

Title: Covid-19 and Precarity of Low-income Migrant Workers in Indian Cities

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# **Covid-19 and Precarity of Low-income Migrant Workers in Indian Cities**

## **Abstract**

Indian cities attract a considerable number of low-income migrants from marginal rural households experiencing difficult economic, political, and social conditions at home. Based on fieldwork in Jalandhar and Guwahati, this paper focuses on the precarity of low-income migrants in Indian cities. It argues that the concept of precarity, used in the context of migrant labour, should be extended to capture multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability examining the relationship between structural inequalities including difficult conditions at home, exclusion from public services, and poor access to justice. It puts forward a proposition that the widespread media representations of migrant workers returning home in the context of Covid-19 are not simply a result of the sudden outbreak of coronavirus but these journeys must be seen as a part of the history of the circulatory system of labour.

## **Introduction**

On 24 March 2020, following the outbreak of coronavirus, the Government of India announced a nation-wide lockdown, with only four hours of advance notice. Since then, images and reports of tens and thousands of distressed migrant workers attempting to make long journeys home by foot, stranded in transport hubs and border points and those left to die, being humiliated and ill-treated have been widely circulated in media. This *sudden visibility* of 'millions' of migrant workers has inspired a large number of reflections from activists, scholars, and commentators highlighting the humanitarian crisis (for example, see, Samaddar 2020, Kapilashrami, Issac et. al. 2020). Yet, despite severe restrictions on mobility and loss of economic activities due to the lockdown, many

migrant workers did not resort to the desperate journey back home. Many, if not most, stayed behind and chose to travel once the lockdown conditions relaxed using available means such as Special Shramik trains.

In this article, we review and reflect on the social and economic lives of these low-income migrant workers in Indian cities, in the light of fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2019 in Guwahati (Assam) and Jalandhar (Punjab), two of India's fastest-growing cities. In our research<sup>1</sup>, we focussed on their migration journeys, working and living conditions, access to services including healthcare, social networks, exposure to ill-treatment, and access to justice. Drawing on our empirical findings, we put forward the following two related arguments.

*Firstly*, circulation between the village and the city is a key feature of migrant labour who come to the city in search of economic security and who have left behind their family, social network, and land back in the village. With insecurity of work and limited social support network in the city, going home is an obvious response for many low-income migrant workers. Yet, any return to the village is temporary. Many bring their family and build social support systems and invest in their future in the city while continuing to maintain socio-economic and political life in the villages. Thus, for these migrant workers, the decision to return home or stay behind in the city is not simply a result of the sudden outbreak of coronavirus but reflects their broader aspirations, social networks, and precarious lives both in the city and the village. In a way, we argue that migrants face an extreme and adverse situation in the city every day, not just during the lockdown.

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*Secondly*, we argue that the concept of precarity should be extended to capture multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability, combining system of circulatory labour between the village and the city, insecure and exploitative work and livelihoods, poor living and working conditions, exclusion from public services and limited protection from violence and discrimination. Thus, precarity allows for a synoptic analysis of the relationship between structural inequalities, exclusion from public services, and poor access to justice.

### **Conceptual background**

The circular movement of millions of men and women from the countryside to its towns and cities to perform jobs at the lowest end of labour value chains is one of the spectacular features of India's political economy (Ruparelia, Reddy et.al. 2011). Over the years, the circular labour migration has evolved into a permanent feature of Indian cities. Yet, cities have not reciprocated by offering these migrants access to decent work, basic services, and protection from violence. They remain neglected in national and state level planning (Kapilashrami et al. 2020), and are denied access to basic amenities such as water, sanitation and healthcare even though they are critical to the maintenance of these amenities for local populations (Kusuma, Pandav et. al. 2014). In the broader literature, the concept of precarity has been widely used to talk about economic insecurity in the context of the impact of neoliberalism in the employment and labour market (Standing 2011). Yet, precarious work goes hand in hand with ill-health, intermittent access to basic services, widespread discrimination and ill-treatment combined with an inability to demand rights and justice.

With its origin in the context of the global north, the concept of precarity has been used to talk about the changing conditions of the global economies that have led to growing uncertainty, systematic exploitation and increased marginalization from the loss of economic and social protection and rights. Yet, as Piper, Rosewarne and Withers (2017) remind us such a condition of labour is hardly new in the Asian context. They argue that the concept may have limited

applicability in the context of Asia where a different history of capitalist development has largely prevented the development of the social protection system in the first place. In the Indian context, informality of labour has been a norm (Breman 1996). Throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, from the vantage point of migrant labour, precarity has been an existing economic reality. Rather than migrant women, men and children being drawn into precarious labour in the cities, migrant workers' journey to the city has been a livelihood strategy undertaken to mitigate precarious life in rural areas (Piper, Rosewarne and Withers 2017). Historical and ethnographic evidence has established that Indian cities attract a considerable number of low-income migrants from marginal rural households (Breman 2003, Breman 1996, Banerjee 2014, Samaddar 2016, Sharma 2018).

Despite migrants' ubiquitous contribution to urban development, they are excluded from the promises of citizenship (Breman 2003). Language and cultural differences expose many low-income migrants from interior parts of the country or across the border to harassment and political exclusion (McDuié-Ra 2012). Housing for many remains transient, crowded and informally arranged with intermittent access to water and sanitation facilities making them vulnerable to malnutrition and diseases (Babu, Kusuma et. al. 2017).

Low-income migrants are mobile, dispersed and invisible. Despite their ubiquitous presence, their precarious livelihoods, and informality keep them invisible in the eyes of service providers and human rights organisations. When urban planners, NGOs and human rights organisations attempt to reach out to poor urban migrants, they often assume that 'places' like slums are an appropriate entry point. Such an approach is based on a limited understanding of the economic and social lives of migrants; especially those involved in the petty trade informal economy or construction workers, who do not necessarily have a fixed address, and therefore remain in the margins of welfare interventions.

In this article, we engage with the concept of precarity which offers a useful framing beyond its widespread use in the context of employment and labour market in the context of the neoliberal city. For us, a key merit for using the concept of precarity for migrant worker population lies in its synoptic framing to grasp multiple and reinforcing forms of vulnerability, combining system of circulatory labour (Burawoy 1976), insecure and exploitative work and livelihoods, poor living and working conditions, exclusion from public services and limited protection from violence and discrimination.

### **Context of fieldwork sites**

Jalandhar is a well-known city for trade and industry in Punjab. Estimates suggest that migrants form 25% of Jalandhar's population of 900,000. Jalandhar has a long history of transnational out-migration. With one of the oldest military cantonments established in the mid-19th century, it attracts a wide range of labour including those from nearby rural areas, low-income migrants from other under-developed states, like UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and MP, and Nepal. Today, as a centre for military recruitment and sports and leather goods manufacture, and the headquarters of major Punjabi newspapers, Jalandhar attracts low-income migrants. Work in factories, vending, daily wage/construction work and helpers in dhabas and restaurants remain major source of employment for migrant men. Migrant women, on the other hand, rely mostly on domestic work and home-based piece-rate work, like stitching footballs. Although migrant population can be found in almost all parts of the city, there are some clusters around industrial hubs like Focal Point and Leather Complex. Both these areas have well-established markets as well as residential units, which are dominated by migrant population. Unlike in Guwahati where the migrant question has been contentious, Jalandhar has not been characterised by a violent backlash against incoming migrant labour although prejudices against them are widespread.

Guwahati is a major economic hub for India's north-east region. The 2011 national census suggests its population is around 1 million (about 15% of Assam's urban population). Historically, Guwahati attracted migrants from rural Assam and north-east India more generally, and from elsewhere in India (e.g. Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) and cross-border migrants (e.g. Nepal and Bangladesh). In the colonial period, migrants were brought to Assam to work in plantations and settle in wastelands. Labour demands in industries, the coal and oil fields, construction of roads and railway lines and other development activities also shaped migratory flows into Guwahati. More recently the establishment of the Guwahati refinery in 1962, the construction of a bridge over the Brahmaputra and the shifting of the State capital from Shillong to Guwahati in 1972 have contributed to Guwahati's urban transformation. Migrant work as vendors, loaders, construction, daily wage workers, helpers in restaurants and domestic workers. Factory work is available to a much lesser extent than Jalandhar. Many markets such as Fancy Bazaar and booming construction throughout the city rely heavily on migrant labour. Many Muslim migrant workers who come from rural areas of Assam such as Dhubri, Barpeta and Nalbari districts are suspected by 'Guwahati residents' as Bangladeshis. Labour chowks throughout the city see a large number of men and women waiting for work and many remain employed at the end of their waiting. Migrants and 'non-natives' in Assam have been on the spotlight following the recent legal and political developments such as the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

## **Research methods**

Our research involved ethnographic fieldwork with in-depth interviews, a brief survey, and a visual participatory method of photovoice. We began by mapping low-income migrant workers, their clusters, occupations and residences, and the infrastructure available for them. The mapping facilitated the finalisation of the locally-specific fieldwork strategies for accessing low-income migrants. Our initial research phase involved 'walking' ethnographies, walking through places of

work, bazaar streets, mapping the kinds of shops, work and labour available through seeing, talking, storytelling and short 'cases' or biographies.

Based on findings of the mapping process, we met low-income migrants via low-income migrants' social networks to identify study participants, or through local NGOs. We conducted a short survey using a closed-ended questionnaire with 100 migrants in Jalandhar and 126 migrants in Guwahati, that included basic demographic data, migratory status, working and living conditions, access to services and exposure to violence and protection.

These surveys provided the basis for selecting people with whom to explore the research questions in more depth through in-depth qualitative interviews (including repeat interviews), the development of 'thick description' in case studies, and visual documentation. Such interviews were conducted with 40 migrants in Jalandhar and 52 migrants in Guwahati.<sup>2</sup> In each city, we conducted photovoice with two groups of 4-6 members each.<sup>3</sup>

## **Findings**

In the following paragraphs, we reflect on low-income migrant worker's precarious life beyond their *sudden visibility* in media following the coronavirus outbreak. Our starting point is that migrant workers rely heavily on their circulation and networks back home for their survival in the city. They enter the city through social and economic networks and build upon these during their

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<sup>2</sup> While our larger sample included both men and women, in this paper, we focus on our interviews with men.

<sup>3</sup> While this paper deals with male migrant workers, the broader project involved studying both male and female migrant workers. We are working on a couple of peer-reviewed articles that specifically deal with the gendered nature of precarity in times of pandemic.

stay in the city. Migrants rely heavily on their networks to navigate the challenges of their lives in a foreign land (*pardes*).

Below, we start by briefly discussing two themes that emerged from our fieldwork that highlight low-income migrant worker's precarity.

### **Circulation, return and home visits**

Migrant workers regularly go back to their villages. In Jalandhar, 66 (out of 100) surveyed migrants visited home 1-2 times in a year and 16 went back once in a few years. In Guwahati, 26 (out of 126) went back home 1-2 times a year and 60 went back more than 3 times a year.

These visits can be for health reasons especially when healthcare in the city becomes unaffordable, for social security, for investing purposes, for social occasions like wedding, death, or religious ceremonies and festivals. This is the most important way of maintaining ties to family back home. The duration of these visits is not fixed. Migrants usually go back in case there is a matter at home that needs to be attended. But most times, they combine these with other non-urgent matters or occasions. If one is going to attend a wedding, they might extend their stay to be at home during some festival or harvest season. Such extensions are common. Many migrants have reported being called back to work by employers during their visits back home. This uncertainty regarding the length of their absence from the city is well woven into all aspects of their life in the city including their decision making around jobs and contractual agreements. In light of these observations, it is more appropriate to call these journeys as home visits rather than return.

Our survey results show that most migrants in the city have been coming to the city for more than 10 years indicating circulation between the city and the village. Out of 100 surveyed migrant workers in Jalandhar, only 13 of them had come to the city in the last one year. 80 out of 100 had

been in the city for more than 10 years. Similarly in Guwahati, 8 out of 126 had come to the city in the last one year. 101 out of 126 had been in the city for more than 10 years. Over the years, migrants develop social and economic networks in the city that are critical for their survival and aspiration for the future. Many spoke about the aspiration to own a house in the city and have invested in the same. In Guwahati, 46 migrants had families with them, and in Jalandhar 59 had a family with them. In this sense, a significant number of the surveyed migrants had brought their families with them.

Making regular home visits is harder for those with families in the city, and children studying in schools. There is a larger gap among visits, and these are reserved for important occasions. Instead of taking the entire family, many male migrants prefer to go home alone for a visit.

One major uncertainty for a large number of migrant families is choosing whether to stay in the city or go back home. In the case of single male migrants engaged in circular migration in the city, the choice is somewhat already made. They are going to return home at the end of their working-age, where their wives and children are with the rest of their families. These are the migrants with the most pronounced precarity in the city, as they are in the city to earn. In the case of those with families and children in the city, home visits and returns have to be carefully planned. The children may want to stay in the city, the family may have paid rent in advance and many have developed and maintained social and economic support systems in the city. Visiting home can be tough even during normal times. Trains are crowded, ill-treatment is widespread, costs can be high and looting is a common shared experience. While critical for their circularity and multilocality, home visits have significant implications in terms of livelihoods.

Migrant workers do not wish to visit home without any savings. Despite not getting work, migrants we spoke to did not seem eager to visit home until they were able to make some savings. A young man who worked as daily wage labor in Guwahati spoke about how despite not getting work for the last several days, he was finding it difficult to return home for Eid. He said, 'my wife can

understand but how will my children understand; they cannot understand and they get hungry and they need to be fed'. He was hopeful that he would be able to find work for a few days before he goes home for Eid.

Migrants we interviewed spoke about a lack of job opportunities back in the village and saw their journey in terms of earning, filling their stomach (*pet bharne ke liye*), and supporting their family. Most spoke about not having sufficient land and the opportunity to earn in the village. A few spoke about constant flooding. While most had heard of the NREGA scheme, only a few spoke about benefits from it. A man from Bihar who worked as a loader in a fruit market in Guwahati said that he had made 'the card' as people (*log*) asked him to make one but had not benefitted from it. He feels that people just give work to their own people. Commenting on the difficulty in getting a job in the village, another migrant, a man from UP who worked as a construction worker in Jalandhar said, "Village chief does not let any scheme get out to the people (*pardhan kha jaate hain.*) Schemes' benefit only goes to select favourites, not to the poor."

A man from Gorakhpur who worked as a vegetable vendor spoke about the situation back in the village in the following terms.

Before coming to Jalandhar 15 years ago, I had been in Delhi since the age of 12. Our family at that time was very stressed and poor. Our house's roof used to leak during rains. I had three sisters. We used to stay for extended periods at our relatives' place, especially maternal uncle. I wanted to leave and migrate for work, but my mother did not agree and forced me to stay. She had heard of incidents where migrant workers were beaten badly and their hands/feet are cut off. My mama used to make me work at his shop. He did not let me study, whereas his children were all studying and going to school. He used to beat me up with pliers, whenever I talked about studying. He would say that I am not supposed to study, I am to work at the shop, what would I do with

education. I got so fed up with the situation that I stole money from my mother and ran away to Delhi with my friends, in search of work.

Another man from Nepal who worked in a factory in Jalandhar always saw his migration as temporary. He always thought that he would earn some money and go back to Nepal, but he hasn't been able to. Now chronically ill with HIV, he said, "what will I do back in Nepal. Things are very expensive there when compared to Jalandhar; even tomato is 3-4 times expensive. I don't think I will be able to work and earn money to feed my family". When we met him at his accommodation, he was on ART (Anti-Retroviral Therapy), and said that that the benefit of staying in Jalandhar has been that he hasn't had to pay for healthcare and that they are able to earn to feed them and survive. He was not sure if he would be able to access medicine for free back home and was also concerned about the stigma associated with HIV.

Madhav, a 40-year-old Chamar man, lived in a rented room, in a *vehra*, in Phagwara (which is 20 kilometers from Jalandhar) with his wife and two younger children (one son and one daughter). His two elder children stay in Bihar and go to the school in the village. He works in an iron moulding factory in Phagwara from 8:30am to 7pm, with no holidays, several days a week. He is paid in cash on a weekly basis. He makes roughly INR 10,000 per month. His work involves working with melting metal and exposure to high temperatures all the time. He goes home two-three times a year. Some 15-18 years back, they did not have a toilet back in his rented accommodation, and used to go in the open (*pehle shauchalya nahin tha*). His residence was on the periphery of the city and agricultural fields were nearby. The farmers used to forbid them from going there. One day, he was going to his usual spot for a toilet, when he was cornered by the land-owner and 4-5 other men (*char-paanch bhai baithe the*). They had beaten him up and warned him that he should not come here anymore. He did not tell anyone about it, not even his family, because he thinks that what was going to happen had already happened (*kisi ko nahin*

*bataye; hona tha ho gaya*). After the incident, he stopped going to that spot and started going somewhere else.

### **Widespread ill-treatment**

Migrants work harder and get paid less. Their vulnerability is rooted in widespread ill-treatment that comes with work but rarely result in compensation and justice. Our findings suggest that low-income migrants are regularly exposed to abuse, discrimination and ill-treatment in the city.

Migrants do not report instances of abuse or ill-treatment to the police when they already know that they will not be listened to. In our quantitative survey, an overwhelming number of low-income migrants reported that they do not feel safe in the city. Out of 126, 76 migrants in Guwahati said that they do not feel safe in the city. In Jalandhar, 19 out of 100 do not feel safe in the city.

Likewise, a surprisingly high number of low-income migrants said that they have been ill-treated in the city i.e. 89 out of 126 in Guwahati said that they have been ill-treated in the last year and this number was 33 in Jalandhar.

Migrant workers are discriminated against and humiliated daily, in every aspect of their lives in the city. One of the most common aspects of this discrimination is the labeling. Migrants from Hindi speaking areas are referred as *Bhaiya* or *Bhaiyarani* in Jalandhar. Similarly, Bengali speaking Muslims are called *Miya* and *Miyani* in Guwahati. It should be noted that the male labels, that is *Bhaiya* and *Miya* are taken from migrants' language and considered respectful in their language. But when used for urban migrants, it assumes a derogatory connotation in the conversations, which is felt by migrants. Many migrants spoke to have expressed a clear dislike for the word. These racialized and classed labels signify migrants as lowly labourers, with strong prejudices. For example, there is a widespread notion that migrants are work-shirkers, and want to get money without doing any work. This legitimises the idea that they need to be forced to work, whatever that

takes. This ethnic-racial characterisation justifies and enhances migrants' structural, systemic and everyday ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation. Migrant workers we spoke to saw this ill-treatment as part of the parcel in a foreign land, which they have to tolerate to survive and earn in the city.

We met Balram in Labour Union's office in Jalandhar, where Dev (union leader) fights labour's cases on a pro-bono basis. Balram looked around 35 years old. He was from Gorakhpur, UP. He had been working in a steel mill making ball bearings. At the beginning of February 2018, he had an accident while operating machinery during work. Two fingers as well as the thumb of his right hand were heavily fractured. He was hospitalised and had to undergo medical treatment and surgery. Balram did not get any compensation. He was fired from work, and his due salary was not given. He also had to ask for money (INR 30,000) from back home for his treatment. He contacted Dev through someone he knew.

Dev filed a case on Balram's behalf in the Labour Court. The employer first filed a reply in the court saying that Balram doesn't work for them. Balram had been working informally for the past many years. Dev had to provide covert testimonies from enlisted workers of the factories to prove that Balram was working in the factory. The employer offered INR 50,000 as compensation. Dev refused to accept this amount and wanted the worker's proper due.

Dev suggested Balram get a medical certificate from Civil Hospital, which would mention the extent of disability, for him to negotiate with the employer better. The doctor at Civil Hospital told Balram to get an X-ray, to verify himself. After he got X-Ray done, the doctor refused to give a certificate saying that Balram's Aadhar Card address is not from Jalandhar. Balram had to get his Aadhar Card address changed, for which he had to get residence proof from the landlord as well. The process took weeks and by the time his Aadhar Card got updated, the doctor at the hospital got transferred. Now, the new doctor asked for a new X-Ray and said that the old doctor didn't give a certificate, why should he give it? So Balram did not get the medical certificate. The employer kept sending people to intimidate him for settlement and put pressure not to go to the

Labour Court. Balram requested Dev to get his case settled before Diwali, so that he could send money home. But, Balaram never came back to him.

We met Shyam, a 25-year-old young man from Tripura waiting for work in a labour chowk in Guwahati. He works as a carpenter. He came to Guwahati two years ago and lives in the city with his wife and a two-month-old daughter while his older daughter stays with her grandmother (the man's mother) in Tripura.

A few months before we interviewed him, he and his cousin (with whom he shares the accommodation) were picked up from the labor chowk by a man to do some work in his house. The work was agreed at INR 1200 to fix something (*kaam*) after bargaining by the employer. He and his cousin initially wanted to do the job on a daily-wage (*haziri*) basis, but the employer wanted a fixed price for the job. Once they went to the employer's house, they completed the agreed work and then the employer asked them to do several additional work including fixing windows for the same wage, which they refused. The employer got very angry and said he would not pay them until the additional work is done. He kept asking for the money but the employer refused and asked them to 'go back'. The employer also threatened them of beating if they kept asking for their wage.

Ram, a man in his 40s, worked as a loader in a busy market area in Guwahati. He had left his family back home in Bihar and came to Guwahati to earn, as it is a common practice for men in his village to travel long distances to earn money. During the interview, we were talking about experiences of ill-health and health-seeking behavior in Guwahati, an older man (another loader) approached us and listened to our conversation that took place by a cart used by loader for ferrying goods from shops, and commented that the guy I was speaking to was not well two years ago and the government hospital asked for INR 20,000 and commented that they don't treat us the *Biharis* well. Only after this, Ram narrated his experience to us. He got very high fever while working in the bazar. Initially, he went to a private clinic in the bazar and spent about INR 3000

on medication. As things didn't get better, his friends/relatives took him to the government hospital. The doctor told him that he had dengue. The hospital staff said that he needed to be admitted to the hospital for a few days and it would cost him around INR 20,000. He said, "I didn't have that much of money as saving; it is a very large amount for someone like me. If I had saved money, I would send that home. They were trying to extort money from me here." After consulting with his relatives and family, he went back to the village within 3-4 days.

### **Concluding discussion**

These findings concur with other research that highlights circulatory and precarious nature of migrant labour in India (Shah and Lerche 2020, Mohan 2017, Samaddar 2016). Not only do these cases show how low-income migrant workers' precarity is rooted in the multilocality of migrant workers that sustains the system of labour (Burawoy 1976), but also in the exploitative and hazardous working conditions and different forms of ill-treatment and intimidation that they are subjected to in both the village and the city. The cases show precarity is a regular part of migrant lives and not just in their workplace. Here, drawing on our findings from survey and ethnographic fieldwork, we would like to highlight four key issues.

First, in attempts to escape difficult economic situation back in the village, migrant workers land in precarious lives in the cities . Thus, precarity does not just arise from their invisibility and insecurity (of work, healthcare) experienced in the cities, but is embedded in their life in the village (that determine the circumstances of migration), their living condition and their exposure to widespread ill-treatment in the city. However, vulnerability arising from such precarity heightens in contexts of pandemic outbreaks (and other crises) where, on the one hand imposed lockdowns could lead to a loss of livelihood and forced evictions from homes, while on the other, total lack of safe transport and special protection measures from the government, they are unable to travel back to their villages.

Second, as a result of their already vulnerable position, migrant workers land in work setting and conditions that are highly exploitative. The piecemeal nature and insecurity of work and exposure to hazardous working conditions (in factories and other manual jobs) contribute significantly to their and their family's ill-health. Yet, their employers and contractual agreements at workplace provide no social protection leading to migrants incurring high costs of healthcare pushing them further into impoverishment and economic hardships.

Third, migrants' racialised and classed identity puts them in vulnerable position to ill-treatment within cities and at their workplaces.

Fourth, circulation and multilocality is a key feature of their livelihood strategy and insurance to cope with precarious life. Migrants rely on their scant networks in the cities (for loans, health seeking) as well as established networks in the village to make ends meet. The above case vignettes highlight their dependency on social and caring support provided by their family back in the village or in the city. These networks become fundamental to their social, economic and cultural lives in the city, and in maintaining their ties back home in the village.

In such a context, we put forward a proposition that the widespread media representations of migrant workers 'returning home' are not simply a result of the sudden outbreak of coronavirus but these home visits must be seen as a part of the history of an exploitative circulatory system of labour. Further, despite crises like Covid-19 pandemic, many migrant workers with established familial, social, and economic support networks in the city did not simply react by returning en-masse to the village, as many migrant workers brought their children and families and aspired to build social and economic support systems in the city. Further studies are needed to understand the experiences and struggles of the migrant workers who stayed back in the city because they did not have any means or desire to go back to the village in the context of pandemic and the lockdown that not only meant lack of work but also that there was no transportation system to enable return, especially for those who came from far.



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