

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the marginalized sections in India: A comprehensive study

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ABSTRACT

On March 23rd 2020, an unexpected countrywide lockdown was announced in India because of which an uncalled movement of nationwide laborers started as they had fear of loss of employment, shortage of food, lack of wages, and lack of basic life facilities. While going home, these laborers suffered a lot. They were more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus; experienced more police brutality and more no. of rail and road accidents. Later on, after detailed studies, it was revealed that the majority of these laborers belonged to marginalized sections. In this paper, the author has explained the different socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the marginalized sections of society including females in India. It includes the impact on employment, education, livelihood, etc. This paper also explains the reasons why marginalized sections suffered most during the deadly COVID-19 period. The authors also give some recommendations to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the marginalized sections of India.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, COVID-19, Marginalized Sections.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared COVID-19 a pandemic and also public health emergency. First case of Corona Virus came from China and speeded the almost whole world. On March 11, 2020 the WHO announced the COVID-19 as a global pandemic which has affected number of countries. In India also it affected the larger population but most affected people are from Marginalized Society. In general sense, if a person feels restrictions or the prevailing conditions do not allow him in participation of economic, social and political life that a person is termed as marginalized person.

In India, on 23 March 2020, lockdowns were imposed to prevent the spread of corona virus, which lead to the risk of malnutrition among marginalized sections such as persons working on daily wages, workers working away from their homes, drivers, fruit and vegetable sellers, waiters, delivery persons, salespersons and thousands others.

India is a country with different social and economic set-up. So the various program announced by the respective state agencies have been found incomplete because of these extreme differences. The belief that the virus would affect those who are wealthy and the people living in slums equally is wrong as these people shared the different socio-economic strata.

Sudra, now known as Untouchables or Dalits, was assigned to serve the caste groups above them. For this, Dalits worked in roles such as scavengers, cleaners, sweepers, leatherworkers, tailors, goldsmiths, black- smiths, and fishermen. It covers more than more than 200 million people nationwide. Many of them are struggling for livelihood and staying away from their families. On March 23, 2020, when nationwide lockdown was announced in India, these marginalized people had to leave for their hometown unprepared as lockdown came with complete lockdown. In India over more than 1.8 million people are homeless and hence it was quite difficult for them to be in complete quarantine ^[1].

While returning back home from the workplace, Dalit migrant suffered a lot. Maximum of them were on foot and did get any assistance neither from the government nor from local people. Irony of the situation was that on May 25, 2020, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh suggested that such Dalits are the carriers of COVID-19 because of which they got little assistance from the others and they faced ostracism ^[2].

There are number of instances which showed their miserable conditions. During lockdown, a crying migratory worker who was trying to go to his dying son lasted an everlasting image in the minds of people.

CASE STUDIES

In the village of Aston, in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, Raju Banskar, 33, says the double stigma of coming from a lower caste and having traveled from New Delhi where the coronavirus is spreading has made it impossible to find a job. Back home, Banskar says work

created through government jobs programs are mostly allocated by the village headman to upper caste workers ^[3].

Manish Kumar, 24, who returned to Tevar village, in the eastern district of Varanasi said caste-based discrimination restarted the moment he entered the quarantine center in his village, where upper castes separated themselves from Dalits ^[3].

Suraj Kumar from Bahadurgarh, Haryana belongs to a marginalised section, suffered after lockdown imposed during outbreak of COVID-19. He is a BPL card holder but during Lock down his name was found removed from the list of BPL card holders. Facing the apathy of local authorities, he had to approach the prime minister portal to get back the same and meanwhile suffered a lot of mental trauma as well as he had not been able to get the benefits for three months.

Jyoti Paswan, a 15-year-old Dalit girl, who peddled more than 1,200 kilometres ^[4] from Gurugram, to Darbhanga in Bihar state in May 2020 to take her injured father Mohan Paswan home.

EFFECTS ON DOMESTIC WORKERS

Most domestic employees have lost their employment. They were not provided with sufficient compensations. Some of them have faced with wage because of the Lockdown due to Covid-19 and these workers were forced to restrict themselves to no resources or have no financial assistance. Domestic workers are generally not registered and have unregulated work. In most of the cases these workers were not able to get the relief packages announced by the government to curb the Covid-19 crisis. Because of scarcity of the basic life necessities, they were not aware about the health packages announcement by the government as their priority is just to earn for livelihood.

EFFECT ON SANITATION WORKERS

Sanitation workers are at the frontlines of the global crisis caused by COVID-19. Even though the various statutory provisions are in place still there are people who are involved in manual scavenging. As per recorded Indian Government data such people are more than one lac eighty

two thousand in number but society is still most ignorant about them as there is no social security and respect for them. They are continuously under the risk of getting infected by Covid -19. Most of them pick the garbage with their bare hands due insufficient precautionary measures ^[5]. Their families are also under big risk. Sanitary workers are generally live in slums or in very poor conditions. Because of which they cannot maintain social distance and hence their family members are continuously at big risk. One such case was reported on 12th April 2020 in Dharavi, Mumbai, India ^[5].

REASONS

- Lack of Education
- Poverty
- Minimal Access from Government
- Lack of Awareness

While addressing in a webinar which was organized by Praxis (April-June 2020) Ponuchamy, founder of Anal Folk-Art Troupe, Tamil Nadu, mentioned that in number of places in Tamilnadu, proper infrastructure is not available in Dalit localities because of which public welfare schemes are not available to them.

Veronica Dung Dung, founder member of Samajik Seva Sadan ^[6] that works with Adivasis in Odisha had said. that Many people among them were unaware about the Jan Dhan Yojana announced by the government and also they were not sure of the account where the money is credited. They were informed that their account was dormant so only a few who had an active account received the sum,”

According to Shahroz Fatima, Pragati Madhyam Samiti, Uttar Pradesh, many Muslim people did not have access to the block office because of the unavailability of valid documents. An activist from Morena in Madhya Pradesh, Rohini Chhari, said ^[6] that some tribal in absence of caste certificate do not have access to the government facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Proper Health, housing and nutrition should be provided to the Marginalized Sections.

2. PPE kits should be made available to the safai Karamcharies.
3. There should be implementation of incentive-based healthcare services.
4. People must have proper information about Govt Schemes.
5. Steps should be adopted to strengthen the labor laws.
6. New laws should be formed for the betterment of transgender community.
7. Introduction of specialized health services for the tribal.
8. Representation of Marginalized groups in decision making committee should be there.

Before taking any Concrete decision to minimize the Covid-19 pandemic, Govt should keep in mind the impact of the decision on the Marginalized Sections at large.

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