

Understanding Trafficking Vulnerabilities amid Covid-19 in India

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a complex problem that exists for generations. Both during and after crises like Covid-19, human trafficking thrives to survive while damaging aspects of developmental activities. However, such factors increase the vulnerability of several groups to potential trafficking during a crisis. The situation of medical emergency can put some people in situations where their families' safety is jeopardised. The paper discusses the dynamics of human trafficking with its extended vulnerabilities due to the global pandemic of Covid-19. It also identifies several factors that heighten the insecurity of the vulnerable population in India within countries of origin, transit and destination. It also seeks to understand on how economic instability triggered by the pandemic created a huge loophole within the governmental structure that created fresh conditions of susceptibility in the huge informal labour market in the region.

Keywords: Trafficking, Vulnerability, Migration, COVID-19, Economic vulnerability

Abstrak

Perdagangan manusia adalah masalah kompleks yang ada selama beberapa generasi. Baik selama dan setelah krisis seperti Covid-19, perdagangan manusia tumbuh subur untuk bertahan hidup sambil merusak aspek kegiatan pembangunan. Namun, faktor-faktor tersebut meningkatkan kerentanan beberapa kelompok terhadap potensi perdagangan manusia selama krisis. Situasi darurat medis dapat menempatkan beberapa orang dalam situasi di mana keselamatan keluarga mereka terancam. Makalah ini membahas dinamika perdagangan manusia dengan kerentanannya yang meluas akibat pandemi global Covid-19. Ini juga mengidentifikasi beberapa faktor yang meningkatkan ketidakamanan populasi rentan di India di negara asal, transit, dan tujuan. Ini juga berusaha untuk memahami bagaimana ketidakstabilan ekonomi yang dipicu oleh pandemi menciptakan celah besar dalam struktur pemerintahan yang menciptakan kondisi kerentanan baru di pasar tenaga kerja informal yang besar di wilayah tersebut.

Kata kunci: Trafficking, Kerentanan, Migrasi, COVID-19, Kerentanan ekonomi

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a dynamic and deeply disturbing problem that represents the subtleties of globalisation as well as the development of human rights discursive practices. Foreign border crossing is not mandatory for trafficking in human beings. It constitutes a grave threat to human rights and dignity. No state can claim its borders are not affected by trafficking in any way (Esquibel, 2005). The COVID-19 crisis could have a long-term detrimental impact on people who have been trafficked or abused. Although the immediate extent of the outbreak on human trafficking is still uncertain, it is evident that its social consequences are already making insecure while making marginalised people more susceptible to trafficking and abuse. Medical emergencies are often related to a variety of well-documented trafficking symptoms, ranging from violating the law and rising illegal activity to resource scarcity and declining job security. The pandemic of COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on human lives, the global economy, and educational systems and the threats of human trafficking have risen as a result of the extreme financial difficulties faced by families, mass migration, and school closures. As per the International Labour Organisation, the 2020 pandemic shutdowns have affected 2.7 billion jobs, or 81 per cent of the global workforce (ILO).

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This isn't the first time that a significant infectious epidemic has heightened the risk of human trafficking. Human trafficking is believed to have escalated in past outbreaks when parents died, placing children at risk worsening the socioeconomic conditions. India is a source, destination and transit country for trafficking victims. Many forms of trafficking such as forced labour, domestic servitude, forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation and other evolving practices such as organ trafficking and many more are dominant across the country.

Although a significant portion of the victims are trafficked outside of India, the majority of trafficking occurs within or between states in India. As a result, COVID-19 has the potential to intensify a previously existing problem in our country. Until developing a resolution to the problem, it is important to identify the vulnerabilities posed by the pandemic which could intensify an already existing problem evident in the country.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study seeks to examine the phenomenon of human trafficking in India during the pandemic. The data in the article uses several methods such as interviews, observations and literature studies. with a qualitative approach and content analysis techniques.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Definition of trafficking

As established by international law, human trafficking includes all types of non-consensual exploitation. Human trafficking happens when individuals are coerced or tricked into slavery, regardless of whether or not the victims are transferred.

There has been no globally accepted concept of human trafficking before the year 2000. Human trafficking is described differently by various legal systems. In 2000, Article 3 of the "UN Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons" defined

"human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (Collection, n.d.)

According to the "SAARC Convention On Prevention And Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution", *"Trafficking" means the moving, selling or buying of women and children for prostitution within and outside a country for monetary or other considerations with or without the consent of the person subjected to trafficking*" (SAARC, 2021)

As a consequence, it is imperative that global trafficking refers to any person who is transferred, illicitly recruited, or coerced or abducted by others for exploitation. The major aspects of human trafficking were listed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (State, 2017). which are divided into three vital parts. i. The act (What is done?) ii. The Means (How it is done?) and finally iii. The Purpose (Why it is done?). The act is the recruitment procedure by the traffickers which also includes transportation and harbouring the victims from the origin. The second step included means of threat which can also include

abduction, fraud, deceit and abuse. Following comes the purpose of exploitation where a victim can be exploited in various forms of sexual abuse, forced labour, organ removal and many more.

Exploitation can be divided into two types: non-consensual and consensual. Non-consensual types of exploitation include intimidation, abuse, or deceit, while consensual exploitation is primarily the reason for lack of other employment resources and results in the oppressed being treated unfairly. Slavery, indentured servitude, child labour, and sexual exploitation are all non-consensual types of exploitation in which people are required to endure in disgraceful and unhealthy conditions or participate in sexual encounters against their own will (Wertheimer, 2005). Much exploitation are consensual in the case of India. Many people are left with no choice and rather permit themselves to be abused. In these cases victims are compelled by a type of "economic manipulation" rather than physical violence, abuse, or deceit. Victims are financially insecure, and they become completely reliant on their exploiter as they have no other choice for livelihood. This is widely evident in the Indian structure as majority of the informal market communities depend on salaries from a single or a limited number of employers in rural regions. A similar approach may be seen in socially inept (or excluded) populations, including such racial communities, marginalised groups, tribal peoples, where people may be uncertain of existing opportunities and fall prey to exploitative situations. Low incomes, heavy workload, and insufficient compensation are all results of consensual abuse. This is attributed to imbalanced agreements under which the contractor wields the balance of negotiating power (because the employee has no other choices).

Adjusting to the new normal

Criminals are also adapting their business practices to the pandemic's "new normal," specifically through the use of modern technological innovations. The COVID-19 pandemic is putting tremendous pressure on the planet, impacting everyone's lives. Strict confinement, restrictions and lockdowns, movement embargoes, and restraints on economic activities and social life are among the extreme steps taken to compress the infection rate of the pandemic. While these security measures and armed guard at the borders and on the roads tend to discourage crime at first sight, they simply encourage criminals to hide their activities. Around the same time, the pandemic has an effect on state and non-governmental organisations' ability to deliver critical services to victims of the crime. Systemic and profoundly rooted economic and social disparities, which are among the major reasons of human trafficking, which have been intensified and brought to the forefront by the pandemic.

To entice and recruit young children and women (and their families) into the trafficking market new methods were offered by the traffickers which includes a number of tactics and practices. The problem ascends out of sheer poverty, joblessness, and economic downfalls, which are all common factors that attribute to the entire Indian subcontinent more because of the disease. And over 122 million Indians have lost their jobs, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy after the lockdown started in the country till May 2020. Among them, almost 75% of them were small traders and daily-wage workers. It is evident that when families are economically not very stable, the vulnerability of the people increases to a great extent.

Majority of the trafficking process involves transportation which is barred during this lockdown situation. The crime of trafficking is difficult to identify even in the normal circumstances. The victims are exploited in illegal, uncontrolled, and unrestricted industries such as minor crimes, the sex work, residential environments, drug manufacturing and smuggling, agriculture, and construction. In these locations, it is much safer for traffickers to conceal their activities in plain sight. In another hand, the survivors' refusal or unwillingness to disclose their victimisation restricts law enforcement's ability to

understand this crime. COVID-19 is feared to be making the process of finding human trafficking victims much more challenging. The people are also more likely to develop the virus and have fewer protections against it. In addition, the victims have much less access to treatment, making it more difficult for them to recover if they are infected. Due to countries changing their objectives during the pandemic, necessary and realistic resources to support them have become a concern.

Massive rises in unemployment and income reductions, particularly among low-wage and irregular employees, have put a large number of people who were already disadvantaged in much more vulnerable positions. Millions of people who had worked in survival circumstances have lost their jobs in the textile industry, agriculture and farming, manufacturing, and domestic work. Many, who carry on working in these industries, where human trafficking is often found, could be subjected to greater degradation as a result of the need to reduce manufacturing costs due to economic hardships, as well as a lack of regulations by the authority.

Conceptualizing Vulnerabilities of Trafficking amid COVID 19

Human insecurity triggers the lack of control in both human trafficking and modern slavery (Bales, K., 2000). When people become susceptible to manipulation and businesses continue to seek lower-wage labour providers, human trafficking enhances profit and builds a market for trafficking. Human traffickers link the demand for labour in destination regions with the labour supply in source areas. Both the absence of factual data on human trafficking and the lenience with which traffickers transport and control victims are exacerbated by corrupt practices among politicians and law enforcement officers. There is much misleading data of the crime owing to discrepancies in official and non-governmental definitions. Many who have been victimised by trafficking networks or smugglers are also hesitant to even provide information for a variety of concerns. This is also a major concern for the illegal migrants too. Economic, political, and social factors may all lead to a higher level of instability among some sections of the population. People who are usually disadvantaged are detected and exploited by traffickers, guaranteeing positive outcomes for themselves (Clark, 2003).

We won't be able to construct systematic and successful prevention measures until we grasp the nature of vulnerability or why it affects those people only, how they are made vulnerable, or at what time or life activity they are susceptible? Many issues would remain unresolved if young age, female gender, low education levels, low employment opportunities, and limited economic condition were clearly designated as indicators of vulnerability. Migration is also a designated component of human trafficking. The individual's urge or desire to relocate is the starting point for the overall series of events. At such a time where there is a need for labour in the grey sector of the economy, obstacles in the form of stringent regulations, costly paperwork specifications, a lack of knowledge, language difficulties, and so on, include a powerful magnet for foreign migration, but the price is too costly for persons to bargain on their own (Brunovskis, 2004). 2011

Probable migrants who lack the requisite connections, skills, and money are forced to seek the aid of "professionals," such as smugglers or traffickers. Even though, in a context marked by a sharp rise in poverty and insecurity, the majority of workers are subjected to inhumane conditions, particularly the exploitation of a vulnerable position. Even then, not all cases of forced labour can be classified as slave labour or trafficking, but every case must be examined individually.

It is essential to interpret trafficking and forced labour as situations in which individuals are exposed to a variety of human rights abuses, such as labour rights abuses, and therefore unable to flee since they are threatened, separated or isolated, or even have a debt to pay or are obligated. Because of

various structural variables, people are forced to choose between incomparable goods, such as personal security with the need to economically support themselves and their families. This is exactly what many Indian migrant workers experience in the informal labour market during the pandemic.

Certain push and pull factors, according to criminal justice and sociologists, make people susceptible to labour market abuse and, potentially, human trafficking. Gender, schooling, and age are among the attributes examined in those who intend to move. Many research look at political uncertainty, globalisation (Bales, 2005), wealth inequalities between developed and developing nations, multinational globalization and transnational companies (Anderson and Davidson, 2003), and women's and children's systemic devaluation and marginalisation (Demleitner, 2001). Poverty, poor education, urbanisation and centralization of educational and job options, societal thought and mind set, cultural traditions, domestic abuse, corruption, conflicts, and trouble obtaining visas, according to (Ejalu, 2006), are all factors that lead to human trafficking.

From both the domestically and internationally environments, decisions to move (into and out of or within national borders) are based on the premise that wages and opportunities in other regions are greater than that in the country of origin. Roy's concept "explains how employees organize themselves among work opportunities based on their level of experience or human resources" (Borjas, 2008). If a person with high educational degrees want to relocate because the wages for prominent positions are higher in another area, this is known as positive selection. Negative selection occurs when fewer educated people migrate to an area with higher wages for low-skilled jobs. The largest of those travelling illegally have low education and ability levels, according to both human trafficking and human smuggling writings. This is most likely because government immigration limits target low-skilled migrants (Bales.K, 2007). This indicates that low-skilled migrants are traveling in pursuit of better salaries in destination regions, leading to negative distribution. While statistics on non-consensual abuse is minimal, it is fair to believe that 12.5 million people are abused non-consensually each year. At least 2.5 million of these are smuggled or trafficked across foreign borders. However, there is a substantial overlap with voluntary abuse, which happens when victims' economic insecurity causes them to embrace coercive workplaces. Consensual exploitation is often dealt with through social and labour law, while non-consensual exploitation is often dealt with through criminal justice law (Koettl, 2009). Both forms of exploitation have negative implications for resources and productivity, and thus are significant development hurdles.

Discussion

The exacerbation of vulnerabilities to trafficking

Increased economic hardship and unemployment

Poverty and unemployment are major causes of human trafficking. The global economic downturn has been intensified by the pandemic recently. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), between 20.1 million and 35.0 million people will be living in poverty as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, with an estimated 1.6 billion informal employment workforce involved (ILO, 2020). UNWIDER predicts that an estimated 500 million people (8 per cent of the global population) will be plunged into poverty, while the World Bank estimates that an estimated 50-60 million people will be living in extreme poverty. Many who already are at stake of trafficking prior to Covid-19 (UNWIDER, n.d.), especially low-wage and informal-sector employees, are somewhat more likely to find themselves in vulnerable positions as unemployment and household and individual incomes rise after the pandemic. Families that depend on

remittances are likely to be disproportionately impacted and put under increased pressure. Because of serious global changes in economic activity, many people are experiencing instability and loss of livelihood for the very first time in their lives during the outbreak. They are less qualified to manage these obstacles and more easily misled about exploitative job prospects if they do not have adequate social and societal resources. People who lost their employment and have no other source of income may be driven into debt crisis and can also consider selling human goods such as children or commercial sex for the first instance (UNODC, n.d.)

Interruption of Regular and Irregular Migration Patterns

It ended in more erratic modes of transportation or more risky erratic paths. Normal global migratory routes are being drastically reduced as countries try to maintain travel restrictions on foreign migrants and also their own people and legal immigrants. As a result, more people could turn to illegal modes of transportation, such as smuggling, potentially increasing the risk of human trafficking. Border security has also undermined pre-existing irregular paths, potentially resulting in the construction of new ones with higher risks. To continue their operations, traffickers are expected to use extremely challenging modes of transportation and unstable trafficking pathways. They could also keep track of businesses and industries that are undergoing labour shortages as a response to changes in migrant worker supply as a result of travel bans. Large number of immigrants presently stuck away from home attributable to border restrictions, who lack better access to social networks, jobs, and other social supports, are likely to be exploited by traffickers during this time.

Rise in the number of people who need to migrate to gain employment

People are likely to prefer domestic or foreign migration to re-gain jobs in circumstances where Covid-19 has caused financial hardship. Loss of livelihoods, as well as a lack of access to food and vital services, could lead to more people considering domestic or international relocation who had not initially thought it. This may last for some time after the pandemic will pass, as the economic crisis afflicts people's ability to earn a living and their economic security. Language gaps, precarious or irregular employment status, disassociation from normal support systems, and lack of basic services together put these migrants and internally displaced people at risk of being trafficked.

Loss of work, limited access to public facilities, and limitations on freedom of travel can all contribute to a family's stress level, leading to the use of negative coping strategies. The risk of trafficking for the intent of forced marriage, and also trafficking for the intent of slavery in illicit activities, such as transporting drugs from one location to another or petty crime, is compounded by a lack or decline in average earnings (UNICEF, 2020).

Rise in Child Labour and Child Marriage

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2019–2020 wreaked havoc on the world's educational systems, forcing schools and universities to close indefinitely. According to a study released on April 8, 2020, COVID-19 has had a substantial effect on nearly 1.716 billion students as a result of school closures (UNESCO, 2020). Closing of schools has an effect on not only students, teachers, and families, but also on many people's social and economic status. The closure of schools as a result of COVID-19 has brought to light a number of global problems, including digital learning, food poverty, childcare, the internet, health care, and disability services. Poor children and their families

are more likely to experience learning disruptions, adverse physical and psychological health problems, childcare, and increasing financial consequences for families who are unable to work.

Though India has been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic, no one has suffered more than its children. Since the lockdown caused by the pandemic, schools have been shut, which are not only critical for education but also serve as a critical monitoring tool to ensure that children are protected out of the reach of child traffickers and not forced into arranged underage marriages. The situation is also grave for the children of the returnee migrant workers who have no money to feed them and are thus susceptible to the trafficking network.

Parents may ask their children to go around and beg in order to put food on the table, or to seek employment and resources. Children who have already been separated from their families during a crisis are more vulnerable to human trafficking, as well as other acts of violence and abuse (UNODC, 2020)

Situation in India

COVID-19 has had a major economic influence in India. India's growth has been downgraded by the World Bank and credit rating agencies for the fiscal year (2021), and India has already experienced its lowest figures in three decades, after trade liberalisation in 1990 (India, 2020). In India, about three-quarters of the workforce is non-regular, implying they are mostly self-employed or work on a contract basis. The self-employed and casual workers are the most likely to lose their jobs and earnings.

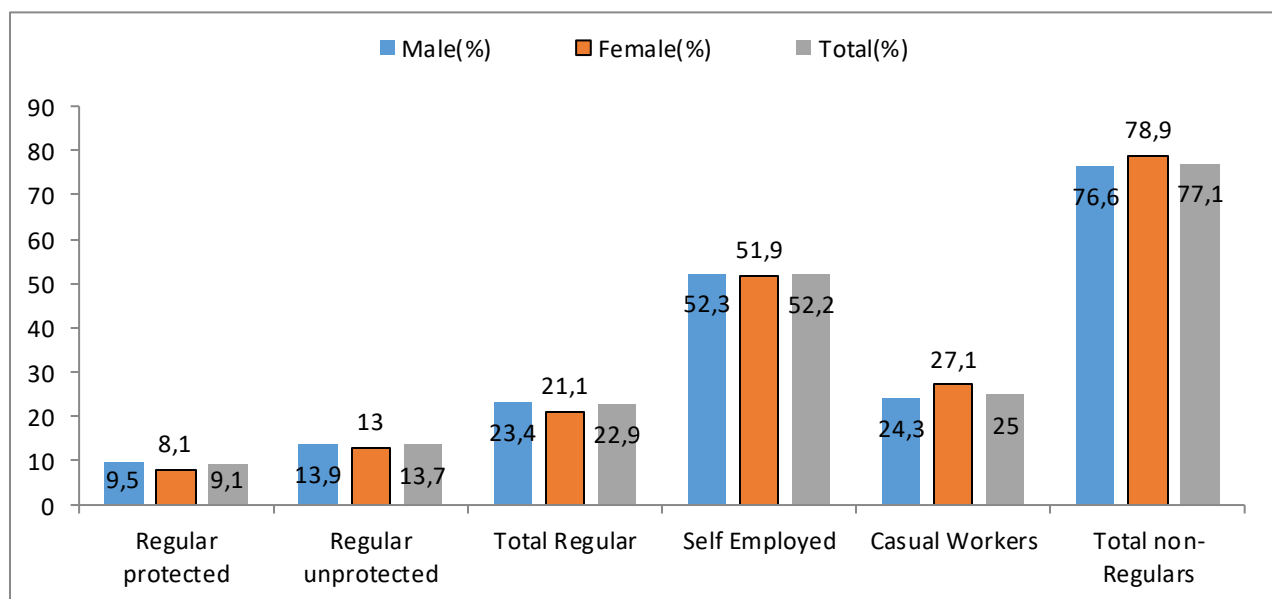


Figure no 1: Employment structure, 2017-18, % of workforce

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18

Figure no 1 clearly portrays the existing employment structure in India which is highly inclined towards irregular jobs and casual employment. Female employment structure is mostly informal in the country where there are no social and economic security during the labour force survey conducted in the year 2017-2018.

According to population estimates for 2020 (estimated at 473 million jobs), about 118 million people work casually in India, accounting for about 25% of the labour force, while just over half of the population (246 million) is self-employed (ILO, 2020). Majority of the women workforce are currently employed in non-regular employment which is marginally higher than the men. When these figures are

added together, the number of people who have been negatively impacted by the lockdown ranges from 364 to 429 million (ILO, n.d.-a) These employees bear the brunt of both immediate travel constraints and the resulting economic downturn. During every recession, younger people are highly vulnerable; they are often the first to lose their jobs and encounter competitive pressure for fewer jobs on the labour market. India does have one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world, falling from 32.2% in 2005 to 20.8 percent in 2018. The largest drop in female labour force participation had been in rural areas, which already dropped from 36.7 percent in 2005 to 21.6 percent in 2018. When women do work, it is usually in low-paying jobs in relatively unregulated industries, such as agriculture. Unpaid family workers are another vulnerable group. Women account for about half of these, or 32 million people, or around 15% of total jobs. Altogether in about 181 million families, the effects of rising care and work pressure are overwhelmingly felt by women (ILO, 2020a).

Brick kilns in the country have a long history of being associated with forced labour and debt slavery. Income shocks have increased the vulnerability to debt bondage and trafficking, according to a recent rapid assessment conducted by Human Liberty Network in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There is a shortage of access to MGNREGA work cards and other state assistance. A shortage of nutritious and preventive health programmes for the most disadvantaged has culminated from the loss of livelihoods and the allocation of government money to Covid-19. They may be compelled to acknowledge lower salaries or whichever work is available as the pandemic worsens, slipping deeper into the pit set by unscrupulous middlemen and smugglers. Since human trafficking is a secret act, data on known victims show only a tiny fraction of the crisis, and the true number of victims can only be calculated using statistical models.

Impact on the Migrant workers in India

Migration is commonly viewed as an economically, socially, and politically destabilising phase, with the economic benefits of migration being overlooked. This may be because it overstretches urban areas, removes active participants from rural areas, threatens family life, leads to informal labour exploitation, and creates administrative and legislative headaches (Kundu, 2012). State, national, and local governments remain insensitive to migrants due to the perceived negative economic, political, and social consequences of migration, while employers systematically violate legislation intended to protect their interests and welfare (Deshingkar, n.d.) As a result, migrants are often forced to live in illegal settlements with limited access to water, sanitation, and electricity, as well as the persistent threat of displacement, disease, sexual assault, underpayment, and police harassment (Deshingkar, P., & Anderson, 2004) Migrant workers are usually discriminated against, often abused, and paid less than non-migrant workers, with their poor working conditions.

In India's informal economy, migrant workers make up the majority of the workforce. Over time, successive governments have paid scant attention to the numbers, workplaces, working conditions, and personalities of these workers, and the vast majority of them have gone neglected, unnoticed, and overlooked as a result of insufficient government laws and policies. In India, the Interstate Migrant Workers Act of 1979, which was enacted to control and protect migrant workers' rights, has been traditionally ignored and poorly enforced. The freedom of people to migrate or move for work is formalised in the Indian Constitution. The Migrant Workers Act of 1979 authorised the use of middlemen to transport migrant workers to factories, buildings sites, and manufacturing plants. As a result, millions of people were recruited, transported, and worked in the informal economy in cities. They are a long way from being supervised or monitored by law enforcement. With 49.5 million jobs, the construction industry in India is one of the largest employers of both skilled and unskilled workers. India's new textile industry

recruits over 35 million people, and the country's brick industry recruits an estimated 2.3 million migrant workers. According to Census 2011 data, a large proportion of migration occurs within the country from one district and to other districts. Around a quarter of all migration is to another state. Because of the availability of educational and occupational prospects in towns, people move from villages to cities. The picture in India depicts 2.6 % of international migration among the total migration that occurs in the country (Census, 2011). Over 30 million Indians work abroad, as per the International Labour Organization (ILO, n.d.-b) with over 9 million of them are based in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region (also known as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf). International migration accounts for about 2.6% of overall migration (Census, 2011). The Gulf area and Southeast Asia employ over 90% of Indian migrant workers, who are low- and semi-skilled workers. India became the top recipient of remittances in the world with over US\$62.7 billion in 2016 earned by both formal and informal migrant workers overseas (ILO, 2018).

Much internal migration in India occurs from the poorer states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, to the manufacturing hubs of more advanced states in the south, such as Gujarat and Maharashtra, or in metro cities. Regardless of whether they work in manufacturing, non-manufacturing, or the service sector, the number of people employed in the unorganised, informal, and private sector is bigger. Migrant workers in big cities are forced to either remain in perilous circumstances in the city or return to villages or smaller towns in every situation which cause an economic crisis or be it a medical emergency like COVID-19.

Migrants are more likely to be especially vulnerable to the direct and indirect consequences of Covid-19, as they are in most other crises. Migrants are burdened by the dual burdens of poverty and separation from their homeland. Owing to a lack of evidence of identification and residency, many services intended for the vulnerable do not meet them. Migrants' economic, social, and political rights are not being met; even though they are formal citizens, their substantive rights as citizens are not being met (Bhagat et al. 2020). Following the lockdown, these migrant workers faced immediate difficulties such as food, accommodation, wage loss, fear of infection, and anxiety. As a result, thousands of them began fleeing to their homelands from different cities. Many migrants died on the road, either as a result of poverty, malnutrition, accidents, or comorbidity, and some even committed suicide (Bhagat, R. B., Reshmi, R. S., & Sahoo, 2020) Many people were forced to walk hundreds of miles to get back to their villages because there was no public transportation. The campaign to avert the pandemic turned into one of India's worst human tragedies in recent memory.

Followed by the crisis, migrants become remittance income suppliers to being household dependents. Food insecurity rises as a result of the crisis, and migrant populations' livelihood choices are limited. Lockdowns and social distancing steps, on the one hand, are drying up jobs and wages, while on the other; they are likely to interrupt food productivity, transportation networks, and global supply chains. Contemporary migration theories indicate that decisions to move or remain, as well as overall patterns of travel, are influenced by economic conditions in destinations and origins, interpersonal relationships between origins and destinations, and accrued interactions at destinations between individuals and community members (Haas De, 2012). The anxiety of these migrant workers are not limited to contracting the virus only, rather there is a huge uncertainty created by the pandemic about their future employment opportunities. Migrant workers in cities were forced to take cash or kind loans to meet minimum consumption requirements due to a lack of funding from employers or the government. They are trapped in a cycle of persistent, permanent poverty due to non-payment of salaries and increasing debt. Workers are obliged to take several loans at high interest rates for their immediate needs due to erratic access to employment and income loss. This reduces their negotiating power and ultimately forces them into a state

of perpetual debt. Circular immigration has continued to be characteristics of India's revamping economy, but the informal sector's scale has barely changed, and initiatives to counter it have been unsuccessful or absent. Covid-19 has enhanced the picture of long-standing policy disparities, with a neglect of migration in the country (Wertheimer, 2005).

Inclusive Policies by the Indian Government

While many initiatives were taken to address the issue temporarily but the road is long to complete the gap. Some initiatives by various state governments and other civil society organizations were important to highlight that supported the migrant workers during the lockdown period. Some instances were observed similarly like the Chief Minister of Bihar has offered to pay the expense of homeless migrant workers in other parts of the country. During the lockdown, Odisha's Chief Minister tried to bring back migrants who had been trapped in various parts of the country. The government established designated hospitals and health centres, and declared a package of income and job support for returning workers (Mishra, 2020). Kerala, which stood out for its fast response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, helped migrant workers who had lost their jobs (Week, 2020) It set up camps in different locations, such as schools, and offered basic essentials as well as health-related information in a variety of languages. Kerala's response may have prompted a small number of migrant workers to return home.

The federal government and state governments are developing policies to address the crisis. States and union territories were also encouraged to advise and streamline procedures for these marginalized people, such as the provision of various agricultural commodities and other essential items through public distribution system (PDS) in the country. Unemployment benefits were also announced by the Union government to a number of union workers who lose their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staffs who are afflicted by the coronavirus may be eligible for unemployment benefits, according to the labour and jobs ministry (Jha, 2020).

Despite the existence of Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, it is rather surprising that the government was caught unaware of the extent and conditions of migrant workers in the country. By requiring all establishments employing interstate migrants to be registered, and contractors who hire such workers to be licenced, the Act seeks to discourage contractors from exploiting interstate migrants and provides them with protection in the event of an accident or death at work, as well as access to health care and recommended minimum wages. The Human Trafficking (Prevention, Security, and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018, also fails to discuss many facets of labour exploitation and appears to be ignorant of the evolving types of labour exploitation in the current globalisation framework. The lapsed bill must be revised and reintroduced as soon as possible, based on expert advice (Bhagat, R. B., Reshmi, R. S., & Sahoo, 2020).

While these responses are important and have helped immigrants, they are inadequate to resolve significant inequalities and the threats that come with health and other shocks. The drawbacks that migrants face, which have been exposed by this pandemic, are deeply rooted in economic and social systems (Bhagat, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Given the severity of the crisis, these interventions are insufficient. The government should do a lot more to protect its citizens and economy. There is also a need to rethink national immigration system, which will include arrangements for the assistance and protection of migrants arriving and potentially

returning to, countries experiencing both economic and other crises. Food insecurity and the pressure to return to one's homeland could be reduced if resilient food systems are developed. However it is a well-established fact that whenever the economic and labour conditions in a country deteriorate, the number of people at risk of being duped by lucrative job offers or recruited into abusive working conditions rise simultaneously.

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