in the marginal situations, migration is one of livelihood strategies. Migration enables people to get better livelihoods and change in their so-

cial and personal lives. There are many debates, which talk about how less migration has limited importance for the people of labour and belonging to so called lower caste communities. Migration process, living at a migrant's place as an individual migrant worker is full of challenges for the workers who are in informal sectors with limited wages. Hence migration has diverse meanings along with some similarities. However, the migration is completely different for so-called 'migrant workers' in India, as the migration process is not development rather it is just a process of making a migrant and his family's livelihood to survive. Migrant worker's challenges are somewhat similar in urban places with unlike sources. The major difference is about wages which attract them to come in urban settings.

There are various categories of migrants, it is not just limited to the wage difference. This paper has tried to raise the concerns of those who suffered most in the pandemic and they were the one who had been suffering continuously in daily lives in urban settings. They were those who belonged to lower caste and lived in a poor marginal situation in villages. Livelihood insecurity was a major cause of their struggle and it brings light on that as a civil society organisation and state as stakeholder has to take it up in the further course of action towards migrant workers.

State's role had always been limited and actions taken during COVID-19 were observed without much concern and understanding of the migrant workers' situation. Post lockdown situation made it visible that migrant workers were invisible and their limited capacity to survive was not pursued. It reflected the state's unawareness, limited concerns and proper me-

chanics in the situation of stress in the nation. State's actions were in favor of larger society and it must be there. However, the lives of individuals were important irrespective of migrants and COVID-19 positive. Newspaper's coverage mentioned that there were deaths due to walking by foot without food. This raised questions over the state's mechanism and required attention of the state towards the migrant workers.

Civil society, individuals and groups of many individuals had stood in solidarity of Migrant workers. This was an example of community cohesiveness, social connection and unity in diversity in India. Everyone has recognised it including the state. However, pandemics were still able to affect migrant workers in particular.

This paper was able to discuss the livelihood and marginality of most marginalised migrant workers and it recommended scope of further study about such groups of the people. State machinery and governance can also take action to assess the implementation of various policies of migrant workers in the various states. There could be an emergency platform for such migrants who are not able to get the benefit of various government policies. Paper also recommends audits of the implementation of the polices.

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