

The Impact of Covid-19 on Migrant's Workers Employment and Livelihood in India

Prithwiraj Swargiary, Priyambee Swargiary¹, Detsung Swargiary³

¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh-06, India, ² PhD Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh-06, India, ³(former PhD Scholar), Department of folklore, Gauhati University, Guwahati-14.

The pandemic (covid-19) has adversely affected the entire world especially in terms of economic shock, labour market shock and health shock which has impacted both demand and supply. It has created an unsuitable environment by creating severe challenges amongst important sectors mainly trade, hotels, restaurant, tourism, hospitality and real estate. The worst affected are the micro small medium enterprises. Across the globe, 2.7 billion i.e. 81% of the workforce are affected by covid-19. As per International Labour Organization (ILO) 93% of the world's workers are experiencing workplace closure. The immediate effect of covid-19 on the young population has led to multiple shocks like employment and income losses, disruption in education and training etc. It has been more vulnerable to migrant workers who face constraint in both work places as well as in return to their families. Workers in the unorganized sectors especially self-employed, casual and dig workers are likely to disproportionately hit. A study by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme reports that more than 270 million people in India were lifted out of poverty from 2005-2016, the largest by any country. But, unfortunately measured at International Poverty Line of \$ 1.90 per day covid-19 will push 71 million population into extreme poverty as per World Bank Projection of covid-19.

Index-terms: Labour Migration, Working Conditions, Remittances, Wages, Construction, Poverty, well-being

Introduction

In the past, the epidemics were hardly concerned with migration and livelihood during the colonial India. Although major cities Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai and many other urban places hugely suffered from small pox, plague, malaria, influenza, and cholera. (Davis 1951; Banthin and Dyson 1999; Hill 2011). Hill 2011 stated that Mumbai experienced a deadly plague in 1896 and also influenza in the year 1918. The epidemic of influenza arrived in Mumbai in September 1918 which swept through north and east India. He found that the reason for excess mortality was the influenza was negatively related with outmigration at district level analysis. In the past, famine not only caused increase in mortality but also resulted in migration (Maharatna 2014). BBC (2020), when migrants flee from the city, they are not only at the verge of losing their livelihood but also at the same time they carry the infections to their native places. During 1980's, when the epidemic of HIV/AIDS broke in various parts of the world migrants

were greatly stigmatized as a carrier of the disease and to be population at risk. This had adversely affected the great contribution of migrants in economic growth, innovation, skill development and enterprise in building cities and the nation. Further, policies and programmes of urban development and planning in India hardly launch any specific programme for the migrants. One of the biggest mistakes in achieving urban sustainability and realizing the goals of sustainable development in India is the failure to recognize migrants as a stake holder. Migrants workers are suffering from dual burden i.e. burden of becoming poor and migrants. Due to lack of identity and residential proofs the migrant's donot receive many programmes meant for them.

2. Nature of the problem:

The widespread of corona virus from the China to worldwide is mainly attributed to mobility and migration of people. Further, the medical professionals largely believe that the only way to control and lessen the

spread of the pandemic is through immobility, lockdown and social distancing. There has been unprecedented breakdown of our economic and social system due to lockdown. Mostly migrant workers are most vulnerable to urban disaster and epidemics. In India, the first case of covid-19 was surfaced on 30TH Jan (2020), and following the outbreak the lockdown was announced in the entire country on 24th march for a period of 21 days. Borders were sealed, schools, colleges, universities were closed, factories, restaurant, shops transportation and all types of economic activities were shut down, barring only essential services. This created a nightmare for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, who lost their livelihoods overnight and became homeless. The most immediate effect faced by these migrant workers were related to loss of works, wages, food, shelter, fear of getting infected and anxiety. As a result, most of them started fleeing from various states and cities to their native places. Many workers lost their lives either due to hardship on the way, hunger, accident and some of them even committed suicide. Sahas (2020) reports on the basis of telephonic survey of more than 3000 migrants from north central India shows that majority of the workers were the daily wage earners and at the time of lockdown, 42% of them were left out with no ration, one third was stuck at destinations city with no access to jobs, wages, food, shelter, 94% don't have worker's identity card. The declaration of sudden lockdown created many difficult situations for migrants living in different cities of the country.

Many travelers were either stuck up at stations or district borders. Further many were forced to walk hundreds of miles on foot to reach their native villages in the absence of public transportation. In addition, those reached their native places were seen as potential carriers of the covid -19 and were ill-treated by the locals. India today (2020), highlighted one instance where a group of returnees were sprayed with chemicals to disinfect them for which later the local administration apologized. In the history of India, this is one of the biggest streams of mass return migration in the country. This is a serious issue, even though they are formal citizens they are lacking fulfillment of the economic, political and social rights. The sudden eruption of migration crisis resulting from the outbreak of covid -19, reminds us the urgency of the matter. This paper emphasizes how our understanding on migration and livelihood be helpful

in mitigating strategy of economic and social impact of covid-19.

Objective of The Study

The specific objectives of the study have been formulated as the following:

- 1] To study the employment trends in labour force participation in India pre and post covid -19.
- 2] To study the unemployment trends in India pre and post covid-19.
- 3] To analyse the impact of covid-19 on international remittances and domestic remittances.
- 4] To highlight the plight of migration workers in India.
- 5] To analyse the steps undertaken by the Government of India to fight against covid-19.

4. DATA SOURCES:

The analysis has been based both on primary and secondary sources of data.

Analysis and Discussion

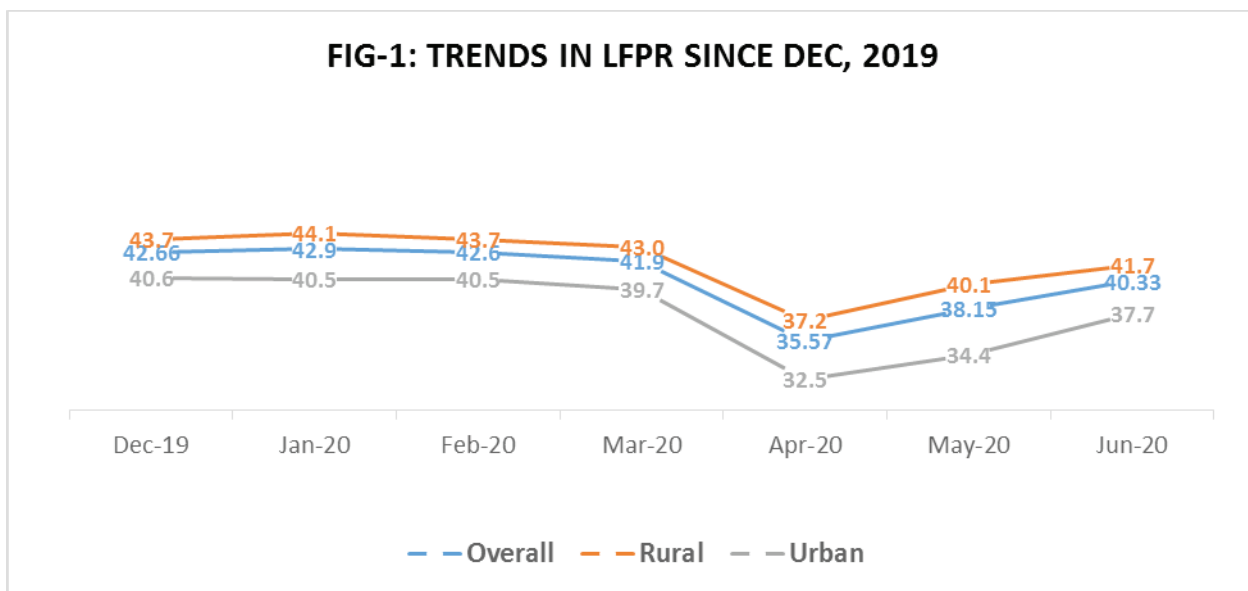
Migration and Livelihood:

In India, millions of people adopt migration as a livelihood strategy and they are directed towards the urban centres. As per 2011 census, rural to urban migrants are mainly concentrated in 53 million plus urban agglomerations (with one million more) that comprises 140 million out of 377 million urban population of the country equivalent to 43% of the total urban population. A total of 53 million plus cities, out of which eight of them are mega cities with a population of 5 million and more. In India, out of 482 million workers, 194 million are permanent and 15 million are semi-permanent migrant workers.

Employment Trends in India:

A] Labour Force Participation Rate: Overall, Rural and Urban

Fig 1 : Trends in LFPR since Dec.,2019



Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data.

In Dec 2019, the overall LFPR was 42.66%, but it remarkably fell down to 35.57% in April 2020. But it again rose to 40.33% in June 2020. In Dec 2019, the rural LFPR was 43.7% and it slightly increased to 44.1% in Jan 2020. However, there has been remarkable downfall in rural LFPR to 37.2% in April 2020 and again it rose to 41.7% in June 2020. In Dec 2019, the urban LFPR was 40.6%, but it decreased to 32.5% in April 2020 and it increased to 37.7% in June 2020.

B] Labour Force Participation Rate: Young Labour Force (15-29 yrs.)

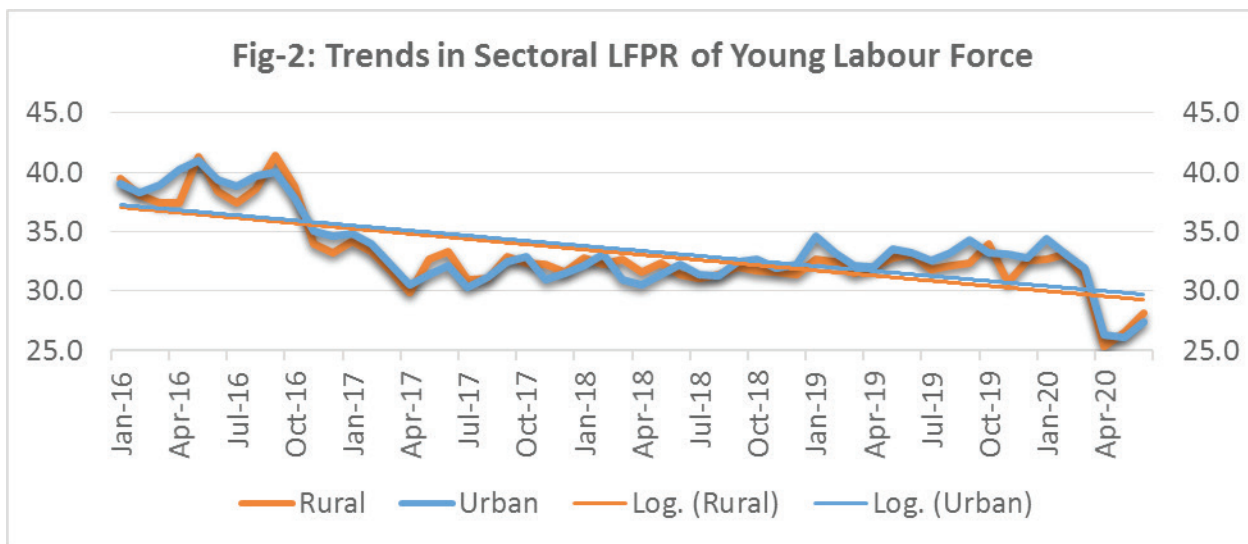


Fig 2: Employment Trends in India: 15-29 Years

Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data.

There has been a rise in young LFPR in rural area from approximately 40% in Jan 16 to 42% in July 16. But there has been a remarkable fall in young LFPR to approximately 25% in April 2020. There has been a rise in young LFPR in urban area from approximately 39% in Jan 16 to 41% in April 16. But there has been a remarkable fall in young LFPR to approximately 26% in April 2020.

C] Labour Force Participation Rate: Sex Wise

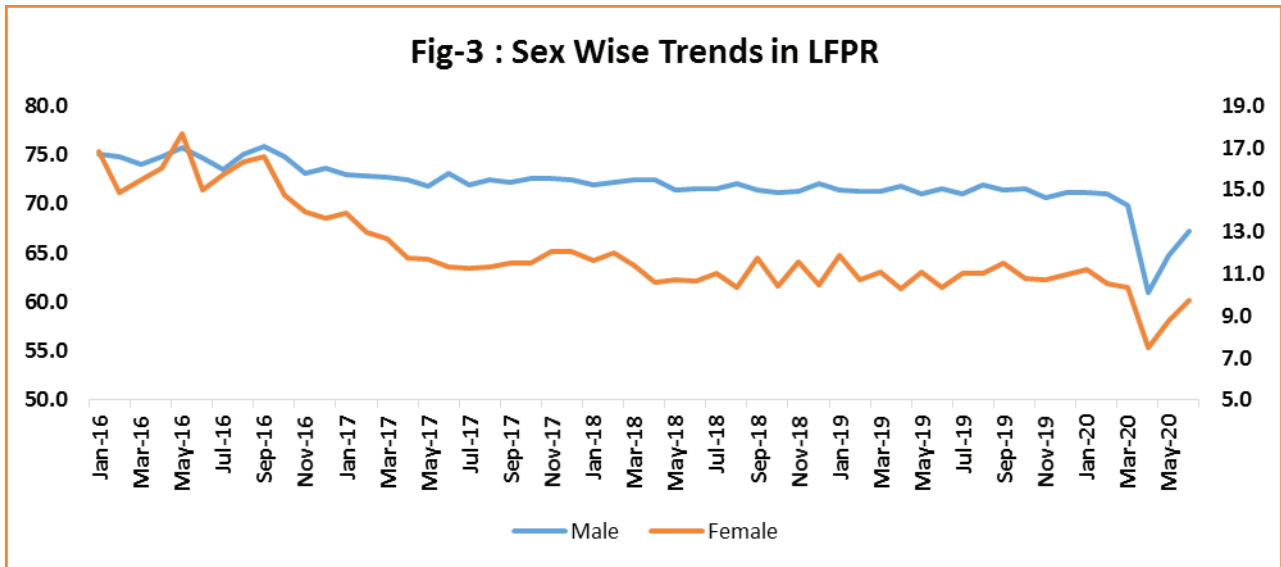


Fig 3: Employment Trends in India: 15 Years and Above

Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data.

A rise was witnessed in male LFPR from approximately 75% to 77% since Jan 16 to Nov 16. LFPR in male abnormally fell down to approximately 60% March 2020 and it again rose to approximately 70%. Similarly, a gradual increase can be seen in terms of female LFPR from approximately 75% to 78% since Jan 16 to July 16. A major decrease in female LFPR can be seen from approximately 62% to 55% since Jan 2020 to March 2020 and further witnessing a rise to approximately to 63% in May 2020

Unemployment Trends in India:

A] Overall, Rural and Urban:

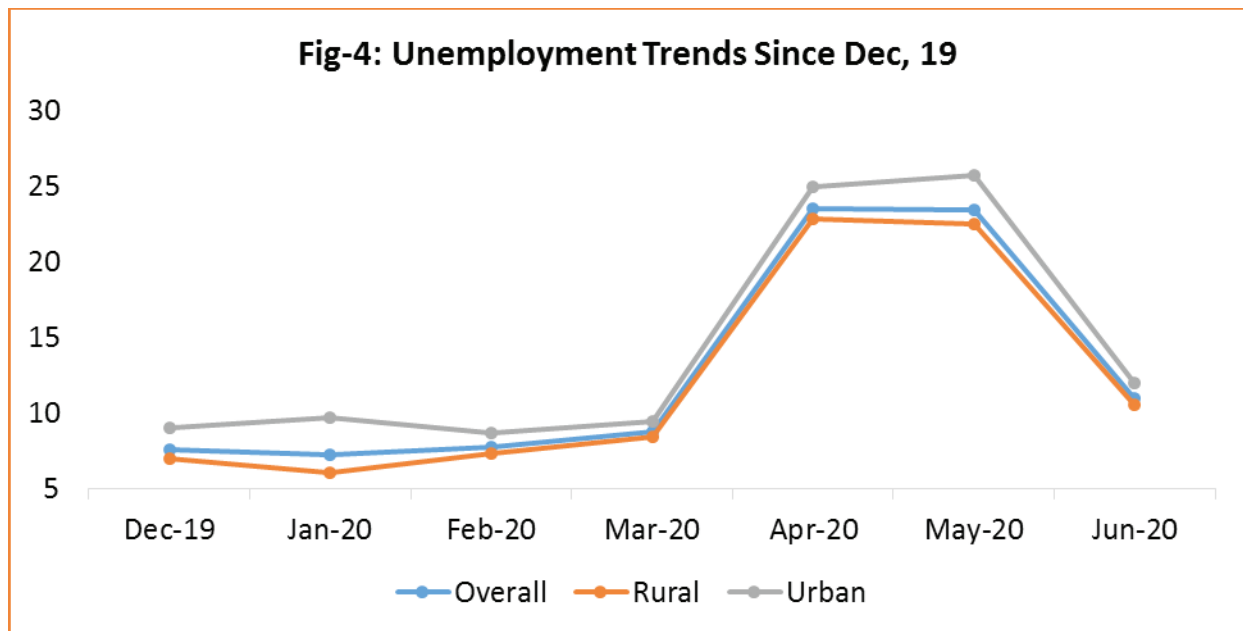


Fig 4: Unemployment Trends in India: 15 Years and Above

Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data

The overall unemployment rate was approximately 7% in Dec – 19 but it abnormally rose from approximately 8% to 24% since March 20 to May 20 and it again fell down to approximately 10% in Jun 20. The rural unemployment rate was approximately 7% in Dec – 19 but it abnormally rose from approximately 8% to 24% since March 20 to May 20 and it again fell down to approximately 10% in Jun 20. The urban unemployment rate was approximately 9% in Dec – 19 but it abnormally rose from approximately 24% to 26% since April -20 to May -20 and it again fell down to approximately 11% in Jun 20.

B) Young Labour Force:

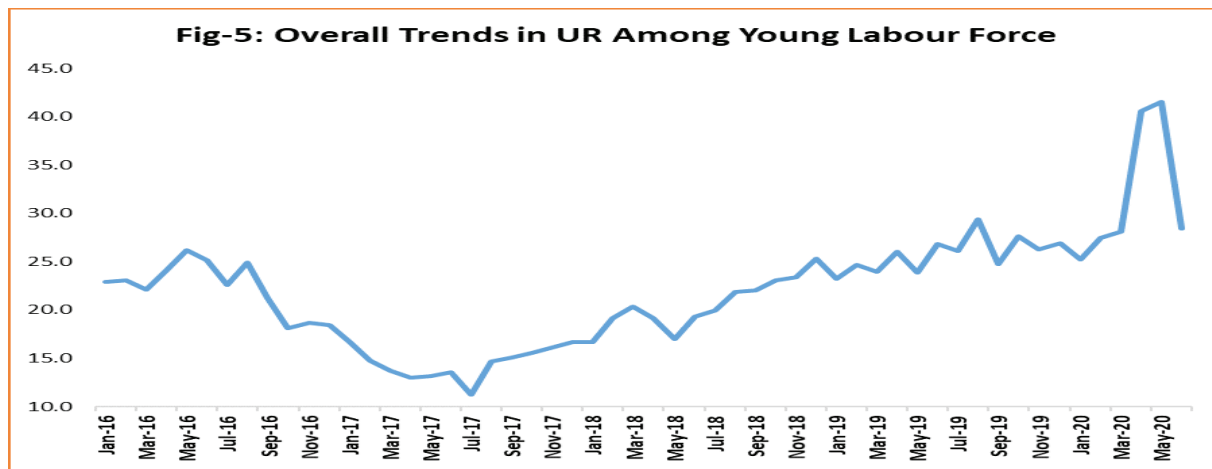


Fig 5: Trends in UR among young labour force

Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data.

The unemployment trends among young labour force was approximately 22% in Jan -16. The rate fell down to approximately 14% to 11% since May -17 to July -17. But it rose abnormally to approximately 41% in March -20 and it again fell down to 25% in May-20.

C) Male and Female:

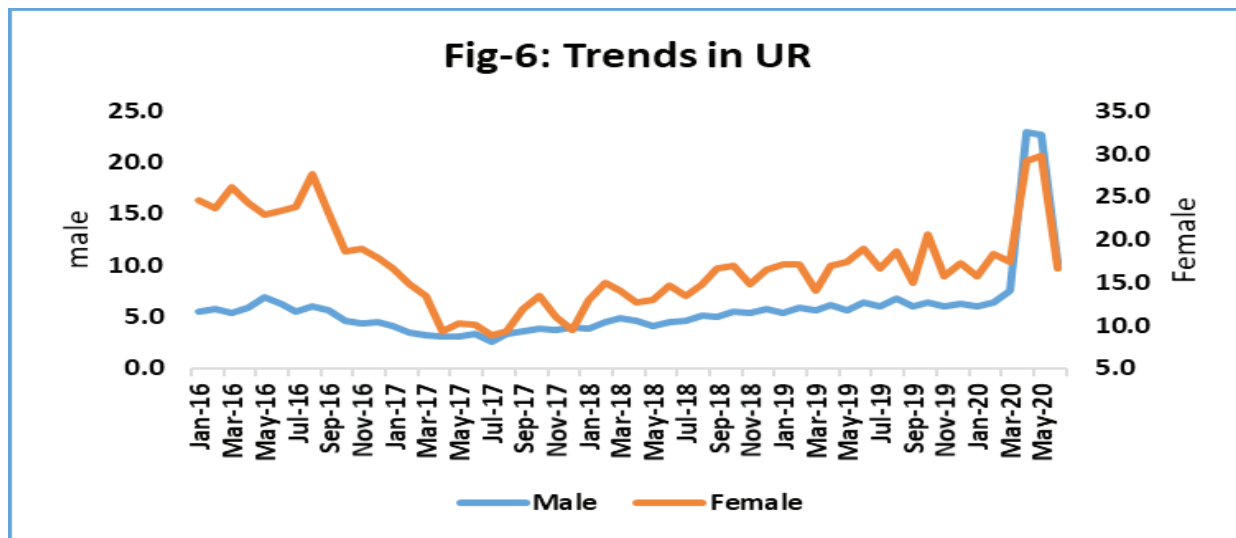


Fig 6: Trends in Unemployment rate.

Source: Calculation based on CMIE CPHS Data.

The unemployment trends among male was approximately 6% in Jan -16. The rate fell down to approximately 4% to 3% since May -17 to July -17. But it rose abnormally to approximately 24% in March -20 and it again fell down to 9% in May-20. The unemployment trends among female was approximately 16% in Jan -16. The rate fell down to approximately 19% to 3% since September -16 to July -17. But it rose abnormally to approximately 20% in March -20 and it again fell down to 9% in May-20.

Remittances:

A] International Remittance:

Due to covid-19, there shall be reduction in the flow of remittances by about 23% in 2020 to US \$64 billion. A total of 82% remittances are received from seven countries namely United Arab Emirates [UAE], U.S, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, U.K, AND Oman by India. There has been sharp decrease in the flow of remittances in India after covid-19. Four states in India namely Kerela, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu received 58.7% of total remittances.

B] Domestic Remittances:

As per National Survey of Household Income & Expenditure [NSHIE] there are 11.5 million households receiving remittances amounting to Rs 0.5 trillion in 2010-11. Households receiving remittances of 41% belong to the bottom 30% of the income distribution. For the purpose of supporting immediate family needs 97% of remittances are used.

Plight of Migrant Workers in India:

The majority of inter –district and inter-state migrants belong to the poorest section of the society and are illiterate. The mode of recruitment is through social network consisting of middlemen, contractors and relatives. The condition of the migrant workers is constantly exposed to accidents, ill health, extreme level of harassment and poor quality of work life. The workers are mostly from rural and economically lagging states like Bihar, UP, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, MP, Jharkhand and other states.

A] Wages:

Migrant workers being part of the unorganized sector lose in bargaining for fair wages. They even lack minimum wages; further the agreed wages are not paid on time. Even after the completion of work, substantial due remains with the builders or contractors, who are always on the look for devouring these due wages.

B] Working Conditions:

Their working conditions and hours of work are not regulated and designed properly. They are further not paid for any excess work. They are working under hazardous conditions. At the sites the working conditions and the facilities provided are far from satisfactory. In case of an emergency or accident there is no provision for medical aid.

C] Housing:

The migrant workers are provided with temporary accommodation to adjust 2-3 people in the same room. All the activities including food preparation, sleeping is to be done in the small space given as temporary accommodation. The accommodation being temporary, the arrangement is made with tin sheets and roofs. When the temperature goes up during summer it becomes difficult for them to stay inside and during rainy season water leaks in the house and it becomes difficult for them to stay inside the house.

D] Sanitation:

The sanitation hygiene of the migrant workers house and construction site is in extremely poor condition. Majority of them are lacking facilities such as kitchen, bathrooms and the toilets. There are cases of open defecation too. The environment around them is pathetic and unhygienic. In most of the settlement availability of water, access to drinking water and sewage facilities are the common problem. Majority of the workers suffer from clean drinking water and have to depend on open well, public water supply. There is lack of provision for washing clothes and utensils. Mostly they share a common room along with kitchen where food is prepared using the kerosene stove placed on the ground. The practice of dumping waste disposal followed by migrant workers has serious implications on public health and environment.

E] Electricity Supply:

Majority of the migrant workers suffer from the provision of electricity. For lighting in night, they used candles, kerosene lamps, and battery run lights. Even, some having electricity connection they are subject to frequent disconnection.

F] Cooking:

In most of the households firewood is used as a source of cooking. They collect it from the nature as well as local vendors. They are lacking proper ventilation facilities as a result huts were filled with smoke and deposits of soot resulting in potential health hazards.

Schemes:

1] Aarogya Setu App 2020:

This was adopted by the Ministry of Home Affairs owing to the COVID-19 pandemic to be undertaken by the Central as well as State Government. This was set up for formulating appropriate health response to not only contains the epidemic but also to protect the health and safety of the community at large. It includes prevention and management of the covid-19 pandemic, contact tracing, syndromic mapping, statistical analysis, medical research, formulation of treatment plans or other medical and public health responses related to redressal and management of the covid-19 pandemic. "MeitY", The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt. of India has been designated as the agency responsible for the implementation of this protocol and its developers NIC, The National Informatics Centre shall be responsible for collection, processing and managing response data collected by the Aarogya Setu App.

2] Atma-Nirbhar Bharat:

It is the vision of the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi of making India a self-reliant nation. Under this programme vendors will be eligible to avail a working capital loan of upto Rs 10,000 with tenure of one year and repaid monthly installments under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. No collateral is needed for this loan. All vendors need to do digital transactions. The scheme will help formalize the street vendors with above objectives and will open up new

opportunities to this sector to move up the economic ladder. The five pillars of Atma-Nirbhar Bharat focus on:

1] Economy

2] Infrastructure

3] System

4] Vibrant Demography

5] Demand.

3] One Nation, One Ration Card:

The Central Government had announced this scheme in June 2019. It was initially proposed to be nationally rolled out by June 1, 2020. Now, it has been extended to be done by March 2021 (Recently announced by Finance Minister). One Nation, One Ration Card Scheme helps the poor migrant workers to buy subsidized rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country so long as their ration cards are linked to Aadhaar. Basically, this scheme is all about inter-state portability of ration card. As per Census 2011, 4.1 crore people were inter-state migrants and 1.4 crore people migrated (intra-state) for employment. Since, People keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living, it will enable migrant and their family members to access Public Distribution System (PDS) benefits from any fair shop in the country.

4] Garib Kalyan Yojana:

PM Garib Kalyan Yojana has announced by the Central Government to help the poorer section of the society during the period of Covid-19. Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, the centre announced a package of Rs.1.75 Lakh Crore and 80 Crore Indians are being benefitted. Under this scheme people will get five kg of wheat or five kg of rice and one kg chana every month until November 2020. Women who hold Jan Dhan Account will be credited with Rs.500 under this scheme. It will also be benefitted to the MNREGA workers, health workers, senior citizens, widows and farmers.

5] Migration Commission:

The Covid-19 lockdown left 45-60 million migrant labourers in the lurch across cities. Faced with lives and

livelihood challenges, a large number of them began to leave in hordes to their native places. Migration Commission links migrant workers with the state economy and provide them employment within the state. The commission will identify skills of workers returning from other states and ensure that they get jobs. Through the Migration Commission, the government intends to provide the migrant workers guaranteed “Social Security” and “Minimum Job Security”. Uttar Pradesh is the first state that introduces Migration Commission in India.

Conclusion

The study clearly indicates the plight of the migration workers in India. No doubt the industry attracts much common man that provides employment status but inside story is totally different. There are many acts that protect and assure the quality of life of workers in the factories and companies, but the migration workers are completely alien to it. Long working hours, lack of health facilities, safety measures, poor housing conditions, atrocities on female workers, poor wages and inadequate compensation factors creates lots of insecurity and hurdles for the migration workers. High incentives and good management improve productivity. Contrary, poor working conditions, poor management and lack of financial incentives reduces motivation of workers resulting in lower productivity levels. Proper and continuous training of workers in the use of contemporary building techniques is equally helpful in improving productivity. Thus, constructive steps must be taken by the Government and private building contractors to improve the quality of life of the workers as well as welfare measures.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank the anonymous referee for needful and helpful suggestions on improving the presentation of this paper. The article

mentioned above has not been published or submitted to or accepted for publication in any form, in any other journal. We declare that we contributed significantly towards the research study, that is, conception, design and analysis, and interpretation of data.

Declaration of ownership:

This report is our original work.

Conflict of Interest: Nil

Source of Funding: Self

Ethical Clearance: This study was approved by the institution.

References

1. Banthia J. and Dyson T. Smallpox in Nineteenth Century India, Population and Development Review; 1999, Vol 25, No. 4., 649-680 pp.
2. BBC,2020. [cited on 6th April 2020] Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52086274>.
3. Davis, K. The Population of India and Pakistan, Princeton University Press, Princeton; 1951.
4. Hill, K. Influenza in India 1918: excess mortality reassessed: Genus; 2011, Vol. 67, No. 2, 9-29 pp.
5. IndiaToday(2020).Available from: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-migrants-sprayedwithdisinfectants-on-road-in-up-bareilly-dm-assures-action-1661371-2020-03-30>.
6. Sahas, J. Voices of the Invisible Citizens: A Rapid Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Internal Migrant Workers; 2020, April, New Delhi.
7. Maharatna, A. Food Scarcity and Migration Social Research; 2014 Vol. 81, No. 2, 277-298 pp.