

Management of Migrant Manpower in Punjab Industry during Pandemics: (COVID 19) - A Critical Study

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Abstract

A sudden spurt of COVID-19 as a pandemic has shaken the world. The fear of the unknown is always the greatest. The what, why, how, where, when, and so on of the pandemic remained unknown, and the world was terrified of the unknown consequences. Workers are the most distressed, particularly those who have migrated from their birthplaces to distant lands to earn a living. The sudden scare hit their existence and they rushed back to their homes to have a peaceful burial at home rather than in foreign countries. It was more common in India, since a person from the lower or lower middle class always prefers to have their last breath in their homeland. Leaving their lucrative jobs, they rushed to their homes by whatever means they could manage, most of them walking for miles together. They left the work places high and dry, with the most hit being the industry. Punjab, the northernmost state of India, was the most hit since it relies on 80% of migrant labour. As it turned into an exodus, it became a great worry for the industry and studies were initiated as to how to control such a future exodus. This study is one such project which studies the management of migrant manpower in Punjab's industry during pandemics.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Migrant Labor, Management, Punjab

Introduction

COVID-19 was in force in India from March 2020 onwards. As of November 16, 2020, confirmed cases affected by COVID-19 globally were 54,075,995 and confirmed deaths were 13,13,919 in 220 countries. (1) In India, the cases on this day were 82,05,728 with 1,29,635 deaths, and the cases in Punjab were 1,39,869 with 4,412 deaths. (2) Considering the seriousness and the mounting sickness rate and deaths caused there, the Central Government of India took over the control and ordered a national lockdown on March 24th, (3) which caused the first closure of industries and other working places. The exodus of workers to their parent states could not have started once the second lockdown was ordered, causing a total industry in shemuzzle and a catastrophic situation in India. (4) Managing such a great loss to the industry, the national economy, and the manpower and rebuilding and restructuring the industrial system needed a detailed study, especially in the state of Punjab, where 80% of the

industry is dependent on migrant labour. (5) Managing the exodus of migrant manpower is thus a challenge which has to be met diligently, and the state and the nation have to be ready for such a situation in the future as well. Hence, the subject of effectively managing migrant labour in pandemics has been the aim of this study. This research was conducted to survey the details of the exodus of migrant workers during the pandemic and its industry on the industry and the workers. This paper has the survey of the available literature in detail about the pandemics, which has been used for the field survey that is being projected in the second paper. Since the data collected is huge and could not be accommodated in this paper, the subject has been bifurcated into these two papers.

Terms

COVID-19 is the highly contagious new pandemic caused by the Coronavirus. (4) A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease.(10) Lockdown: A government-ordered restriction on all activities in the affected area for a specific period of time.No large gatherings or functions are allowed. (14) An industry is a group of manufacturers or businesses that produce a particular kind of good or service and involves systematic labour, especially for some useful purpose or the creation of something of value. (15) MSME: According to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act of 2006, micro, small, and medium enterprises engaged in the manufacture or production, processing, or preservation of goods as specified. A micro enterprise is an enterprise where investment in plant and machinery does not exceed Rs. 25 lakh. (16) **Industrial manpower is the** manpower furnished by human physical strength and is the collective strength or availability for work of the people in any given area, nation, etc. (17) **The migration** of human beings is the shifting of people from one place to another, generally in large groups. (19) Migrant: A migrant is someone who relocates to another location or country, usually in search of work.(20) Migrant worker: A migrant worker is someone who migrates to work either within or outside of their home country.(21) **Worker Exodus:** An exodus is the movement of a lot of people from a place, e.g., there has been a mass exodus of workers from the villages to the towns. (24) Punjab: Punjab is a state in northwest India that is bordered by Pakistan to the west, J&K to the north, HP to the east, and Haryana and Rajasthan to the south.

Available Literature on the Subject of Study

The literature on the subject of study was available on various websites in bits and pieces, and published work in print is rare since the pandemic COVID-19 is going through its second wave and its end does not seem near. Material issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) (1, 2) on COVID-19 prevention measures; (3, 4) papers by the Indian Labour Organisation (ILO) (5, 6) on manpower management; the World Economic Forum (EF) (7) on the impact of COVID-19 on the global economy; and the Association Chamber of Commerce (ASSOCHAM) (8,9) on the state of industry in India.World Migration Report, 2005 (10) and in north India, including Punjab by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce (FICCI) (11). The Census of India 2001 gives the details of migration in India (12). Yushifumi Usami's 2012 project report has details about migrants in Ludhiana in comparison to Coimbatore. The Statistical Organisation of India and Punjab have the relevant data about industry and workers. Other materials include papers on COVID-19, manpower and migrant laborers, which are also available in plenty on the net, in journals and on Wikipedia. The reporting in The Times of India, The Economic Times, The Tribune, and ET Auto is also significant for this project. A brief summary of the above is given in the following paragraphs.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Indian Industry

ASSOCHAM prepared a brief in April 2020 titled "COVID-19, Impact on Indian Industry: Voice of the Indian Industry," with the assistance of Primus, their Knowledge Partners.(8) mentions the key challenges faced by industry during COVID-19.(8) These are (a) the expected duration of the industry's economic stress, which will be enormous.(b) Restrictions on the movement of people and goods have impacted workforce capacity and disrupted supply chains, bringing economic activity to an almost standstill. (c) While most respondents don't expect their industry to recover soon, they are also not confident in the effectiveness of measures to support their industry-specific challenges at the state level. (8) The responses of 3552 industry respondents, including manufacturers (48%), infrastructure builders (14%), services (38%), with up to 500 (75%), 500-2500 (12%), 2000-10,000 (6%), and more than 10,000 (7%).(8)

In April the respondents companies in Industries considered duration of economic stress on the industry (a) more than a quarter- (79%) (b) About 2-3 months -18%), (c) 3-4 weeks (2%) (d) 10-15 days (1%). (8)

Problems arising out of lockdown due to COVID-19 were seen as (i) lack of raw materials (18.2%) causing (ii) productivity loss due to lack of remote work capabilities (25.2%). (iii) Insufficient staff to accomplish critical work (19.9%) (iv) Limited orders/demand for final products (7.9%) (v) Limited Operations due to transport restrictions (28.7%). (8)

Lockdown restrictions on the movement of people and goods have affected the capacity of the workforce and the supply chain, bringing economic activity to an almost standstill. While most of the respondents did not expect their industry to recover soon, they were also not confident in the effectiveness of measures to support their industry-specific challenges at the state level. (8)

Status of business in April 2020 after the first lockdown was found to be (a) completely closed (5%) (b) Partial operations with limited capacity (75%).(c) Working remotely at nearly full capacity (14%).(d) Only 6% were fully operational.(8)

During March and April, the effectiveness of measures taken for the industry by the Indian Government at the centre was considered as (a) very effective (11.5%) and somewhat effective (34%). (c) Has no effect 27.5%) (d) Moderately ineffective (10.7%).(e) extremely ineffective (14.3%).(8)

Most worrisome was the financial pressure, for which working capital constraints were (33%), paying salaries to staff (27%), EMI payments against loans (21%), and (d) in-progress capital expansion (19%). (8). The expected manpower reduction was (a) more than 20% (24–45%). (b) 11-20% (14.6%) (c) 1% to 10% (21.3%), and no change (36%).(8) The present quarter is expected to be strenuous for most of the businesses, with things likely to improve from July. At the same time, most businesses are looking at minimal disruption to their workforce, to ensure readiness when operations resume to full scale. (8)

COVID-19 in Punjab

In Punjab, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on March 5, 2020. By May 2020, with COVID taking almost one life every hour in Punjab, the struggle for survival became intense. As the figures of COVID-19 started mounting, imposing lockdown was the only answer the Government found to deal with situation. Soon, the curfew followed thereby paralysing the state. Since March 5, 5350 persons died of COVID-19 in 2020 and the number of cases crossed 1.65 lakhs. Under the rising weight of casualties, the hefty fees charged by the hospitals, the rumours of sale of organs by doctors, the healthcare crumbled and the people started losing faith in treatment since there was neither a vaccine nor any medicine yet available in hospitals or from chemists. This forced the people to stay strictly at home. With no manpower coming out for work factories were shut especially in April and May 2020. No work, no pay being the norm of the industry specially having migrant labour most of which was unregistered and temporary, the workers were left penniless. With no end visible from COVID-19, the workers preferred to die at his home rather than in a foreign land. (24)

Migration of workers

Migration is not a new phenomenon. For decades and even during pre-historic times, there is sufficient evidence of people moving from one region to another. People moved across the length and breadth of the country and at times across borders for social, economic, and political reasons. The developed and developing areas have created a demand for labourers, and the rural and backward areas have become the supplier of labourers. The majority of the migration of labour is dependent on agriculture for work and income. Non-seasonal migration flows from the areas of limited economic opportunities and retarded social development to fast-developing areas providing higher wages to enhance the socio-economic status of the people. (7)

Places of Origin and Patterns of Migration to Punjab

According to the Census of India 2001, the states where most migrants originated from were Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh. In most cases, the cost of travel to Punjab from their place of origin was borne by the migrants themselves, though some companies also incurred the expense. Many of the migrants came to Punjab individually, while others travelled with their families. In the event that their family also came

with them, the spouse also pursued paid employment. The types of jobs were not necessarily the same. In some cases, the children of migrants also found employment. 912)

Migration in Punjab

Only data on migrants from the 2001 Census are available. The issue of migration is not a recent phenomenon in Punjab. The out-migration of Punjabis to other states and foreign countries as well as their successes and entrepreneurship, especially in the transport sector, are examples of other states. The state, however, witnessed a reversal of the trend and subsequent industrialization, globalization, etc., during the green revolution of the sixties. Today, Punjab is one of the most sought after destinations for the poor, backward states' unskilled rural population. Most of the seasonal migrants in the state are for agricultural purposes. In this context, please refer to the following table:

Table 1. Estimation of Inter State Migrant Labour in Punjab in Late 1990

| Sr No | Activity | Migrant Workers in Punjab |
|-------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Agriculture | 7 Lakh |
| 2 | Brick Klin | 2 lakh |
| 3 | Manufacturing | 7 lakh |
| 4 | Service (Palledars Rikshaw, domestics) | 3 lakh |
| 5 | Construction | 2.65 Lakh |
| | Total | 21.65 Lakh |

Source: Source: Punjab Human Development Report – 2004 – Table 8.1

Table 2. Shows the Male Migrant Workers in Punjab:

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|
| Total Workers | 539.6 | 100% |
| Local workers | 178.2 | 33% |
| Migrant Workers | 361.4 | 67% |
| Inter-state Migrants | 149.2 | 27.7% |
| Intra-state Migrants | 196.0 | 26.3% |

Source: Census of India, 2001, Series, B Economic table 1, D Migration Tables

Table 1 shows that in Punjab, the migrants in the fields of manufacturing, agriculture, lower level services, construction and brick kilns are the most sizeable in industry and agriculture. Table 2 shows that 67% are migrant workers, of which 27.7% are interstate and 26.3% are intra-state migrants, primarily from poor backward states' unskilled rural population.

According to the Economic Survey of Punjab 2006-2007, "The magnitude of unemployment in Punjab continues to be a cause of serious concern. The government is seriously concerned with the plight of educated unemployed people. The State Government in 2007 created a separate Department of Employment Generation, which is separate from the existing Department of Labour and Employment. At the same time, many innovative schemes and programmes have been initiated for educated unemployed people in the state at the same time. Another dimension of migration has come from studies pointing towards the factors of rural-to-urban migration as a growing desire for a higher standard of living. They have revealed that the higher migration rates were from households of upper castes in comparison to others, as they have a higher level of education or skill and a higher level of aspiration. Further, labour migration is also caused by other contributory factors like policy change, technological change, non-unionization, and zeal for improving people's quality of life. Studies have also revealed that migration of labour families is on the increase as they search for waged work opportunities for the whole family. (26, 27)

Reasons for Migration

Today, labour migration is identified by temporary tenure, poor groundworking conditions, and many times, physical and verbal abuses and violations of human rights. Migrants are often considered second-class citizens and are often relegated to the 3 Ds (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) jobs. In the World Migration Report (2005),

the International Organization for Migration (IOM) wrote about the concerns that surround migration, such as job losses, lower wages, increased welfare costs, and the belief that migration is spiralling out of control. The WHO and UNESCO are both proponents of a human rights-based approach for migration management. (1, 2)

In the Indian context, the migration is generally from remote, backward rural areas of the country (majority from Bihar and UP as reflected in the Census of 2001) to all major industrial towns in the states with a much stronger economy. Labor recruiters and human trafficking networks all play an important role in the migration of disadvantaged sections of society (poor, landless, unskilled, SC/ST/OBC, women, adolescent groups, and so on). (14)

Migrants reach the state with varied intentions, like working as seasonal labour or settling in the state. Many of these labourers are victims of debt traps. Many a time, the selection process of individual labour for employment reminds people of the forgotten slave trade. These seasonal workers' living and shelter arrangements are often extremely unhygienic with inadequate basic amenities. They pay for all their basic requirements such as food, shelter, medical/healthcare, and are generally left with little to no savings. Therefore, the debt cycle continues year after year. The industrial migrant labourers in the state generally live with their families. Their dwellings are somewhat better than those of agricultural labourers. At the same time, there are reports of many unlawful activities among these populations, ranging from child labour, bonded labour, use of drugs, crimes, sneaking of terrorists and foreigners in the garb of migrant labour in the state etc. On the other hand, these migrant populations also directly or indirectly affect the lives of local people. It is reported that the migrant population is a strong and well-organised pressure group in the city of Ludhiana. Because migrant labourers are socially and linguistically regarded as "outsiders," the emphasis is always on "migrants as a problem" rather than "migrant problems." These labourers move from one place to another, looking for better wages. All these job opportunities notwithstanding, the sons of the soil of Punjab with aspirations try their best to reach Canada, the US, Germany, Australia, etc. There are innumerable reports of exorbitant charges or fraud by the agents. Many adopt irregular means and ways to reach the out-shore and end up in trouble. Furthermore, local workers face competition from these groups, which frequently results in conflicts of interest and disputes.

Punjab is no exception, and the towns and villages of Punjab see an annual influx of a large number of unskilled people from the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This migrant work force reaches Punjab from all over the country, individually as well as in groups, with or without the help of contractors or agents. According to the newspaper (Tribune), the population of migrant labour in Punjab has reached 2.5 million, with Ludhiana being its focal point. Punjab's entire industry and agriculture, including paddy, plantation and allied fields such as poultry and dairy, is almost fully dependent on these migrant workers. (14)

With almost every industry in Punjab shutting down following the imposition of lockdown and curfew to check the spread of coronavirus, the industrial workforce is among the worst affected in the state, with their present and future at stake. Though in Ludhiana, one of the most important industrial hubs in the state, a section of businessmen released salaries and advances to their workers despite staring at losses worth several hundred million, others were not so lucky in other parts of Punjab. (15)

But a large section of workers could not reach their factories to get financial assistance from their owners due to the curfew and were confined to their congested rooms taken on rent. As all trains were cancelled and other transport modes were not working, labourers could not even return to their native states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. (15)

Ludhiana businessmen, who have been unable to pay anything to their workers, fear that unrest will kick in among thousands of workers if they do not get monetary assistance during the lockdown period and there will be heavy consequences. Most of the sufferers were micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The industry was now desperately trying to seek help from the Ludhiana deputy commissioner, police commissioner and other higher officials in this regard. (15)

Table 3. State of Origin of Migrants in Ludhiana

| State | Migrants | Per cent |
|------------|----------|----------|
| All states | 2,29,581 | 55.9% |
| UP | 1,05,220 | 25.6% |
| Bihar | 64,022 | 15.6% |
| Haryana | 13,499 | 3.3% |
| HP | 10,547 | 2.6% |
| W. Bengal | 6,272 | 1.5% |
| Rajasthan | 4,797 | 1.2% |
| Uttranchal | 5,088 | 1.2% |
| Delhi | 4,453 | 1.2% |
| Kerala | 447 | 0.12% |
| Otheres | 15,226 | 3.7% |

Source: Census of India 2001, Series D, Migration Tables

Table 3 shows that out of the total 55.9% of migrant workers, the maximum number are from UP (25.6%) and Bihar (15.6%).

Mr. D S Chawla, president of the United Cycle and Parts Manufacturers Association (UCPMA), Ludhiana, said, "As April 23 was a Sunday and a curfew was imposed the next day, no employer was able to go to their factories or bank to either pay cash to their workers or transfer salary via cheque." We are getting inputs that the workers' have exhausted all their money. If they don't get money soon, some of them might be forced to take up unlawful ways to survive. " (15, 30)

Exodus of Migrant Workers in India

Following the easing up of regulations, many automakers like Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai Motor India, and Hero Motor Corp announced that they would be commencing operations in a graded and phased manner at their manufacturing plants. Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Hero Moto Corp commenced plant operations in a phased manner. With lockdown 2.0 still in force, migrants started moving back to their home states. Since railways and buses were closed, transport facilities did not exist. Some of them started on foot from states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, and Punjab. As the lockdown 3.0 came into effect on May 4, the union government allowed the gradual resumption of economic activities by relaxing lockdown measures in certain parts of the country identified as green and orange zones. Meanwhile, the Union Home Ministry, with effect from May 4, allowed stranded migrant labourers to go back to their native places. Fearing a large movement of these labourers, the companies needed to offer big incentives to lure the migrant workers to stay back or, if they had already left, to come back and join. Migrant workers form a large chunk of the workforce for many companies across India. With guidelines for lockdown 3.0 came a fresh guideline issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 30, 2020 for interstate movement. With effect from May 4, the Union Home Ministry allowed the movement of these stranded migrant labourers. This put the companies ready to restart their factory operations in limbo as the temporary and contracted labour started migrating back to their home states due to the easy availability of home-bound trains. This started the great exodus of the workers. (17)

Maruti is not as dependent on migrant workers as it had regular workers along with some temporary workers, as stated by RC Bhargava, the Chairman of MSIL. In an earlier interview with the Economic Times, RC Bhargava, Chairman of Maruti Suzuki India, said, "Maruti is not so dependent on migrant workers. We have regular workers and we have temporary workers. There are, of course, some contract workers also, but they are not migrant workers. They are here for the long term. The migrant problem does not really impact our ability to function at all as a company. " The car industry depends not just on the factories that assemble the cars, but on the entire supply chain operations. Any disruption there will result in a delay in the manufacturing of the final product. Thus, the company that did not employ the migrant workers did not face closure due to non-availability of workers. (17)

However, the company that makes engines at its Gurugram plant is connected to a network of over 300 tier-1 and tier-2 suppliers, where the majority of workers are migrant labourers who fled to their native places after the

sudden imposition of lockdown that left them in limbo. Without the engines, Maruti's Manesar plant, which assembles cars, cannot be fully functional. Thus, the migrant workers affected not only the unit they were working in but also other units that functioned in tandem with companies employing migrant workers. (17, 29)

The same storey is in the state of Maharashtra, which is a major automobile manufacturing hub in the country. Industrial activity was permitted in "orange" and "green" zones in 20 districts, including in SEZs (Special Economic Zones) and the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), but re-starting operations was not easy. Even if the Maharashtra government decides to allow operations, it is going to be difficult to re-start work without the labourers. Work was at a standstill in the Pune-Pimpri auto hub as the majority of workers here—from Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam and Uttar Pradesh—have headed home following the virus outbreak, "says Sandeep Belsare, President of the Pimpri Chinchwad Small Scale Industries Association. According to a parts supplier to the automobile companies that ET Auto talked to, it was going to take them at least three months to get their factories back into operation. Even if the government has allowed us to gradually restart operations, we don't have adequate manpower to get the wheel moving. It was quite ironic that both the decision to re-commence and to allow the native workers to go back to their homes came at the same time. (17)

The dealership business, which was thwarted by the lockdown, found it equally difficult to open up with less than half of the work force, especially in the post-lockdown period where hygiene was central to business operations. Vinkesh Gulati, Vice President, Federation of Automobile Dealers (FADA), told ET Auto, "For instance, even if MHA allowed for opening up with 50 percent of staff, The workshop with 50 employees, without wash boys and technicians, is practically not possible. We would need not only sales consultants but the rest of the workforce to be fully functional because we will be very health-conscious. " (17)

The auto component industry's workforce is attributed to a major number of migrant workers, who were affected due to the virus outbreak and lockdown. According to the analysts, the situation is going to be catastrophic and the industry needs a single comprehensive roadmap to guide its way back to re-commencement of operations. Employers needed to offer big incentives to lure the migrant workers back. As per the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), factory workers could only be brought back if there was an assurance of advance payment and compensation, besides safety and security at the workplace. The willingness of workers to come back and logistical facilitation for them were key issues. (17)

It further suggested that migrant workers could be issued e-passes by local authorities such as the BDO or the Tehsildars, based on the industry's requests to allow them to travel to their place of employment. Many industry bodies also wrote to the centre to prevent the reverse migration of workers. (17)

Industry in Punjab

At the time of independence, Punjab had only a few hundred industrial units, mainly processing food grains, cotton ginning, and brick kilns. Most of the manufactured items of even common use come from outside. During the post-independence period, industrial development in Punjab took place in phases. In the fifties, the cycle-parts and hosiery industries took their roots, while in the sixties, with the advent of the Green Revolution, agriculture-related industries like the manufacturing of farm machinery came into being. The main focus in the seventies was on industries such as auto-parts and electronic items, and during the eighties, on resource-based industries such as food processing. The industrial sector in the state of Punjab is going through a very significant phase of transition, with severe challenges and many new opportunities. As per data available from the Punjab government, on May 11, the industrial units working in Punjab were as per table 3 in Annexure 1 (19).

Table 4.:UNITS WORKING IN PUNJAB ON MAY 11, 2020

| District | Registered | Functional | Workerspermitted |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Ludhiana | 95,202 | 6,543 | 2,10,970 |
| Amritsar | 20,200 | 438 | 8,104 |
| Mohali | 15,564 | 755 | 18,162 |
| Jalandher | 14,000 | 2.816 | 51,510 |
| Patiala | 14,000 | 502 | 14,200 |
| Sangrur | 13,502 | 160 | 14,354 |

| | | | |
|------------|----------|--------|----------|
| Kapurthala | 11,204 | 265 | 12,433 |
| Gurdaspur | 10,172 | 134 | 1,126 |
| Hoshiarpur | 10,072 | 71 | 8,826 |
| Bathinda | 8,372 | 225 | 18,359 |
| Moga | 6,975 | 208 | 2,687 |
| Faridkot | 6,637 | 403 | 5,467 |
| Mansa | 5,487 | 23 | 669 |
| Ferozepur | 4,183 | 290 | 4,186 |
| Fatehgarh | 3,750 | 108 | 1,280 |
| Muktsar | 3,277 | 37 | 796 |
| Barnala | 2,604 | 272 | 3,440 |
| Fazilka | 2,509 | 199 | 5,218 |
| Rupnagar | 2,428 | 150 | 1,486 |
| Nawanshahr | 2,200 | 27 | 1,901 |
| Pathankot | 2,183 | 18 | 332 |
| Tarn Taran | 1,400 | 117 | 2,367 |
| Total | 2,55,741 | 12,671 | 3,87,919 |

As per this data, the Ludhiana industry had the maximum factories (95202) and it was the most affected, with only 6,543 factories able to function while others were closed. This affected over two lakh workers. Hence, the survey was concentrated on the Ludhiana industry. industry in Ludhiana. Automobile parts, Hosiery goods, Sewing machines & parts, Home appliances, Machine tools, Readymade garments, Hosiery, needles, Rubber goods, labels (metal & cotton), chemical goods, Oil engines, Agricultural implements, Electronic goods, Tractor parts, Cycle tyres, Plastic goods. (19)

Exodus of Migrant Workers during COVID-19 in Punjab

There is no history of an exodus of migrant workers from Punjab except during the Nineteen Nineties during the militancy in Punjab. It was, however, never such a mass-scale exodus as was observed in 2020. In Punjab, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on March 5, 2020. As the figures of COVID-19 started mounting, imposing a lockdown was the only answer the government found to deal with the situation. Soon, the curfew followed, thereby paralysing the state. By May 2020, with COVID taking almost one life every hour in Punjab, the struggle for survival became intense. Since some migrants left on foot for states as far as Bihar, Orissa, and even West Bengal, the state government requested the centre to open up trains. For this, proper safety arrangements were made before boarding and due registration was done. (24)

On May 1, 2020, Chief Minister Capt Amrinder Singh said, "Nearly 10 lakh migrant workers work in Punjab, out of which 6.52 lakh applied to return. The United Community People's Association (UCPMA) said, "Majority of applicants want to go to UP and Bihar-3.43 lakh and 2.35 lakh, respectively, by 4.30 pm on Sunday-thus forming 88.6 per cent of the total population." Meanwhile, 10,692 and 6,157 people want to move to Jharkhand and Utrakhhand respectively. (5) By May 4, 2020, a total of 8 lakh migrant workers had registered to return to their home states.(5) The large number of job losses in India were primarily among employees whose salaries were irregular and who did not have written contracts or joining letters. In Punjab too, the job losses were immense. (8, 9)

Reasons for this exodus in 2020

In lockdown 2.0, fearing permanent loss of jobs and impending hunger due to the financial crisis, the exodus of migrant workers started by mostly moving to their states on foot en-masse as there was no transport available due to the lockdown. The major exodus of migrant labourers from Punjab to their native states started as the lockdown 3.0 was announced, causing an adverse impact on the state's industrial and farm sectors. The Indian government started "Shramik" trains to ferry stranded migrants to their respective home states. In Punjab alone,

more than 8 lakh migrant workers have registered themselves to go back to their home states, causing great apprehensions in the minds of industry owners and farmers.

Onkar Singh Pahwa of Ludhiana, President of the All India Cycle Manufacturers Association, Punjab, on May 7, said, "The availability of a minimum workforce was a prerequisite for the purpose of the resumption of industry. The centre had allowed only stranded migrants to be sent back home. But now even those labourers who are not stranded are getting tempted to register to return to their home states because of the availability of free rail travel. (17)

Government Response to the Exodus of Workers from Punjab

Explaining the Indian government's response to the exodus, Rahul Ahuja, chairman of the Punjab unit of industry body CII, said, "It is inexplicable that the governments did not foresee the current exodus, triggered by the desperation of the workforce, which is not stranded." The bulk migration of workers would turn out to be counterproductive for the industry as it would not allow industrial activities to restart. ": "If the bulk migration of workers is not stopped, then Punjab will be ruined economically." Gurmeet Singh Kular, president of the Federation of Industrial and Commercial Organisations, said: "The migration of workers would prove to be a death knell for industrial activities in the state. There was not even a single death in the state due to hunger. Thus, the propaganda of non-supply of the ration is false and motivated. "On May 7, representatives of All India Cycle Manufacturers Association, Chamber of Industrial & Commercial Undertakings, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and FICO appealed to the Centre and state governments to stop the exodus of workers and requested that the state government reach out to migrant workers to provide whatever assistance they require. (9)

COVID-19: Implications for Regional Industry and the Economy

Coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. It causes illnesses ranging from the common cold to diseases such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Globally, around 116 countries are facing the wrath of the virus, with more than 10 reported cases in each country. India is one of the 116 countries, and there has been a sudden rise in the number of positive cases. The current situation has forced the Central and State governments to take several precautionary measures. The safety measures and the social restrictions mandated by the government have brought consumerism to an all-time low, with people staying at home. Restaurants, malls, movie theatres, and even schools and colleges remain closed across the country.(5)

17% of GDP is contributed by the manufacturing sector, which absorbs 12% of the workforce. The BSE index has fallen by over 30% since February 2020 after the COVID-19 cases started coming to light, clouding the outlook in the last quarter of FY 19–20 for Indian businesses, especially in the service sector, and posing a risk to the great Indian growth story. With the Punjab industry facing heat because of a massive drop in demand for industrial products due to the coronavirus scare, there is an urgent need for relief in the form of deferment of payment of the goods and services tax, a cut in the bank interest rate and immediate release of the tax refund to stay afloat in the time of crisis. (5)

Already being hit hard because of tepid demand, the industry expects the Punjab government to defer the payment of electricity bills, property tax and other statutory dues for at least two months. Almost all industrial verticals in Punjab-bicycles, garments, auto parts, hand tools, etc., have been hit because of the steep drop in demand for products, the industry said. To address the problem of migrant labourers and prevent their exodus amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the Punjab Chief Minister directed all industrial units and brick-kilns to commence operations while adopting safety provisions. (5)

Punjab Industry

A report by FICCI for the period covered from March 1, 2020, to April 10, 2020. It is based on primary research based on industry surveys from 15 sectors across the States of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and UT Chandigarh, revealing insights on the impact of COVID-19 on revenue, cash flow, inventory, etc. and their key recommendations to the State Governments. Personal interviews with key industry leaders were also conducted to gain a broader perspective on sector-specific impact. Even as the Indian economy has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic, the damage is expected to be limited if the situation eases by mid-May. However, the disruption is likely to last till September if the situation doesn't improve and the lockdown extends. Consumer

spending would be negatively impacted on account of possible job losses and reduced incomes. A long-term plan needs to be put in place to ensure that small businesses are encouraged to get back on their feet as soon as it is safe for them to do so. Among other steps, the state governments should consider easy lines of credit for MSMEs, as this is probably going to be the most difficult to access. Increased protectionism may also be called for to keep cheap imports at bay until manufacturers find their feet. (1,2,3, 11)

Punjab's MSME industry will have to incur huge losses. As per the estimate, Ludhiana's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) industry will suffer losses of between 1,200 and 1,500 crore, while the total loss of Punjab's industry would be around 3,200 crore during these seven days. Trade and repair services and hotels and restaurants together employ 41% of the total workforce within the services sector. Other services, which include education services, health services, entertainment, etc., together form the next major employer. About 30% of the workforce engaged in these services is being impacted due to the pandemic. (11)

A study by the All India Manufacturer's Organisation (AIMO) estimates that about a quarter of the over 75 million MSMEs in India will face closure if the lockdown due to COVID-19 goes beyond four weeks, and this figure is estimated to touch a whopping 43% if the situation extends beyond eight weeks. (11)

The impact will be high because these MSMEs provide employment to more than 114 million people and contribute around 30–35% of the GDP. The MSMEs are affected at several levels by the national lockdown. The production facilities and retail have been hit hard. (11. P.16)

Impact on the Informal Economy

The coronavirus disease strain that has started spreading since December 2019 (COVID-19) in mainland China, since its discovery, has been a deterrent for the Indian economy. India is a net importer of Chinese products, with the lion's share being electronic components at 67% and consumer durables at 45%. India is also heavily dependent on Chinese imports to make medicines: the APIs (Active Pharma Ingredients) and other components that go into manufacturing. As the pandemic continues through the first quarter of 2020–21, imports have been hit on account of the closure of Chinese factories. This may lead to a supply shortage of major components, further hindering the manufacturing activity in India and could well be the first indication of the disruption caused by the virus in the country. (4)

As a result of the loss of manpower and the economic crisis created by the pandemic, almost 1.6 billion informal economy workers (representing the most vulnerable in the labour market), out of a worldwide total of two billion and a global workforce of 3.3 billion, have suffered massive damage to their capacity to earn a living. This is due to lockdown measures and/or because they work in the hardest-hit sectors. The first month of the crisis was estimated to have resulted in a 60% drop in the income of informal workers around the world. This translates into a drop of 81 per cent in Africa and America, 21.6 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, and 70 per cent in Europe and Central Asia. Without alternative income sources, these workers and their families did not have any means to survive. This has caused the shutting down of many enterprises who did not get enough labour to work, breaches in supply-chain management and lack of income. (11)

The economic impact of worker exodus during this pandemic period

The Indian economy has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. The damage is expected to rise if the pandemic is not controlled within the next few months. The disruption, which lasted till date (November 30, 2020), is likely to deteriorate further since the second wave of COVID-19 has started globally, including in India and Punjab. Consumption has been negatively impacted on account of job losses and reduced incomes. (8)

COVID-19: Impact on Industry: Exodus of Migrant Industrial Workers due to COVID-19

Migrant workers started migrating after lockdown 1, but the real exodus of migrant workers from their places of work to their hometowns in UP, Bihar, MP, Orissa, and other states started at the beginning of May as lockdown 3.0 came into effect. Even though some relaxation was given for companies to restart their production, this large migration resulted in a loss of available manpower to the industry. The absence of migrant workers who had been a part of the regular workforce of major tier-2 and tier-3 companies posed a hurdle of non-availability of manpower, causing a major hurdle in the resumption of production. As job losses escalated, nearly half of the workforce was at risk of losing their livelihoods. The latest ILO data on the labour market impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic globally reveals the devastating effect on workers in the informal economy and on hundreds of millions of enterprises worldwide. According to the ILO Monitor third edition: COVID-19 and the World of Work, the drop in working hours in the second quarter of 2020 was significantly worse than previously estimated. In comparison to pre-crisis levels (Quarter 4: 2019), there was a 10.5 percent decline, equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs (assuming a 48-hour work week). The previous estimate was for a 6.7 per cent drop, equivalent to 195 million full-time workers. This is due to the prolongation and extension of lockdown measures. Estimates suggest a 12.4 per cent loss of working hours in Quarter 2 for the Americas (compared to pre-crisis levels) and 11.8 per cent for Europe and Central Asia. The estimates for the rest of the regional groups follow closely and are all above 9.5 percent. The impact of the effect on the work force has also been called a negative impact on the global economy. (11) In India, there was a risk of 136 million jobs being at risk during COVID-19. In Punjab, 8 lakh job losses were caused due to the exodus, with Ludhiana having the maximum impact with more than 2 lakh job losses. Employees in India lost a large number of jobs, particularly those whose salaries were irregular, who did not have a written contract, or who did not have joining letters. Regionally, the situation has worsened for all major regional groups. (1,2,3, 5,6)

Enterprises at Risk

The proportion of workers living in countries with recommended or required workplace closures has decreased from 81 to 68 per cent over the last two months. The decline from the previous estimate of 81 per cent in the second edition of the monitor (published April 7) is primarily a result of changes in China; elsewhere, workplace closure measures have increased. Worldwide, more than 436 million enterprises face high risks of serious disruption. These enterprises were operating in the hardest-hit economic sectors, including some 232 million in wholesale and retail, 111 million in manufacturing, 51 million in accommodation and food services, and 42 million in real estate and other business activities. (1,2,3, 11)

A long-term plan needs to be put in place to ensure that medium and small manufacturing enterprises (MSMEs) are encouraged to get back on their feet as soon as it is safe for them to do so. Among other steps, the state governments should consider easy lines of credit for MSMEs, as this is probably going to be the most difficult to access. Increased protectionism may also be called for to keep cheap imports at bay until manufacturers find their feet. (1,2,3,11)

According to ILO Director General Guy Ryder, "For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security, and no future." Millions of businesses around the world are barely breathing. They have no savings or access to credit. These are the real faces of the world of work. If we don't help them now, these enterprises will simply perish. "Measures for economic reactivation should follow a job-rich approach, backed by stronger employment policies and institutions and better-resourced and comprehensive social protection systems. International coordination on stimulus packages and debt relief measures will also be critical to making the recovery effective and sustainable. International labour standards, which already enjoy tripartite consensus, can provide a framework. " "As the pandemic and the job crisis evolve, the need to protect the most vulnerable becomes even more urgent." (5)

Solving these problems of manpower has to be dealt with from 2 angles: (a) solving the problem of manpower and (b) solving the problem of industry. Solving the problems of manpower involves (a) solving the problem of COVID-19 (b) resolving workers' on-the-ground issues. Solving the problems of industry will involve (a) solving the problem of restarting the industry, (b) re-employment and retraining of the workers according to the new situation. (c) Determining who will replace the workers who have left permanently.(5)

Return of Migrant Labour to Punjab

The return of the migrants was gradual, mostly after the lockdowns were lifted. They were either called by the industry or returned due to their financial problems and also the fear of COVID-19 having subsided. Jindal told The Wire that flying in the workers was the only option he was left with – there was a long waiting list for trains and chartering a taxi from Patna to Ludhiana was way more expensive than airfares as a two-way fare was being demanded. In a no-nonsense manner, he told his predicament: "I produce blankets but currently do not have enough skilled labour to handle the knitting, dyeing, or designing jobs in order to optimise production. The arrival of these workers will ease my beleaguered production line somewhat, but the fact is that I need more workers." (28)

Solving the problem of COVID-19

Even as the Indian economy has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic, the damage is expected to be limited if the situation eases at the earliest. However, the disruption is likely to last till next year if the situation does not improve and the lockdown continues. Consumer spending would be negatively impacted on account of possible job losses and reduced incomes.

A long-term plan needs to be put in place to ensure that small businesses are encouraged to get back on their feet as soon as it is safe for them to do so. Among other steps, the state governments should consider easy lines of credit for MSMEs, as this is probably going to be the most difficult to access. Increased protectionism may also be called for to keep cheap imports at bay until manufacturers find their feet.

During COVID-19, there was a risk of 136 million jobs being lost in India. Employees in India lost a large number of jobs, particularly those whose salaries were irregular and who did not have written contracts or joining letters. (1,2,3)

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The Study's Necessity:

Having seen the tremendous impact of workers' exodus from Punjab industry and discovering no comprehensive study to evaluate the sequence, reason, effect, and future impact; and there being no thoughtful management system, procedures, and processes for such an exodus of workers due to pandemic, the need for this comprehensive study has been felt as a project, the need for this comprehensive study has been felt as a project.

Delimitation:

Since in Punjab, the maximum impact of the exodus of workers has been on the MSMEs of the Ludhiana industry. Ludhiana being the largest employer of migrant workers, the scope of the study has been limited to MSMEs in Ludhiana during the pandemic in 2020.

Methodology

The study was thematic and exploratory in nature, using secondary data initially, which was verified on the ground by the primary data. Secondary data was collected from books and nets available in bits and pieces and joined to find a logical and systematic approach for obtaining field data. Secondary sources included grey literature, government reports, research reports, and state policies on COVID-19, lockdown, and migrant workers in Punjab. Secondary data was collected from many sources, including: (a) Census of India, 2011; (b) Statistical Abstracts of the Government of Punjab (c) Projects on the subject undertaken by various university departments in Punjab. In addition, efforts were made to consult annual reports and other reports on the issues as available in related ministries/departments; other published and unpublished records, and research, which have hitherto been conducted on the issues of labour migration. After collecting the data, it was systematically collated, interpreted, reviewed, analysed, and formed into this project report. This study has been put in the first paper, while the second paper will include the details of data collected through questionnaires, interviews, photography, and observation by the researcher. The data was collected through random and purposive sampling techniques, which included both qualitative and quantitative information.

Field Work Procedures

Questionnaires were prepared, which were toned and tuned to find out the details about the parameters to include. "(a) Industry in Punjab (b) COVID-19 in Punjab (c) Lockdown in Punjab (d) Migrant Workers in Punjab (e) Exodus of Migrant Workers during Pandemics (COVID-19) Reasons for this exodus (g)Return of Migrant Labour to Punjab (h) The impact of the exodus on workers (i), industry (ii), and the economy (iii).Managing situations like exodus in pandemics

Separate questionnaires were meant for industrial managers and migrant workers. Photography of moving out and incoming migrant workers, industries, and closed states was collected to project the on-ground situation. The

data and information collected were collated into tables and graphs and analysed orally and statistically. Interviews were conducted with key players in industrial associations, entrepreneurs at lower, middle, and top management levels of MSMEs, and large industries in Ludhiana, the major industrial town of Punjab.

The universe of study was (1) the major industrial city of Ludhiana, the most affected industrial area, was selected for the study, and (2) the sample size involved a total of 11 factories, 11 managers, and 25 migrant workers. There were also in-depth interviews conducted with the opinion leaders.

The study involved identifying, understanding, and alleviating the problems of industry MSMEs and migrant labour in Punjab and finding a permanent solution to meet such pandemic situations in the future. The primary data attempted to (a) Obtaining information about the migration pattern, types of work, and roles of contractors and agents; and (b) the most common problems encountered by migrants, as well as suggestions for resolving them. (c) To obtain an overall picture of the pandemic scenario among MSMEs and migrant workers, (d) Apart from migrant workers, managers and industrial associations were the other respondents who were directly or closely associated with COVID-19, Lockdown, Industry, and Migrant Exodus. Efforts were made to select migrant labour through random sampling. In view of migrant labour's non-availability, a purposive sampling technique (interview of alternate/available migrants) had to be used.

Summary

As per data last updated as of 5:29pm CET on January 21, 2021, on the WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard, globally, there have been 95,612,831 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,066,176 deaths, reported to WHO. According to The Tribune dated January 12, 2021, the industry has bounced back as 96% of units have resumed operations and 97% of their staff have re-joined. During pandemics, only 435 units out of a total of 2.6 lakh units, including 500 large units, were left operational. In Punjab, 2,37,118 industries with a 16,08,108 workforce have resumed operations. In Ludhiana, having the largest number of registered units, 8,18,812 out of 95202 industries have become operational with the return of 5,05,893 of the 7,69,245 total workers. Jalandhar Tribune, January 12, 2021).

As has been shown by the recent pandemic caused by COVID-19, pandemics unsettle entire systems in the area of occurrence. Since their period is relatively long, long-term measures are necessary to manage conditions arising from it. Managing the workers under these conditions has to be envisioned, planned, and prepared for thoroughly, and the plans should be amended as per the changing situations, temporary or permanent. Employment of migrants because of the ease of availability and lower cost has become a norm in Indian industry. However, during pandemics, when exodus occurs, the functioning of a concern comes to a standstill, as has been seen in the period of lockdowns, causing heavy financial loss to the industry, individual, and the nation as well. Maharashtra thought it well before when it was made compulsory for the Maharashtra industry to employ 80% of its workers locally within the state. Even Haryana also followed suit and made it compulsory in industry for 75% of workers from within the state. Punjab, too, must adopt this approach as soon as possible by making it a law. Other arrangements include accommodation for the workers within the periphery of the factory.

All the sources recommend professional and technical training of the state's own local youth for working in factories by the government or by the companies themselves to make them fit for the job skills and on-line working since rural areas have plenty of jobless workers. During the pandemics, those industries that explored the local workers were successful in maintaining their operations even during lockdown. Employment of local workers will also plug the perennial exodus of festival workers during festival seasons. Employment through contractors can also be stopped, and preference should be given to permanent local workers since they tend to commit to all times. The local workers will be most beneficial to the MSME's.

Adoption of WHO guidelines on anti-pandemic safety measures is needed. Workers must be made aware of the safety measures and become accustomed to online working. Automation, computerisation and technical skill development in industry are now essential future requirements. HR managers must maintain regular communication with workers on mobile phones or computers. Working from home or working online is also an alternative for which HR must train their men and rehearse regularly. Netting company groups also becomes essential where the exchange of information becomes most effective and timely. Adopting security and safety measures is the other most important task that the HR team must ensure. Caring for their financial needs is

essential. Remote or online working is one such measure that can be used to solve administrative and communication problems.

As manufacturers seek to drive business continuity and compete amid extraordinary times, the focus has to shift to developing more innovative cultures and leveraging flexible operating models. The goal should be to recession-proof the organisation while continuing to attract, engage, and retain talent. There is also a need to set up an institutional mechanism for these migrant workers which should have nodal cells to register, verify the antecedents of workers, record the reasons for migration and track their movements within the state. The cell should also be in charge of investigating complaints of harassment or human rights violations and resolving them in collaboration with police, non-governmental organizations, and labour unions. Workers should be made aware and motivated under the direction of a cell to ensure that they sincerely take on the jobs and perform them to the satisfaction of the employers. Contact points must be established between the migrants. Facilities should also be provided for accessible and Coordination and liaison with other government departments and stakeholders should also be done by this cell.

Workers should be provided with suitable accommodation, possibly within the periphery of the company where they are employed or at a nearby place under the direction of the owners. Safe drinking water and clean toilets in all workplaces and places of residence and medical facilities by the government to prevent the spread of the disease must be provided.

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