

# Unskilled Migrant Women Labour during Locked down: A Socio - Economic perspective

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## Abstract

Migration is a process which led the distribution of human on this planet with different cause for food and survival. The economic opportunity becomes a dominant cause after agriculture. Millions of workers had to migrate back to their original places due to Locked down. Mainly in their villages in India intensified the magnitude of reverse migration of Semi-skilled and unskilled workers and they were the most to suffer in this pandemic of Covid – 19 outbreaks. ‘According to the ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work report published on 7 April 2020 estimated that in India, 400 million workers in the informal economy were at the risk of falling deeper into poverty throughout the crisis, the biggest group affected by the pandemic in the worst way has been that of the poor migrants.<sup>1</sup> The locked down impacted the life of women labour disproportionately who were working as domestic helps, home-based workers, care workers, etc. with no secure contracts, regular paid work and social protection. The proposed study focused on a contemporary issue which will try to unfold the negative effects & challenges of this reverse migration to themselves and their family. Also identified the unskilled level of male & female migrant labour who came back in three tehasils of Gautam buddha nagar during locked down.

**Key Words:** Migrant women, men, unskilled, Labour, reform, locked down

**Research methodology-** For proposed research Primary information was collected with migrant workers during locked down period by field survey. Exploratory research has been done with the help of various existing data.

Study is based on Primary data mostly abstracted by field survey. The interview was done with the migrant workers who came back to their homes after lockdown from various states and cities. For Exploratory research -Secondary data of population, area, literacy, causes and Impact was taken from the government released data in Census and from published Books, journals & websites. All the data have been tabled with the help of charts.

**Area** -In total 337 sample size of data is collected from all Tahsil Jewar, Dadri & Dankaur of Districtis Gautam Budha nager, Uttar Pradesh.

**Objectives-**

To assess the negative effect of Pandemic Covid-19 on Migrant Women labour.

To identify social Issues/hurdles faced by Migrant Women labour.

To identify the unskilled level of male & female labour who marched back to their home during Locked down in mentioned area.

To suggest suitable Strategies - how to facilitate the growth of migrant women workers?

**Introduction-** In Indian society greater part of men and women residing in rural and urban areas were unskilled. Though, compared to men, in both Rural & urban areas a greater number of women were unskilled and faced many problems including lack of skills. The researches revealed that more than 90% of women laborers were concentrated in the informal sector. The condition of unskilled women who were working in the informal sector was miserable, they had to work without any job security, very low wages and no social security benefits, also working conditions were unsatisfactory and lack of skill

among women was one of the main reasons for these entire problems. Migrant women laborers represented 4.7 % of this worldwide labour market comprising 164 million labourers,<sup>2</sup> with almost half being women. Most of migrant workers were appointed in the areas of the economy with level of unprotected or momentary work, characterized by little pay and lack of social security, together with in care work which in many countries was largely carried out by women migrant labourers.<sup>3</sup>

Women's labour migration was driven by precise reasons in countries of origin and destination that were often gender connected. One set of reasons related to gender disparity and gender-based inequity, which may stop women from achieving the same economic chances both at home and in a foreign country as men, and from exercising the equal rights of freedom of mobility as men. By the constitution, India was established as a welfare state. Through Directive Principle of State Policy our country is responsible for social security of its citizens. Article 39, 42 and 47 of the Constitution has ensured the social security including appropriate food, shelter, healthcare, and safety to its citizens especially workers. In spite of all these social securities, women were the most negatively affected during the calamity like Covid 19. Generally women labourers are known as dependent workers & they have not got what they deserved really.

**I. Negative effect of pandemic on women labour during Locked down.** The shocks of locked down during covid -19 on women migrant labour appeared to be multifaceted as they were over-represented in the informal economy and amid undocumented workers in several countries. These dependents and invisible women migrant labour employed were in a high-risk group for COVID-19 further, women workers who experienced increased level of harassment or violence in shelter homes, at work, in quarantine facilities, or upon reduction of expenditure and after returning home.

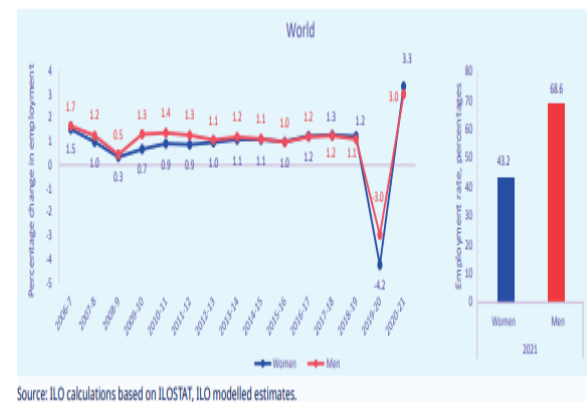
During the pandemic disparity was intensified between men & women in the world of work. According to the international labour organization (ILO) globally, women have been extremely hit in terms of job loosed: 4.2 % of

women's employment was destroyed as a result of the pandemic compared to 3 per cent of men's employment & year 2021, compared to year 2019 there will be 13 million fewer women in employment, while men's employment will have recovered to 2019 levels. The financial calamity persuaded by the Covid -19 epidemic commanded to extraordinary job losses for both female & male.

Table I: Illustrates that the reduction in services btwn years 2019 and 2020 was more noticeable

than during the Great Recession<sup>4</sup> for both female and male.

Table 1. % Variation in employment by gender, Years 2006-2021 & rate of employment, 2021



Largely decrease in employment was because of the effect of lockdown that affected manufacturing and services sectors, in these areas women were overrepresented & also women were often employed with informal working arrangements. Compared to men women were facing various hurdles to secure their jobs.

Inadequate access to social safety, an increase in violence, sexual, physical, mental harassment and Permanent gender gaps in time spent in unpaid care work, were very serious issues, have made it difficult for women to continue their works. Worldwide, in years 2019 & 2020, employment of women deteriorated by 4.2%, represented a decrease of 54 million services, while employment men declined by 3%, or 60 million jobs.<sup>5</sup> In year 2020 women experienced huge employment losses which was (-4.2 %). Compared to 2019 in year 2021, internationally

the number of employed women was expected to be 13 million only while the number of men in employment was expected to be about the same as in 2019. In year 2021 Only 43.2 % of the world's working-age females will be hired, compared to 68.6 % of working-age male.

The influence of Corona pandemic on female migrant workers was different from male workers, vis-à-vis the process of migration. Although Women were the frontlines workers during pandemic but the community description about migration was basically masculinized.

According Rajan and Sivakumar - "Gender norms in particular prop up are their own barriers when it comes to migration in the form of policy restrictions, discrimination, violence, and exploitation. This is true for within India too, where the primary cause of internal female migration was seen to have been marriage or associated migration"<sup>6</sup> (Rajan and Sivakumar, 2018),

Due to the Gender norms and social hurdles women were being forbidden from the prescribed labour market, and not only in formal sectors but even in informal labour sectors women paid low-salary, there was no security of Job and domestic workers like sanitation workers, and care givers were placed at the bottom of the pyramid, The ILO estimated the highest percentage of women (58.2%) to be employed in the service sector (World Bank, 2020a) and they had been hardest hit by the corona pandemic. (Sharma, 2020; Sapra, 2020), this was putting women migrants in a far <sup>7</sup>more precarious situation as compared to men migrant workers. Rukmini (2020) also mentioned that only in India, within 2 months of lockdown 4 out of every 10 employed females lost their Jobs, consequential in over seventeen million females being rendered jobless. Sapara Mentioned that- "In spite of such large suffering, the absence of inclusivity in the labour economy and the general lack of gender sensitive policy-making have rendered the suffering of women migrants invisible" (Sapra, 2020).

UN Women 2015– 2016 (Nandi, 2017) revealed that how Indian women workers do seven times as much unpaid work as men yet they were treated as non-workers because these women

were not involved in those works which were considered 'economically productive'. During corona pandemic, the lockdown, fixed with social and gender norms, had forced female workers to put in greater number of hours into domestic works, which run counter to social distancing norms thereby increasing their risk of contracting virus (The Week, 2020). They had been at the getting end of more sexual violence as well as domestic abuse. Many women reported health issues due to their incapability to access health, sanitation, and nutritional facilities because of the interruption and re-routing of, public services to fight against the pandemic.

Women who were economically marginalized and those who belong to underprivileged communities and castes formed the huge majority of migrant females, the economic recession attached with the vagaries of working in the informal areas had rendered them far more vulnerable than they had ever been before. Experts suspicious that in the repercussion of the pandemic, problems of debt, loans and mortgage will end up burdening these women, resulting in distress sales of property, child marriage, and even prostitution (Rajan et al., 2020). Without recognizing the gender aspects of migrant distress, quick enactment of sound, comprehensive and gender responsive policies such women will be forced to struggle with a far worse exploitative atmosphere in the new economic normal.<sup>8</sup>

## **II. Social Issues / hurdles faced by Migrant Women –**

Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. The COVID-19 epidemic had shed light on very grave hurdles in the worth of services, particularly for the many females who were working in effeminized areas and professions and in the in-formal economy. When the pandemic hit, trends like jobs with a high concentration of women were given low wages, extended working periods, inadequate chances for vocation advancement and exposure to occupational health and safety risks as well as violence and harassment put women workers at greater risk & they have experienced a further

worsening in their working environments. Migrant labour, ethnic and racial minorities, older persons and those with disabilities and living with HIV and AIDS have also seen the quality of their jobs diminished.<sup>9</sup> Covid -19 pandemic has interrupted the incomes of females who were working in the informal economy, as many informal industries were forced to shut down momentarily or permanently, leading to severe damage of profits and an enlarged danger of dropping into poverty. Due to that, many kids had faced a higher risk of child labour and lesser rates of school registration, especially for girl child.<sup>10</sup>

### **Hurdles - to continuity of Education especially for young girls & Adolescents –**

The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them.

Migrant women faced multifaceted ground realities like male dominating social structure, prejudiced social traditions, customs, practices low literacy rate among women including limited exposure & lack of technology knowledge. Besides that women are always considered secondary wage earner. women are being faced discrimination in the area of Professional courses due to son preferences. After reaching on their destination, they will face the Challenges that how to continue the Education especially for young girls & Adolescents. COVID -19 Pandemic will also disrupted the efforts which were being taken to end the practice of child marriages, near about 13 million child marriages taking place between years 2020 to 2030 that could otherwise had been avoided.<sup>11</sup>

**Increased Gender Based Violence-** Locked down due to covid -19 pandemic, aggravated the female migrant labour' amplified risk of sexual and gender-based violence at all phases of migration. Due to increased travel restrictions, female migrant domestic labourers faced a menace of abuse, departure them trapped and unable to reach their homes. This is proved by

previous pandemics studies that women and young girls, especially migrant women & girls, were faced heightened danger of gender-based violence, abuse, sexual harassment & intimate partner violence. The Ebola pandemic exposed that several forms of violence like human trafficking, child marriage, and sexual exploitation and abuse were aggravated within calamity situations & made their life vulnerable. Similarly, corona Pandemic driving alike trends at present-days.<sup>12</sup> Domestic violence increased not only in India but all over the world. Both the United Nations and the Council of Europe have expressed concern about the increase in domestic violence in various countries during lockdowns due to the COVID19. As per the data of the cases of domestic violence provided by NCW in the month of April 2020, the matters of domestic violence were doubled throughout lockdown compared to pre-lockdown days.<sup>13</sup>

### **Deficiency of adequate information about migrant labourers -**

In spite of above gaps, the most serious challenge in the execution of the code was lack of adequate data on migrant labourers. After the census -2011 There was no available nationwide data of Migrant labour.

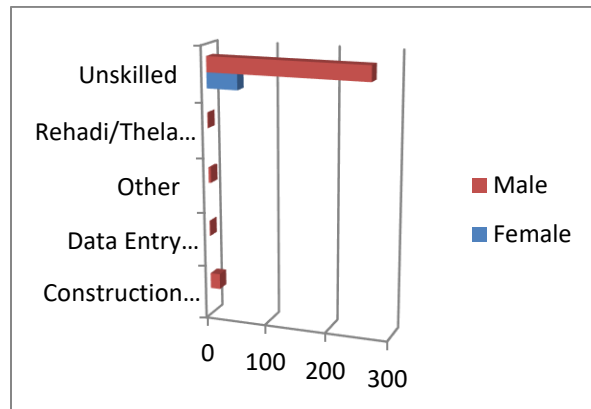
### **III. Un-skilled Levels of men & women migrant labour who marched back:**

*According to Breugel, 1996-* The migration of skilled persons has been intellectualized as the migration of male, with female following only as additions to the career ambitions of the male companion, so that female were seen as the sprawling spouse.<sup>14</sup> On the other side, if we talk about female labor migration was intellectualized mainly as the migration of those who were entering in the lesser skilled areas of the labor industries. Though, it was essential for a number of reasons to reconsideration this image of skilled migration as generally man and of women migration as mostly unskilled migration.

In India about 90 % workforce of 500 million was involved in the informal areas. Corona pandemic had enforced millions of workers out of work. Migrant Labour had to returned home. A huge and inclusive re-skilling training

programmes were needed for those workers whose works may be at risk, combining in-formal labour, employees in malls, cinemas, domestic labour that may not open for some more period, was required to make them ready to work in other areas, like ecommerce.<sup>15</sup>

Table-2- Highlights the significant sex differences in Semi-skilled & Unskilled levels of migrant labour came back -



Source: Primary data collected by the Interaction with migrants & Field survey

### Findings-

Table-2 -Shows that in three Tehsils Total 337 migrants came back during locked down out of 337 migrant labours, 264 male labours were unskilled while if we talk about low skilled labours only 16 were construction labours, 1 was data operator, 1- the lawala/patri weldor/Sabji and 4- were involved other marginal activity for their livelihood.

Data reveals that there was a significance difference between Man & Women Migrant labours population. Out of 337 total migrants only 51 were the women.

When unskilled level of women was analyzed. it was found that all migrant women labours were unskilled. It was told by them that they could not get any job during the locked down period because of lack of skills.

It was also revealed that before locked down, they were doing work in very unsatisfactory conditions. They were working as domestic

helps, home-based workers, care workers etc. in extremely low wages, without any job security & social security benefits.

Lack of skill among women was the main reason behind the miserable conditions of women.

Due to social attitude, traditions and practices of Indian society most of women are the secondary earner of their family. Women are spending more time on taking care of child that's why family head don't want to spend money/time on training and education of women.

It will be also the challenge of Up-skilling/Re-skilling of migrant women labours for livelihood & Income generation in patriarchal society.

**Need of Skill development** -It was recognized by the eleventh 5<sup>th</sup> year plan (2007-12) that India had a huge requirement to skill millions of formal and informal labour in the next 10 years.

Therefore, the government is required to established many programs to increase the percentage of formal and informal skilled labour in its total labour force particularly female from only 2% now to 50 percent by 2022, therefore generating a five hundred million solid source pool. In matter of female the aim of skill development, is not only to make ready them for jobs, but also to enhance the performance of female labour by improving the quality of work in which they were involved. Training and skill development would inspire higher self-respect among females and overall personality development. It was also advised that for skill advancement to be more effective, training required to curve in the direction of developing the kind of skills female already aware. Though, emphasis on upgradation require not be at the price of developing new skills, specifically in the matter of female who otherwise may get further engrained in outdated skills and roles. Hence, there was a requirement of the skill development course cooperative and flexible to inspire female to register. (GoI, 2015)<sup>16</sup>

Thus it was clear that there was an urgent necessity for a standard shift in the skill development area, in favor of distinct training programme, novelties and high quality drill.

**IV. How to facilitate the growth of Migrant Women Workers During Covid -19-** It becomes tremendously essential that security & safety and most important self-esteem of migrant's female workers should be guaranteed? Medical services and nourishing food must be provided to all migrant women.

Gender-sensitive, rights-based policies and procedures will support to avoid human and labour rights abuses in the instant term, decrease the recovery charges for industries, and preserve the livelihood and social profits of migrant labour and their relatives in the medium-to-long term.

Support with Ministries of Labour and all related ministries and investors was a main key. Additionally, by including male and female migrant labour in national Corona Pandemic responses, countries can better protect the health and safety of all workers and prevent the spread of the pandemic. Special provision should be arranged for migrant female labour.

Governments required to address the challenges which are being faced by internal migrants by including them in health services, cash transfer and other social programmes, and protecting them from discrimination. It's time that the code is revisited, particularly in the context of the pandemic and its impact on women migrant workers. There was ample possibility for intensifying the definition of the occupational sickness, and including biological hazards caused by viruses and other harmful bacteria that affect people while they were at work proposed as per international labour standards. Challenge of Health and Immediate need of hygiene Menstrual hygiene products should be provided to migrant females and young girls across the nation.

States must identify the industry in which the migrant workers were working.<sup>17</sup> **Offer a range of services from counseling to shelter, skilling, re-skilling and medical support-** after returning home, the migrant labors are required to be supported with related information and counseling for job search and employment chances given their skills and previous experience through their local governance and panchayat structures, integrated into the social

protection schemes that apply to local workers, and provided with referrals for continued health care and to address their grievances. Setup well publicized in coordination with the police and NGOs. Spread awareness & Educate communities about the need to support female labour. To deal with emergency situations like Corona pandemic, natural disasters etc., a special provision to be introduced in the Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. in covid-19 duration to facilitate performance & growth of Migrant female workers. It was needed to renovate existing plans. Foremost important step was promotion and implementation of long-term social and cultural change towards gender parity. Such plans include guaranteeing headship and active engagement of women and young girls, along with men and young boys, in community-based groups related to the humanitarian area/sector; conducting advocacy to promote the rights of all affected populations; and enlisting females as programme staff, including in positions of leadership.

**Conclusion-** A number of measures has been taken by the Government to address the situation such as warranting the distribution of food facilities on a huge scale, pressing companies to pay salaries and landowners to ignore payments. "In spite of all these important steps, more required to be done as the human disaster continues to unfold before our eyes, but Special Measures should be taken into account the particular situation of migrant female, who were among those most economically vulnerable and impacted by the condition. Suggestions given by UN high commissioner for human rights were completely right. Bachelet stated that "This is a time for domestic solidarity and unity. I encourage the Government to draw on India's vibrant civil society to reach out to the most vulnerable sectors of society, to ensure no one is left behind in this time of crisis." Comprising Corona pandemic in the country that hosted one-sixth of the world's population will be required efforts not only by the Government, but also the population at large. In order to reveal the full capacity of female labor force it is required to bring about an employment revolution along with a skill development revolution. The organizers

must give attention on female specific strategies for their active contribution in the employment industry. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. Therefore, there is an urgent need to change of social attitude & mindset to women. It would help country to encounter its skilling goal and obtain profits of having the massive labor force by 2025.

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