



## MIGRANT WORKERS WERE DENIED THEIR RIGHTS DURING THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD

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### ABSTRACT

The biggest black spot in India's lockdown to prevent the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the lack of preparation of migrant workers. In the cities, India has decided to keep workers. For the refugees, some of whom were forced to walk hundreds of kilometers to return home because the daily wage jobs they relied on to survive had disappeared, resulting in unimaginable misery.

The problem is that political strategies between the center and the states are moving in a subtle way in the wake of the corona virus lockdown. It is noteworthy that the state government did not want to take any responsibility from the workers who were in the state at that time and they were deprived of all their rights, even though they were Indian people, no effort was made to protect them.

**KEYWORDS :** migrant workers, lockdown, COVID-19, rights.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the year of 2020 on 24 March, the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Lockdown all over India for 21 days. The Lockdown announcement prevented movement of the whole 1.3 billion inhabitants of India as a preventive measure against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic situation in our country. The announcement of Prime minister came after a 14-hour intentional public curfew on 22 March, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. Spectators confirmed that the lockdown had slowed the growth rate of the pandemic by 6 April to a rate of doubling every six days, and by 18 April, to a rate of doubling every eight days [1].

As the end of the first lockdown period, state governments and other advisory committees recommended extending its period. The government of Odisha and Punjab extended the state lockdowns to 1 May. Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal and Telangana followed that. On 14 April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the nationwide lockdown until 3 May, with a conditional relaxation after 20 April for the regions where the spread had been contained or was minimal [2].

### Deprivation of migrant workers during lockdown period in India

In spite of the sanction of the central government, food distribution services have been barred by many state governments. When they were jobless in the lockdown period, thousands of people emigrated from major Indian towns. As of 10<sup>th</sup> May, over 350 deaths were reported due to the shutdown, with causes ranging from malnutrition, suicides, illness, road and rail collisions, police brutality and lack of timely medical treatment. Of the recorded deaths, the majority are among the migrant labours and others manual workers who were oppressed [3].

During the lockdown period due to COVID-19 situation in Delhi, migrant workers wait in a line for food at Delhi Government School. Millions of migrant workers had to cope up with the lack of jobs, food shortages and confusion about their prospects as factories and workplaces were shut down. Following this, many of them spent days in hunger and desperately seeking to go back to their homes. Although government schemes ensured that due to the lockdown period, the poor would get extra rations, but the distribution system was far away to be efficient and free from corrupted practices [4-5].

Thousands of migrant workers were seen walking or cycling hundreds of kilometers to return to their native villages, with

no job and little income. Most were arrested for breaking the lockdown and some of them died in road and train accidents or even in fatigue. The government directed all landlords and employers not to claim rent and continue to pay salaries to their workers without deduction, on 29 March. It also reported that those who violated the lockdown would be sent for 14 days to government-run quarantine centres [6].

The central government reported in its report to the Supreme Court of India on 31 March, 2020 that migrant workers, apprehensive about their survival, were suffering from panic created by the false news that the lockdown would last more than three months [7].

### Various steps of the government

The Uttar Pradesh government agreed at the end of March to arrange the schedule buses at the Anand Vihar bus station in Delhi to send the migrants returning to their villages free of charge. Migrants throughout the country stayed stranded until the last week of April, when the central government eventually allowed the state governments to run buses, but not trains [8].

The central government authorized the Indian Railways to operate 'Shramik Special' trains for the migrant workers on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2020. It was claimed that migrants had to pay for train fares due to lack of cooperation between the originating States and the railways. The government was met by opposition criticism. The Railways later stated that 85 per cent of the overall operating expenses were borne by the Indian Railways and the remaining 15 per cent which makes the ticket cost need to be paid by the originating states. The Supreme Court acknowledged on 26 May that the migrants' concerns have not yet been solved [9-10].

Thus, Supreme Court of India directed the Centre and States governments to provide stranded migrant workers with free food, accommodation and transport. In the Indian state of West Bengal, the COVID-19 pandemic was first confirmed in Kolkata on 17 March 2020. A total of 1,62,778 COVID-19 positive cases, including 25,280 active cases, 3,228 casualties and 1,34,270 recoveries, have been confirmed by the Department of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of West Bengal as of 31 August 2020 [11].

### Various steps of the West Bengal government

Ms. Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, referred to her government's 'Sneher Parash' (touch of affection) programme, in which 4.57 lakh stranded migrant workers, got Rs. 1,000/- each. In addition, the state government spends 25 cores on rail tickets for migrant workers. Ms. Banerjee said that in the administrative quarantine centers where returning migrants were put up, gross spending amounts to about a one core a

day. In the lockdown phase, she added, the state government also provided 16 cores to 162,808 workers in the unorganized sector. The Chief Minister of West Bengal also issue order to all District Magistrates to establish a repository for migrant workers in terms of their expertise so that, in the future, the State could construct a bank of workforce and provide them job opportunities, available for their livelihoods [12].

### Concept of Migrant Worker

Migrant workers are informal and unskilled workers who travel methodically, on an impermanent, seasonal basis, from one region to another to provide their services [13].

Migration of Indian workers started in India during the period of British Colonial rule. The labour was moved from the surroundings areas to the locations of mining, plantations and factories. The study of migration in India deals with in two parts. The first part is in Pre-Independence India and the second part is in Post-Independence period. Pre-Independence migration in India consisted of immigration of foreigners, emigration of natives to other's countries and internal migration. Post-Independence migration is largely inter-state and inter-districts [14].

### Lack of proper planning by the government and lack of minimum rights for migrant workers

Democratic India is witnessing constitutionalism and national integrity. But most significant character of a democratic State is that it must be free from inequality, discrimination and injustice. But on the contrary, a State like India is silently and gradually avoiding playing its role to eradicate these vices in its political system. Presently, we witness an enormous human disaster throughout the lockdown phase when the migrant workers were required to throw out their places of job due to the loss of works and they without having money and other resources are forced even to walk on bare foot under this circumstances. Unfortunately, during pandemic situation they tried to find food and shelter in other places, but they hardly could hardly able to get that. All the rational persons who trust in democracy and social justice they could not stop expressing their regrets for the society where we live in. Our central and state governments have not made any tangible plan about these migrant workers; they are focusing only vote bank politics and making allegations to each other. Effect of this, so many migrant worker deprive from their basic rights as human beings [15].

### CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, we may say that migration is a very stressful process with different causes, such as availability of work, social and geographical alienation, poverty, poor living conditions, separation of families, lack of leisure time, etc. But they face enormous problems at the time of Lock down, they are Indian citizens, they have the right to vote, but elected representatives fail to deal with their problem and it remained them 'migrant' workers in their own country. They have all fundamental rights and human rights, but because of no tangible planning of Central and State governments, they are deprive their all rights in their own nation. They are interested in accusing one another, but this occurrence of annoyance is endured by poor migrant workers.

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