

# Asian Resonance

## Crisis of Seasonal Migrants in Odisha during Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

Seasonal migration is a perennial and rampant phenomenon in rural pockets Odisha. The Covid-19 Pandemic has induced a lot of reverse migration worsening the situation of the seasonal migrants both at the place of origin and at the place of destination. The migrants have been returning to their native places in the midst of hue and cry finding it difficult to cope with the situation. The present research tries to analyse the critical situation, the reverse migrants are passing through amid lock down imposed by the government of India. The study is conducted in four most migrant prone blocks of Bargarh district of western Odisha. Data and information for the present research have been collected from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data have been collected from government's record, websites, newspapers and journals. For the collection of the primary data, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of Bargarh district was contacted to have information about the number of people returning from other states. The study shows that the government has taken several praiseworthy initiatives like arrangement of relief camps, transportation, buses, shramik special trains and quarantine measures for the migrants during lockdown. However, the migrants are not satisfied with the quality of these services especially transportation and quarantine measures. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in much psychological disorder among the seasonal migrants due to the harsh experience of travelling from the place of destination to the place of origin and related experiences.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Lockdown, Seasonal Migration, Poverty, Unemployment

### Introduction

Covid-19 or Corona Virus has become a buzzword in the contemporary society due to the severity and risks involved in it. Covid-19/ 2019-nCov or Coronavirus as commonly known, has probably been as terrifying as the Spanish Flu and Swine Flu (Jilani et al, 2019). The number of cases and death toll are rising day by day throughout the world and India is no exception.

India's nationwide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 pandemic has critically dislocated its migrant population. Lacking jobs and money, and with public transportation shut down, hundreds of thousands of migrants were forced to walk hundreds of miles back to their home villages – with some dying during the journey. The central government imposed the lockdown and closed businesses when India reached around 500 cases of COVID-19. Local authorities followed with measures such as creating strict containment zones to close off hotspots, which left millions of migrant workers stranded. The country's rapid response slowed down the spread of the disease, but also raised concerns about exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities (<https://socialprotection.org/>). The virus has spread from towns and cities to the rural areas of India in general and of Odisha in particular in spite of the lockdown. The reverse migration is one of the key factors behind such spread to rural areas. Seasonal migrants are the most affected persons of society due to lockdown. Many seasonal migrants have returned; some are still in the process of returning, to their native places. The pathetic situation of these migrants is grievous and dismal. Every day, news comes regarding migrants walking long distances to reach to their native places.

The seasonal migrants of Western Odisha constitute one of the most marginalised groups. The emergence of Covid-19 Pandemic has had an impact on populations across the globe, but not all populations are affected equally. Pre-existing health, infrastructure, socio-economic

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inequities shape people's vulnerability to the disease. The Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on access to health care, welfare, housing and work etc. In spite of the government's initiative to protect the migrants calling for specific actions during Covid-19 crisis, the situation of seasonal migrants in Odisha is deteriorating. Protection of seasonal migrants amid the Pandemic is urgent and of utmost concern from the point of view of public health and human rights. The present research explores about the seasonal migrants' experience and the effect of Covid-19 on their life-situation/everyday life as a result of self-isolation, social distancing and changes in service delivery during the crisis including their journey from the place of destination to the place of origin. It examines the consequences of loss of support, livelihoods and social networks on seasonal migrants and tries to document physical, psychological and public health risks associated with the effects.

#### Review of Literature

The corona virus originated from Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in central China as claimed and now it has been spread to the whole world. There is a close relationship between migration and the spread of the disease. Though international migration played the major role, the inter-state and inter-district migration at the micro level have also significant contribution in the spread of the virus.

Although migrants tend to be younger than the local population, they tend to live and work in crowded conditions that do not permit social distancing, putting them at increased risk of contracting the disease (Kluge et al. 2020). Migrant workers frequently live in precarious conditions, often in crowded urban environments or slums that do not enable them to comply with recommendations about social distancing. This is true of poor households throughout the world whose living conditions often do not permit compliance (Brown, Ravallion, and van de Walle 2020). To better understand the challenge of complying with social distancing recommendations in developing countries, Brown and van de Walle (2020) propose six conditions that indicate whether it is possible to follow the WHO's recommendations for household protection from COVID-19. These conditions are: 1) access to internet, a phone, TV, or radio; 2) no more than two people per sleeping room; 3) access to a toilet that is not shared with another household; 4) the dwelling can be adequately closed (e.g. there are walls and a ceiling); 5) access to piped water in the dwelling or yard; and 6) the household has a place for hand washing with soap. The negative effects of job loss can be particularly significant for migrant workers because they frequently work in informal jobs and so lack safety nets in case of job loss or illness. Few migrants from developing countries have access to social protection coverage (Avato, Koettl, and Sabates-Wheeler 2010). There is evidence that households do not expect migration to be a viable path for employment in the near future. For example, Listening to the Citizens of Uzbekistan survey found that the number of respondents with household members considering seasonal migration fell by more than 95 percent over the previous year

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(World Bank 2020c). Several factors could play a role. Persistently depressed economic conditions could mean lower demand for migrant workers and less support for permissive migration policies. Prolonged travel restrictions may induce additional technological progress in sectors like agriculture where shortages do arise, also lowering demand for migrant workers (Clemens, Lewis, and Postel 2018).

#### Area of Study

Seasonal migration is a common phenomenon in western Odisha. People migrate to different places from their native villages in search of livelihood opportunities. Bargarh district has attracted world-wide attention for large scale seasonal migration and the exploitation of the seasonal migrant labourers. (Biswal, 2019). There is heavy migration from the non-irrigated region of Bargarh district during the lean period in search of livelihood especially among the socially and economically marginalised sections of the society. Keeping in mind the high rate of migration, the sample respondents for the present study have been selected purposively from four blocks namely Paikmal, Padampur, Gaisilet and Bijepur of Bargarh district.

#### Objective of the Study

The present research has been conducted keeping in mind the following objectives:

1. To capture the response of the governments' initiative to deal with the problem of the seasonal migrants
2. To assess the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown on the seasonal migrants of sample region
3. To record the experiences of the seasonal migrants in reaching home from the place of destination.

#### Methodology

The data and information for the present research have been collected from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data have been collected from government's record, websites, newspapers and journals. For the collection of the primary data, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of Bargarh district was contacted to have information about the number of people returning from other states. The District Rural Development Agency updates the data on daily basis regarding the registration of the migrants and the status of return migrants. Hence the data for the present research is included till 25.06.2020. The information about the seasonal migrants is collected from the DRDA, Bargarh for the collection of primary data and information.

The respondents are contacted over mobile phones keeping in mind the risk and lockdown. A total of 50 respondents have been contacted several times to record their experiences and sufferings during the whole process of returning home. The initial telephonic interviews have been taken from the respondents when they were in the Temporary Medical Centres (TMCs) specifically created by the governments to deal with the problem of COVID-19. Later, they are further contacted for several times till they reach their respective homes. The researcher

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was in constant touch via cell phones with the respondents during the whole period of research. The respondents have also shared relevant photos through whatsapp.

### **Government's Response to Deal with Migrants' Problem during Covid-19**

#### **Directives**

On 27 March, the Home Ministry ordered the states to ensure that migrants would not move during the lockdown, permitting the states to use the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for providing food and shelter to the migrants on 28 March. On 29 March, the government issued sweeping orders directing that the landlords should not demand rent during the period of the lockdown and that employers should pay wages without deduction. It also announced that those who violated the lockdown were to be sent to government-run quarantine facilities for 14 days, and that it had asked state governments to set up immediate relief camps for the migrant workers returning to their native states. However, the order regarding payment of wages was withdrawn in the guidelines for the lockdown extension issued on 17 May. (Wikipedia)

#### **Transport Arrangements**

As of 28 May 91 lakh migrants had travelled back home in government-arranged transport facilities. However, according to the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), migrants were confused about the exact procedures to register themselves for travel. Additionally, many state registration portals were either in English or the local language of the states they lived in, which very few migrants could understand. Further, general lack of information from the government to the migrants resulted in them paying large sums of money to register themselves (Wikipedia).

#### **Buses**

In late March, the Uttar Pradesh government decided to arrange buses at Delhi's Anand Vihar bus station to take the migrants back to their villages for free. Large crowds gathered at the bus station. However, with the extension of the lockdown, many remained stranded till the last week of April, when the state governments were permitted by the central government to operate buses, but not trains. As of 23 May, 40 lakh migrants had travelled to their homes by buses. The condition in the buses is generally poor, with social distancing impossible due to overcrowding and higher fares being charged than promised (Wikipedia).

#### **Shramik Special Trains**

On 1 May, the central government permitted the Indian Railways to launch "Shramik Special" trains for the migrant workers and others stranded. On 3 May, the Ministry of Home Affairs mildly reprimanded the state governments for hurriedly requesting trains to transport migrants, stating that the trains were primarily meant for those who were stranded due to the sudden lockdown, and not the migrants. Migrants faced many hardships while travelling by these trains. Many reported to have no food and water arranged for them while they travelled. Others who received food packets and water reported that the provisions were

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simply dumped at the entrances, leaving workers fighting with each other for their share. Some migrants also died during the train journeys, but the Railways stated that most of them had existing illnesses. According to Railway Protection Force, there have been almost 80 deaths on board the Shramik Special trains between 9 and 27 May. (Wikipedia)

#### **Relief measures**

Soon after the nationwide lockdown was announced in late March, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a 1.7 lakh crore (US\$24 billion) spending plan for the poor. This consisted of cash transfers and steps to ensure food security. By 3 April, the central government had released 11,092 crore to states and UTs under the NDRF, to fund food and shelter arrangements for migrants. To help provide jobs and wages to workers, the average daily wages under the MGNREGA were increased to 202 (US\$2.80) from the earlier 182 (US\$2.60), as of 1 April. 1,000 crore from the PM CARES Fund was allocated for the support of migrant workers on 13 May. On 14 May, FM Sitharaman further announced free food grains for the migrant workers, targeting 80 million migrant workers by spending 35 billion (US\$490 million). (Wikipedia)

#### **Labour Laws**

The governments of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat sought to temporarily revise their labour laws in early May with the purpose of attracting industries and investments. Labour unions criticized this as being harmful to the migrant workers while giving more authority to the employers. Ten of them then wrote to the ILO on 14 May regarding the same, to which the ILO responded by reassuring them that it had contacted Prime Minister Narendra Modi. (Wikipedia)

#### **Quarantine Measures**

Many states reported high numbers of positive cases of COVID-19 among the migrants returning home as lockdown restrictions eased. State governments opened thousands of quarantine centres to house them with some states imposing mandatory institutional quarantine. States also imposed strict measures for migrants to follow, either while leaving or after entering state borders. (Wikipedia)

#### **Status of the Returnee Migrants in Bargarh District during Covid-19**

Bargarh is one of the most migration prone districts of western Odisha. The people belonging to lower socio-economic background migrate every year during the lean season to other states for the basic survival of their lives. The people go through many hardships, exploitation, and harassment during the process of seasonal migration. The Pandemic Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown have made the life of the migrants exceptionally miserable and they have encountered much humiliation. As stated earlier, the government has started the process of bringing back the migrations to their places of origin. The data for the following tables have been collected from the District Rural Development Agency office of Bargarh district. The following table (Table No.1) shows that there are instances of migration from the total twelve

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blocks of Bargarh district. There is no such block in the district where people have not migrated. The record of the DRDA is updated daily regarding the cases of registration of the migrants to return to their native places. The table shows that Jharbandh block has recorded the highest number of registration i.e.2617 (Two Thousand One hundred seventeen) cases where as Bhatli block has the lowest cases of registration i.e. 541 (Five hundred Forty One). Again highest number i.e. 53 registration have been done on a single day (25.06.2020) from Jharbandh block. Hence the table clearly indicates that Jharbandh block is the most migration prone of the district.

**Table- 1: Status of the TMCs of Bargarh District (Rural) (as on 25.06.2020)**

Name of Block	Pre-registered	Registered on 25.06.2020	Total
Amabhona	898	16	914
Attabira	1250	01	1251
Bargarh	1179	12	1191
Barpali	896	0	896
Bhatli	541	0	541
Bheden	1264	0	1264
Bijepur	660	8	668
Gaisilet	1662	0	1662
Jharbandh	2617	53	2670
Padampur	1498	22	1520

**Table- 2: Status of the TMCs of Bargarh District (Urban) (as on 25.06.2020)**

Name of Block	Name of TMC	Pre-registered	Registered on 25.06.2020	Total
Bargarh Municipality	Anand Mandap	16	0	16
Bargarh Municipality	SUH Building	26	0	26
Bargarh Municipality	Ranapratap High School	0	0	0
Bargarh Municipality	Panchayat College	0	0	0
Attabira NAC	Boys' High School	5	0	5
Barpali NAC	OTDC Building	17	0	17
Barpali NAC	Govt. High School	0	0	0
Padampur NAC	Town Hall	0	0	0
Padampur NAC	Anwasha Hostel	0	0	0
Bijepur NAC	Govt. High School	0	0	0
Bijepur NAC	Radiance College	0	0	0
Bijepur NAC	Kalyan Mandap	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>66</b>

**Source: District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Bargarh**

The sample blocks of the present research are the most migrant prone blocks of Bargarh district. The government of Odisha has also declared these blocks as the migration prone blocks and is taking various measures to reduce the cases of migration from those blocks by providing work in their locality through MGNREGA. The total number of migrant returnees from the four blocks is 6436 (Six Thousand Four Hundred Thirty Six) as mentioned (in Table No-3) out of the total number of number i.e. 16148

**Table- 3: Status of the TMCs of Sample Blocks (as on 25.06.2020)**

Name of Block	Pre-registered	Registered on 25.06.2020	Total
Padampur	1498	22	1520
Paikmal	2586	0	2586
Gaisilet	1662	0	1662
Bijepur	660	8	668
<b>Total</b>	<b>6406</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6436</b>

**Source: District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Bargarh**

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Paikmal	2586	0	2586
Sohela	985	0	985
<b>Total</b>	<b>16036</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>16148</b>

**Source: District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Bargarh**

The cases of migration vary from rural to urban areas in Bargarh district. The people of rural areas are migrating more than that of the people of urban areas. The following table ( Table-2) is clear evidence that fewer cases are registered from the urban areas like municipalities and Notified Area Council (NAC) of the district. A total of only 66 cases have been registered from the urban areas, Bargarh Municipality being the highest. Whereas Table No-.1 shows that there are 16148 (sixteen Thousand One Hundred Forty Eight) cases of registration from the rural areas. The process of registration is still going on and number of returnees might increase in coming days. There is no registration form Bjepur and Padampur NAC.

The comparative analysis of migration between rural and urban areas of the district clearly shows that the people of the rural areas are migrating to other areas and affected by the Pandemic Covid-19. The temporary medical camps or quarantine centres that have been organised by the government of Odisha have also been given in the following table with respect to the urban areas.

(mentioned in Table No-1) of the return migrants of the district. Among the sample blocks, Paikmal Block has the highest number of return migrants i.e 2586 (Two Thousand Five hundred Eighty Six) where as Bijepur Block has the lowest number of return migrants i.e. 660 (Six hundred Sixty). On a single day (25.06.2020) highest number of registration have been done in Padampur Block while no individual has registered from Paikmal and Gaisilet blocks. (Table No-3)

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### **Impact Of Covid-19 on Seasonal Migrants Impact on Health and Well-Being**

The seasonal migrants are fearful about staying at the place of destination during lockdown declared by the government of India to combat the spread of novel corona virus. Since the seasonal migrants are not well-accepted by the host community, they are afraid of being charged by the police as well as the local people. Many of the respondents reported physical and psychological abuse. Many do not get any financial support from the employer to deal with the health problems during the crisis. Some of the respondents are worried that the mortality rate of their community would not be recorded and thus would be invisible to authorities.

The seasonal migrants are deeply affected by social isolation which exacerbated existing feelings of loneliness, sadness and anxiety about income, health and life. Reverse migration uproots people from their respective places of destinations and existing social connections. They do not have any family or friends to rely on during crisis at the place of destination. Some are gradually trying to connect and rebuild social networks with the place of origin which enabled them in rebuilding of gradual hope, dignity and confidence. Since they have limited access to telephones and internet, they are enforced with self isolation undermining their ability to maintain the social networks. They have to spend extra-solitary time leading to further marginalisation. The closure of places of worship, isolation, limited social contact and limited access to services have made them more vulnerable. The whole scenario affects mental health and disrupts their coping strategies. The increased anxiety and stress related to the Pandemic exacerbated existing concerns. One of the respondent states:

"I was in a far way place from my home and I was afraid as to how to reach to my village. I was extremely worried about my children left back in my home with my aged parents. Thank God, with great difficulty now I am in home with my entire family members"

The feeling shared by the respondents unfolds the suppressed feelings of the seasonal migrants and their concerns to meet left behind family members of the villages. In the time of crisis, everyone wants to be with the family and fellow beings which provides strength and support. The seasonal migrants separated from the family are in great depression and they want to be connected with their family members. They are extremely worried about coming home.

### **The problem of Transportation**

The migrant workers are desperate to return home from their respective places of destinations amid lockdown. Due to the non-availability of the Bus and train services many of them are stranded in the work site. It is not uncommon for the seasonal migrants to walk hundreds of kilometres with a desire to reach to their native places. The Migrant workers have suffered a lot with respect to the transportation of returning home. The Government has initiated necessary measures to bring the migrants back from their places of destination.

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## **Economic Impact**

The earning of the seasonal migrants is minimal and they do not have much savings. They eke out hard for a living and migrate for survival. Due to the Pandemic Covid-19 and lockdown, they have lost their jobs and are unable to get work which pushes them to distress. Whatever meagre savings they have, are already spent in the journey from the place of destination to the place of origin. Many of the migrants have returned home empty handed. After reaching home, they have to face many hardships and challenges due to the non-availability of work and lock down. They are unable to feed themselves and their dependents (those who have dependent like children and old parents) properly and the situation is becoming deplorable day by day. Finding no way out, they are bound to borrow money from the local money lenders with high rate of interest. This is an increasing economic burden on the migrant family. It is even difficult to get loans from the money lenders too as many of them are reluctant to lend money to all seasonal migrants. As reported by the seasonal migrants the money lenders are becoming very selective in lending money; they assess the person who can be in a position to repay money and then decide whether to lend or not. Some of the sample respondents reported to have mortgaged their small patch of land what they have to deal with the economic crisis arising out of Covid-19. Hence many sample seasonal migrants are found to be in distress to shoulder up the family responsibility. While interacting with one of the respondents, he says:

"I have spent everything whatever I had earned during the short period of my migration. I have come home without a single penny in my hands and now I am jobless. Without finding any option, I was forced to borrow money from a person of my village and promised him to repay the money by working in his farm in the upcoming crop season."

The above statement shows the kind of economic distress, the seasonal migrants of sample area are going thorough. Since the harvesting season (Kharif season) is coming very soon, the seasonal migrants are hopeful of getting work in the farmland and that has become a way of borrowing money from the local people who have more land. However, it is quite expected that this time the wages may be less since many seasonal migrants have returned home and there would be surplus of labour in the local area. Which might result in earning less or taking more time to repay the loans?

The government is planning hard to deal with the crisis of Pandemic Covid-19. The government has taken steps to provide rice and dal to poor families as part of the Public Distribution System. The government has further paid the Old Age Pension, Widow Pension, and Disability Pension of three months at a time so that people can manage their family during lockdown. In the Jan Dhan Yojna also an amount of rupees 500/- is deposited in bank accounts of female account holders to support the female sections of the society. The steps taken by the central government and government of Odisha are highly appreciative but not sufficient to reduce to economic distress of the

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seasonal migrants which they have never ever witnessed. The seasonal migrants, perhaps, end up as bonded labourers if pro-active planning is not made and proper steps are not taken in time.

#### **The problem of Accommodation**

The seasonal migrants describe inadequate living conditions which have intensified during lockdown. The seasonal migrants living in shelters, shared accommodation and overcrowded housing with shared toilets are unable to self isolate. Living in overcrowded facilities generated health risks and anxiety about contracting the virus from co-residents. (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk>)

The government has made arrangements for quarantine centres in all parts of Odisha to combat the spread of novel corona virus. In almost every Panchayat of western Odisha, schools have been converted into quarantine centres to accommodate the reverse migrants. The reverse migrants are asked to stay in those quarantine centres for the specified period of time as prescribe by the government. The government takes care of food and other needs of the migrants during their stay in these centres. But, the sample respondents reported poor accommodation in the quarantine centres leading to overcrowding and difficult to maintain social distancing. Since the sample respondents belong to the lower caste of the society they are again isolated by their comates inside the centres considering them untouchables. Some of them have to sleep on the floors and have to adjust with poor quality of food. There is no proper ventilation and have to bear the scorching heat of May-June. Some respondents reported frequent power cuts and non-functioning fans provided in the centers. The breakfast, lunch and dinner are not provided in time and they have to manage and adjust with the situation. A young returnee from Cotton Mill of Tamilnadu mentions:

"I was kept in a school of my Panchayat where I was provided with a mat to sleep on the floor and a bucket for my personal use. I didn't have to pay for the food but you know, I was feeling hungry since it was not provided in time. The school toilet was used by all persons staying in the quarantine centre, so I was worried that I might get affected by the virus. Thank God, no positive case was reported from the centre where I was staying. With great difficulty finally I am in home and I am safe and fine."

The above statement reflects the sufferings of the seasonal migrants. They have to adjust and cope with many critical situations starting from their journey from the place of destination to the place of origin. They have to adjust to the adverse conditions at several points of time till they reach home. It is worth mentioning that there is a ray of hope and joy after being associated with the family members, friends and villagers.

The conditions of women seasonal migrants in the quarantine centres are even more adverse than the male members. There is no separate arrangement for the women at the quarantine centres. They have to share rooms with the male seasonal migrants which create very difficult and uncomfortable conditions. Some women migrants have their children with them

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too and managing the children in the centres is a great challenge for them. The girls' toilet of the school is used by all female migrants staying in the centre which results in fear of being affected by the virus. Some women migrants reluctantly share that they are not well-behaved by their counterparts during their stay in the quarantine centres. A female reverse migrant who has returned from Telengana shares:

"I am a woman and I stayed in the quarantine centre sharing room with the male members. My husband and children were also with me in the same centre but still then, it is, beyond my culture. Some of them are my relatives, so I was shy and uncomfortable. But as there was no option, so I stayed."

The feeling shared by this woman migrant is a reflection of the traditionally restricted and culturally unacceptable conditions they have to face in the quarantine centres. The women seasonal migrants have to break their tradition and culture which has psychological impact on the mind of the sample migrants. Since they have no other option but to share room, they feel humiliated and exploited leading towards emotional weakness and psychological trauma that might continue for long period of time in their life.

After being relieved from the quarantine centers, the villagers are hesitant to easily accept the reverse seasonal migrants into their village due to the fear of corona virus. The villagers have a sense of fear that if they allow them to enter into the village, these migrants might spread the virus. There are instances where the reverse migrants are kept in the school of their respective village to maintain the home quarantine. Sometimes the family members and neighbours are hesitant to allow them inside their home. The male respondent who is a returnee from Surat narrated his harsh experience as follows:

I stayed in the Panchayat quarantine centre for fifteen days and when I returned to my village, the villagers did not allow me to enter into the village. I was asked to stay in the school building for next seven days to maintain the home quarantine. But you know, I was staying alone in the school and sleeping on the floor. There was no fan and electricity and it very difficult for me to adjust the heat of May. I was using the same mat and bucket given to me in the panchayat quarantine centre which I carried with myself. My mother was keeping the food in the school varandah which I took later and eat. I was cleaning the utensils by myself and kept it in the varandah which my mother collected later on. I was served breakfast, lunch and dinner like this. You see, I was emotionally very weak to deal with that situation and felt extremely suffocated, lonely and excluded. My life continues like this for seven days. I was counting days and night and nights were more fearful then the days because hardly I slept during the nights over-thinking about my past and worrying about my future. I felt exhausted! Those seven days were like seven months for me. I felt as if I were inside a jail, as if I were tied to a chain! When I completed my home quarantine in my village school (you see, my village school was my home for seven days living in self-isolation) and met my family

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members and friends. It's a great joy; it's like a new life for me.

All reverse seasonal migrants stay in the quarantine centres for seven to fifteen days (as per the government rule) and have to stay in home quarantine as per the guideline made by the government. It is very difficult to deal with the problems arising out of home quarantine. The sample respondents mention that they do not have sufficient rooms in their homes which can be converted as a home quarantine. Usually the single room is used as the drawing room, guest room and bed room in normal days. The room is shared by many family members. So making arrangement of one separated room as a home quarantine was very much challenging for the family members. But at any cost they have to arrange a room for the migrant family member to be used as home quarantine, some young male family members have to spend nights in their relative's house.

#### Psychological Impact

During outbreak of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, and the restrictions imposed on routine activities as part of social distancing norms to prevent the spread of the disease, scores of migrant workers tend to move back to their native places. During the prevailing COVID pandemic also, many migrant workers used all possible means to reach their destinations. Many of them are however stuck at borders, including state, district and at national border areas. These are the most marginalized sections of the society who are dependent on daily wages for their living, and in times of such distress need help and understanding of the society. Immediate concerns faced by such migrant workers relate to food, shelter, and healthcare, fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, loss of wages, concerns about the family, anxiety and fear. Sometimes, they also face harassment and negative reactions of the local community ([http://www.manupatrafast.in/covid\\_19](http://www.manupatrafast.in/covid_19))

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in much psychological disorder among the seasonal migrants due to the harsh experience of travelling from the place of destination to the place of origin and related experiences. Although COVID-19 has emerged very recently, due to the unprecedented nature of this pandemic several studies have already been carried out to examine its consequences, primarily in China but also in Europe (Fagiolini et al., 2020; Porcheddu et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). Research from China, the first affected country, suggests that the fear of this pandemic can lead to mental illness such as stress disorders, anxiety, depression, somatization and behaviors such as increased alcohol and tobacco consumption (Shigemura et al., 2020). Moreover, the application of strict lockdown measures in that country is affecting many aspects of people's lives, triggering a wide variety of psychological problems, such as panic disorder, anxiety, and depression (Qiu et al., 2020). The situation of the seasonal migrants in the study area is similar to the findings of the above studies. The reverse seasonal migrants are found to be facing several psychological disorders.

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The youth are very much vulnerable to the psychological problems. From a psychological perspective, young adults have shown high levels of psychological symptoms in response to the COVID-19 outbreak (Lai et al., 2020). These high levels of distress among young people could be due to the fact that they tend to gather a large amount of information from social media, which could easily trigger stress (Bao et al., 2020). In contrast, distress in older people could be explained by the fact that this population is suffering from the highest mortality rates as a result of COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, psychiatric patients were prone to develop anxiety and depression due to lack of access to psychiatric care (Hao et al., 2020). Workers were prone to adverse mental health due to perceived risk of contracting COVID-19 at the workplace (Tan et al., 2020). Healthcare workers experienced high levels of anxiety due to concerns about spreading COVID-19 to their family members (Chew et al., 2020) (<https://www.frontiersin.org>)

Gender could be another variable to be considered in the psychological response to the pandemic. In fact, much of the research has shown that women appear to present more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and distress in comparison with men (Lai et al., 2020; Liu N. et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). However, another recent research study in China that analyzed anxiety disorder, depressive symptoms, and sleep quality found that one in three participants showed anxiety disorders, but mood states did not differ between males and females during the COVID-19 epidemic, which contrasts with the findings of previous research showing that women are more likely to suffer from anxiety when compared with men (Huang and Zhao, 2020) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>)

#### Conclusion

The situation of the seasonal migrants has been worsening further due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. They are passing through the crisis of living in quarantine centres, unemployment and their livelihood is at stake. The psychological stress and trauma derived in the process of reverse migration may continue for long time and some of them may be unable to cope with the situation and lead a normal life. Hence, government must take proper measures for integration and development of these poor sections of the society.

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