REVERSE LABOUR MIGRATION: POLITICS & ECONOMICS POST COVID19

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Abstract
Migration is a form of spatial mobility of population between one geographical unit and another involving a permanent change of residence. The census of India defines migration by place of birth or residence. If a person was born at a place other than the place of enumeration, then he is treated as migrant. *India is estimated to have some 120 million rural-to-urban migrant workers. COVID19 has put migrant workers and their livelihoods at the door step of government. Although they built cities and countries, their rights and interests are not recognized in policies and programs. Nearly 92% of the 61 million jobs created over the 22 years post liberalization in 1991 have been informal.* This paper tries to analyze the plight of migrant's labourers and critically examines the role of political system towards labour migration during and post covid 19 pandemics.
Keywords: Reverse Migration, Migrant Labourers, Covid19, Political System.

Introduction

To understand reverse migration, first we need to understand what is migration? And what drives migration? Migration is a natural process that often happens depending on the socio-economic, demographic, cultural, political and environmental factors related to the migrant people (Team IAS, 2020). Migration is a form of spatial mobility of population between one geographical unit and another involving a permanent change of residence (UN, 1958). The census of India defines migration by place of birth or residence. If a person was born at a place other than the place of enumeration, then he is treated as migrant (Bala, 2017). Reverse Migration refers to the situation when labourers, workers and people start migrating back to their native place in the backdrop of non-availability of livelihood and job opportunities (Team IAS, 2020). In significant regions of the country, the coronavirus epidemic has sparked a massive reverse migration from "destination" to "source." Hundreds of thousands of labourers are heading back to their communities in search of warmth and empathy. The epidemics of the past was hardly concerned with migration and livelihood during the colonial India, although major Indian cities like Kolkata (Calcutta), Mumbai (Bombay), Chennai (Madras) and many other urban places hugely suffered from influenza, smallpox, plague, malaria and cholera. Mumbai experienced a deadly plague in 1896 and also influenza in 1918. (Bhagat, 2020). The 2011 Census provided the most recent government data on migration. According to the 2011 Census, India has 45.6 million migrants (38 percent of the population), up from 31.5 million migrants in 2001. (31 percent of the population). While the population rose by 18% between 2001 and 2011, the number of migrants climbed by 45 percent. Internal migration accounted for 99 percent of total migration in 2011, with foreigners (international migrants) accounting for 1%. (PRS, 2020). A pandemic of this scale is usually feared because it exposes the limitations of public health. In India, however, COVID-19 has exposed the condition of the labour force. More than 100 million workers have reportedly lost employment. Of the total workforce of India, around 90-92% (about 450 million) is informal (The Wire, 2020), which means they work without social and employment security. The Economic Survey 2016–17 estimated an interstate migrant population of 60 million and an inter-district migrant population of 80 million. The average annual flow of migrants between states was calculated at 9 million persons (Ranjan, 2020).

Objectives of the study.

1. This article attempts to analyze the plight of migrant laborers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and critically assesses the political system's approach toward labour migration both during and after the pandemic.

2. This paper also makes an effort to explain the concept of migration and reverse migration in India.

Methodology

This research paper uses a secondary method of data collecting in the form of content analysis of papers, records, reports, and periodical articles to achieve its objectives. Several literatures on the topic have been consulted for this purpose.

Reverse Migration and plight of migrant's labourers.

The spread of Corona virus from the epicenter of Wuhan in China to worldwide is attributed to migration and mobility of people. On the other hand, the medical professionals largely believe that the control of this infectious disease is possible through immobility and confinement like lockdown and social distancing (Bhagat et al). When the government announced the shutdown, migrant workers in the cities found themselves losing their jobs, sometimes their homes, and in many cases their income. Many of them have no choice but to return to their village of origin, and since transportation has been canceled as part of detention, often on foot, is exposed to starvation., risk of infection, harassment and bad mandatory quarantine conditions (Haan,2020). Many migrants feel compelled to return to the native place because they have no savings left. The repeated extension of the lockdown left migrant workers stranded without work, cash and food regardless of their social profile. The nation-wide helplines set up by the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) interacted with about 34,000 workers by 5th June and reported that 50% of the workers had rations left for less than 1 day, and 64 percent had less than 100 rupees left with them (Rao et al, 2020).

The role of political system on labour migration during Covid-19.

It is important to highlight initiatives that have supported migrant workers in India, including civil society efforts, self-help group initiatives and measures central government support. The statistics shows that the reality of migrants in India is very different. While the total number of internal migrants is estimated to reach 450 million in 2011, up more than 30% from 2001, the actual numbers may be higher. The most populous source states are Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar, followed by Madhya Pradesh (MP), Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, and West Bengal; the most populous destination states are Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.

(BloombergQuint,2020). So, what are the major streams as well as the sources and destination points of this vast mass of migrant population? First, the major area of work they are engaged in would be agriculture labour, brick kilns, construction sites, services (maids to watchmen to drivers) industrial non-skilled workers, small and tiny road side businesses (tea shops, dhabas, small eateries, hotels, restaurants, etc. This entire workforce falls under the informal sector, which, of course, constitutes 93% of India's total workforce. (Dandekar, Ghai, 2020). That the lockdown announcement had huge implications for the economy in general and for the informal migrant labourers in particular was acknowledged and responded to by the government. On 26 March, the Indian finance minister announced a relief package for the poor affected by COVID-19. Amounting to US$22.6 billion, this would pay for free food grains, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for cooking, cash transfers for 3 months and insurance for frontline healthcare workers. The Government of India issued a Rs. 1.70-lakh-crore package under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana on March 26, 2020, to offset the impact of the lockdown on vulnerable communities. Health workers, farmers, MGNREGA workers, economically vulnerable groups, including women, the elderly, and unorganized-sector workers, Jan Dhan account holders, and Ujjwala beneficiaries are all included. (Bhagat, et al, 2020). For the following three months, 80 crore people would receive an extra 5 kg of wheat or rice and one kg of chosen pulses as part of the scheme. The Central Government has directed state governments to utilize the Rs.52000 crore Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund to provide relief to construction workers via direct benefit transfer. Later, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chipped in with a dramatic interest rate decrease and a series of unconventional lending initiatives to help besieged businesses (BloombergQuint, 2020). However, fear of losing their jobs caused a huge exodus of millions of these migratory labourers in various parts of the country, who embarked on a long 'barefoot' journey with their families to their original places in the absence of transportation infrastructure (Bhagat et al, 2020). Many states, including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Karnataka, organized special buses to transport these workers and their families to either state borders or districts (NDTV, 2020). This large influx of people created havoc on national highways, bus stops, and train stations, as well as mistrust between

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states. Because this was a violation of the benefits of lockdown and posed a risk to them and the people in the villages, the Government of India issued a strict order on March 29, 2020, to seal all interstate and district borders and asked states to issue necessary orders to district authorities to ensure adequate arrangements for temporary shelters. (Especially near highways) with adequate amenities and basic requirements, provision of food, clothing, and health measures for the poor and needy people, including migrants' labourers, stranded in their respective areas due to lockdown measures (Press Trust of India, 2020). The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has also instructed landlords not to charge rent during the crisis, and companies to pay their employees' salary without deductions throughout the closure time. MHA established a control room to monitor the situation 24 hours a day, seven days a week to ensure that everyone has access to basic supplies (Press Trust of India, 2020). The rather indifferent responses on the part of the state to the problems faced by migrants can be evidenced by the large number of relevant legal documents on paper, most of which are ineffective due to the lack of executions. May refer to the Contract Labor Regulations and Abolition Act 1970 which introduced ordinary workers to legal status by providing a mechanism to register contractors with 20 or more workers with a number of other establishments. Without such a registration, the employer is directly responsible for the employment provided that one can also refer to the Federal Migrant Workers Act 1979 (look up employment regulations and conditions of service), National Disaster Management Act 2005 and Street Vendors (Regulation Protection Act), 2014 enacted to regulate street vendors in public places and protect their rights (Sen, 2020). More recently, the promulgation of the Labor, Health and Safety Code and Working Conditions, which governs the health and safety conditions of workers in establishments with 10 or more workers and more, and in all mines and all docks. The above code is which replaces the 13 applicable labor laws, including the Factories Act, 1948; the Mining Act, 1952; Dockers Act, 1986; Contract Labor Act, 1970; and the Interstate Migrant Labor Act, 1979. The Code, referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee in July 2019, received a positive response from the Committee as recently as February 11, 2020 (Sen, 2020). Domestic migrant workers, mainly in the informal sector, contribute nearly 10% of India's GDP [gross domestic product]. Now is the time to show them that we care about them. Until the closure is over, we need to make sure they have food and shelter, and that their health problems are treated. We must channel their means of subsistence wherever necessary. Then there are vulnerable groups in the migrant group such as the elderly, the disabled and pregnant women, which need to be addressed. We need to actively screen workers using portable medical devices, and plan and prepare to isolate workers if they are found to have COVID19. Finally, we need to educate them about the disease in their own language and make sure they have a good understanding of the disease. (Paliath, 2020).

Conclusion
Cereals and pulses must be provided weekly to meet the food and nutritional needs of migrant workers and their families. The government is expected to use the infrastructure of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and distribute food grains as buffer stock at 60 million tones with the Food Corporation of India. It should also mobilize local agencies to ensure the supply of daily needs related to the disruption of the Coronavirus. The integration of migrants in development is a daily need. The government should seriously consider the recommendations of UNESCO, UNICEF and the Migration Working Group and implement them as soon as possible (IIPS, 2020). The public health system, especially at the lower and lower secondary levels, must be strengthened, increased investment, supply of drugs and equipment on a large scale, and above all, human resources of the system. medical system. public health must be enhanced. a breathtaking level. The database on migration and migrant households needs to be strengthened through the census, the national sample survey (NSS), the NFHS survey and the migration census. Available data is which is very old and also not available on time. Since migration has affected households in almost all dimensions in both rural and urban areas, including migrants in our official statistics and reaching them effectively will be helpful in formulating robust and inclusive policy and, domestic programs.

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