

Migratory sagas and paradoxical Infodemics of forced migration and trauma during COVID-19 in India

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Abstract: Migratory sagas have been a part of human history since time immemorial, with people moving from one place to another for various reasons such as economic, social, or political factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a unique challenge for people who are forced to migrate, particularly in India. The pandemic has caused a paradoxical infodemic, with both genuine and misleading information being disseminated about the risks and benefits of migration during these times. Forced migration, has been a reality for many individuals and communities across the world for centuries and in India, it coupled with trauma and uncertainty about the future, has led to unprecedented challenges for those who are already vulnerable due to their displacement. In India, forced migration has been a recurring phenomenon, with people moving due to various reasons such as economic, social, or political factors. In this context, it is crucial to understand the migratory sagas of those who are forced to migrate, the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and the paradoxical infodemic with both genuine and misleading information being disseminated about the risks and benefits of migration that has emerged around forced migration during these times. This paper explores the migratory sagas of those who are forced to migrate, the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and the paradoxical infodemic that has emerged around forced migration during these times. Through a review of existing literature and analysis of current events, this paper argues that the infodemic surrounding migration during the pandemic exacerbates the difficulties faced by forced migrants, leading to further trauma and uncertainty.

Keywords: Covid - 19, India, Migration, Sectoral Dialogue, Lockdown

1. INTRODUCTION

Migratory sagas refer to the stories and experiences of people who are forced to migrate. These stories are often characterized by trauma, uncertainty, and displacement. Forced migrants often face a myriad of challenges, including a lack of access to basic

necessities such as food, water, and shelter, discrimination, and a loss of cultural identity. These challenges are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created a new set of difficulties for forced migrants. The claim that we are up against "an invisible, elusive enemy" is made, but it has some flaws. As a result, people are letting down their much-needed guard. On the one hand, this is causing fatalistic reactions that verge on psychosis. On the other hand, others are defiantly labelling the "viral apocalypse" as nothing more than a "small-time virus" (Bilak, A, Essig, B., 2021). The battle against the lethal virus is diluted at both ends. As good communication is essential for the effectiveness of preventative actions against dangerous illnesses, language also takes significance. Throughout this epidemic, it is notable how aggressive rhetoric and military analogies are used to inspire action (Singh, K., 2021). A few of these names, such covidiot, which describes someone who disobeys public safety warnings, zoombombing, and maskne, which describes an acne outbreak spurred on by facial coverings, are on the watchlist. The epidemic has also given rise to a number of unique names that combine existing terms. The practice of scanning frightening news on a smartphone is known as doomscrolling. We've also started using other neologisms in our regular correspondences, such as coronacoma, coronials, covidivorce, and coronaspeak (Nour, M., Jawad, F., 2020). Coronial dads are also involved in the birth of coronial children and are required to take care of the family, the workplace, and the children. It is widely acknowledged that our language creates our world. As a result of the pandemic, which has had a profound impact on our language, the primary language of the world now carries the imprint of the pandemic as well as the infodemics that resulted from its constant coverage by numerous fora and media outlets. Old words have new meanings that characterise our current situation, our

alienations, worries, and uncertainties (Dutta, A., 2021). The strange realities of the internet's "hyper" and "virtual" and "post" era, which have been with us for some time, have been abruptly jolted. We are currently in a strange and unsettling atmosphere where the sands are shifting. This peculiar setting is being studied on a global basis and will have a unique language. The word "quarantine," which emphasises the social and economic impacts of Covid and frequently uses the terms "lockdown," "social and physical isolation," and "furlough," has, interestingly, overtaken the phrases "lockdown" and "pandemic." First traces of life emerging after the lockdown, re-open, gradual, and lessening were all buzzwords in the early months. When the fear of the virus abated and boomeranged to face-to-face interaction increased and was used as in-person worship and in-person graduation. The bulk of the speakers often utilised keyworkers and circuit breakers in subsequent months, which revealed the ebb and flow of the sickness, sport, and the sports bubble.

2. COVI-TERMS HYBRID PEDAGOGY (CHP)

It was observed that some words have been there in the past but now have been included with new meanings; *self-isolation* and *self-isolating* are now used to describe self-imposed isolation whereas earlier they have been applied to countries which, chose to detach themselves from the rest of the world (Gunasekhar, A., 2021). The term "social distancing," first used in 1957 (Long, N., 2020), is defined as an attitude of aloofness or a conscious effort to socially remove oneself from others while without maintaining a physical distance to prevent infection. Also, an elbow bump has historically been used as a way to celebrate rather than as a way to avoid shaking hands while being greeted. A series of studies suggest that in the month of January 2020, the words that have gained currency in these tense and trying times are mainly related to naming and describing the pandemic and associated repercussions; *coronavirus*, *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome*, *virus*, *human-to-human*, *respiratory*, *flu-like*, *Next month Covid-19*, *quarantine*, *self-quarantine*, *institutional quarantine*, *epicentre* and *self-isolate* among others became current (Manjula, R., Rajasekhar, D., 2021). By the month of February, keywords reflected the social impact of the virus and social surroundings of the *medical responses*; *non-*

essential, *work from home and postpone* and *Personal Protective Equipment* was among the highly used words. The prevention of personal hygiene from infection gave importance to *disinfectants*, *sanitisers*, *face masks*, *face shields* and *sanitisers*. Wearing mask-wearing escalated the rise of phrases such as *mask up*, *anti-mask*, *anti-masker* and in institutionalised online-based learning picked up words like; *remote*, *distant*, *online/offline*, *mute/unmute* and *proliferated*, consequently spurting in online, digital and hybrid pedagogy (Chakraborty, I., Prasenjit, M., 2020). Travel limitations have brought attention to the importance of bio-bubbles and travel bubbles, and their breach has led to a number of crises affecting both local and foreign individuals. To move throughout the lockdowns, an e-pass that authorizes a person's movement was made mandatory (Atikh, R., 2021).

Other disease-related words like *cytokline storm* or *spike*, Case fatality rate, co-morbidity, morbidity ratio and mortality rate have unfortunately entered our common lexicon. These terms refer to the spread of disease and the possibility that it will either decrease, remain at a steady level within a population, or result in a pandemic. A mix of social isolation techniques, real-time historical contact tracking, geo-fencing, and micro containment zones, together with physical examination and screening of both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, are required to stop the spread of illness. Effective medications were required during the pandemic, and both specialised and standard medications were in high demand. The emerging viral strains have brought with them terrifying mutations. The designation of SARS-CoV-2 mutations has been a little hasty. World Health Organization announced that SARS-CoV-2 variants of interest (VOI) and variants of concern (VOC) will be named based on the Greek alphabet for purposes of public discourse (Rolain & Raoult, 2020; WHO, 2020). B.1.1.7 is now known as Alpha under the new naming scheme since it was the first variety of concerns identified by the World Health Organization. B.1.351, which originated in Brazil, is now known as Beta (Prajapat M., et. al., 2021). The other two versions of interest are P.1, which was initially discovered in Brazil and is now known as Gamma, and B.1.617.2, which was discovered in India but is now known as Delta. Epsilon through Kappa in the Greek

alphabet makes up the six varieties that the WHO has identified as being of relevance.

As confirmed by World Health Organisation a new spell of the pandemic, was reported in 2020 (Cucinotta D., 2020), putting the whole world in a bizarre crisis, that has plunged the country into a state of residual precariousness. The Coronavirus disease 2019, commonly known as the COVID-19 pandemic is a result of SARS-2 infections, consequently a global public health issue, with countless deaths, glooming depression, prolixity and isolation. The virus brought about a massive change to the ecosystem and triggered a vortex of bumps that the people had never experienced before and had no design to bridle the pandemic, subsequently a formidable fear and scaled anxiety in the people due to the virtues of the crisis, fear was allied to how and when the situation will assimilate and apprehension of impending doom. The biggest worry was the absence of a potent treatment or a potential vaccine to conquer the virus (Hall, M.C. et. al, 2021). To make things worse, the pandemic contrived people not only physically but also psychologically, economically, socially, politically and linguistically. People who belonged to the substrata of the food chain were affected resentfully by this situation, irrespective of their social status, everyone was devoured by this pandemic in some way or other. Undoubtedly, life during the pandemic affected significantly the way people started perceiving, shelled and cornered with one another around the world. Furthermore, it has also taught the world the new norms of human relationships and social distancing, which, can be debated pensively. Not only it supplied the world with a lesson about the triviality of the hamster cage but also the vulnerability of the human course of life (Vieira, C. M., et. al., 2020). It's prudent to mention that the pandemic has driven the world to a significant change in the social attributes that people have ever witnessed.

3. IMBROGLIO AND JEOPARDY

The pandemic was supplemented with lockdowns and travel restrictions that were heavily imposed by governments all over the world as a precautionary step to curtail the outspread (Mahato, S., et. al., 2020). However, the lockdown upset the diurnal activities of the people specifically the working class leaving them in major financial jeopardy. A new pattern was

replaced by surviving in a predicament of a state of panic, with multi-folds of uncertainty and fear for a longer period of time which, was first predicted when the epidemic first started.

As a result of intensive mitigation strategies, a variety of new behaviours were developed, including "social seclusion, domestic quarantine, facemasks, attentive hand washing, avoidance of public meetings, etc."(Juang, W., 2021). "As time passed and the situation became worse, the pandemic has slowly unmasked its harsh reality and people have started grasping this truth that the current state of the situation is going to last longer than what was presumed of it in the beginning, and this has affected them rather drastically" (Jesline, J., et al. 2021). The transformational process of adapting to this pandemic risk as a public or global calamity, while dealing with the fear of contracting COVID-19 and managing the disease, is highly exhausting and not doable by all" (Shaw, R., et. al., 2020).

The lockout has affected everyday gamblers in a unique way. Not only did they lose their employment as a result of the shutdown, but they were also furious because their daily revenue, which they relied on to exist, had also stopped. They lost all means of support, making it impossible for them to make ends meet. The working class's most vulnerable group to the effects of the recession was determined to be the migrants." (Behera. A. K., et.al., 2022). The pandemic disrupted people belonging to all classes; moreover, it has revealed the conspicuous realities of socio-economic and healthcare establishments.

As a result of their inability to deal with the issues brought on by the loss of their jobs and money, "there were numerous documented incidents of suicide and suicidal attempts, notably by persons from economically poorer groups." (Vijayakumar, L., et al., 2022). Also, it has been shown that the risks of disease and mortality differ dramatically depending on "social location, such as race, social class, gender, age, ability, and geographic location." (Manzar, M. D., et. al., 2021).

Also, this epidemic put a tremendous amount of mental pressure on the general public. One such group that was highly and adversely affected by this crisis situation was the migrants, who had to move out to different parts of the country in search of jobs to sustain their families (Ali, A., Khan., et al., 2022). Data obtained from the National Sample Survey (NSS)

2007–2008 (Parida, J. K., et al., 2015) out of the total workforce in India, about 28.3% were migrants. According to the 2011 census, about 37% of India's total population was found to be migrants (Jesline, J., et al. 2021). This escalated to 139 million migrants from what was reported in the 2001 census (Singh, OP., 2020). There are about 100 million internal migrant workers in India, and most of them are daily-wage labourers who have travelled out from different states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, etc. to other states in search of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs (Rao, N., et al., 2020).

The concept of social distancing is irrelevant to the migrants because of the perseverance of life, insecurity and hunger. Isolated from their loved ones and caged due to lockdown with no money and job subjected to the economic setback. While India's population of 1.3 billion people could not but come to terms with the changes of imposed social distancing, millions of migrant workers in India had other daunting tasks to confront (Paital, B., et. al., 2020). Although the lockdown situation had an effect on the entire town and required people to stay inside, migrants were unable to take comfort in being confined with their families and were instead destined to be left stranded in a migrant nation without any means of surviving. Because of this, this group had to experience more terrible challenges than anybody else, including financial, social, and mental ones. Downtrodden workers during the COVID-19 pandemic have witnessed numerous hardships & struggles. With factories and workplaces shut down due to the lockdown imposed in the entire country, millions of migrant workers had to deal with the loss of livelihood, food shortages and uncertainty about their future (Clapp, J. & Moseley, W.G., 2020).

Many of them and their families had to spend nights hungry and famished. Due to the lockdown, thousands of them then began walking back to their places, with no means of transport whatsoever. In retaliation, Governments took various steps to help them and subsequently arranged transportation for them to ply smoothly. Many of our fellow Indians died due to the lockdown, with consequences ranging from starvation, suicide, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and lack of medical care (Ahamed, S. R., et. al., 2021).

4. ATROCIOUS PREDICAMENT

The workforce majorly comprises daily-wage labourers working in the manufacturing and construction industries. Often neglected adequate healthcare, nutrition, housing and sanitation, since many of them work in the informal sector, the reason being from sub-urban areas but live in cities for work around the year (Banerjee, D., et. al. 2021). A large chunk of money is to be sent home for the nourishment of their families back home, with no savings and living in factory dormitories, due to the imposition of lockdown. According to official reports, there was an ample amount of food stocked up in the government godowns to feed the poor for a couple of years. Meanwhile, government programmes ensured that the poor would get additional rations during these tough times, however, the distribution system failed to be effective as the ration cards were cluster-specific and fair price shops were inaccessible (Das, S., 2016). Many migrant workers were observed travelling thousands of miles on foot, bicycles, or rickshaw carts with their families in order to return to their home countries, and that too while going without food, due to the lack of employment and financial resources and the lockdown restrictions that were imposed. It is hard to preserve social distance while travelling in big numbers; some of them would sooner perish from the virus in their own hamlet than go hungry in the city due to a lack of employment. Police brutality, on the other hand, made the headlines as many were arrested for violating the measures and parameters of lockdown, when caught at state borders, forests and even on boats and ferries to cross rivers many were confirmed dead due to sunstroke and exhaustive weather. A catastrophe so severe, that vehicles, used to make rounds in states to maintain the supply chain mechanism and people were seen hiding inside the freight trucks & dumpster trucks, many died in accidents on the roads after walking or hiding in vehicles despite being wounded. After a long day of trekking, 16 migrants were killed on May 8, 2020 (Negi, C., 2020) when a freight train ran over them as they were sleeping on the tracks. They believed that because trains were not moving in either direction, it was safe to do so. Later in May 2020, migrant labourers decided to travel in large groups either by foot or in the cargo areas of trucks and shipping containers, despite the government's operation of

special trains and buses. For the most part, because of malnutrition, they did not wait in line to board the government-arranged transportation. Also, they believed that if they returned to their hometowns, they could resume farming and take up part-time employment to supplement their daily income.

5. DISCUSSION

Migrants faced many hardships during travelling these trains, a large number of them were left with no food and water arranged for them while they travelled. Unexpected events led to severe chaos and confusion, trains from many locations were coming with significant delays, there was no sufficient food or sanitary facilities aboard the train, and there was stone-pelting. Those who got food packets and drink verified that they were just thrown at the gates, which led to workers arguing over who would get what. Any of the states reported large numbers of Infections of COVID-19 among the migrants returning home as by then the lockdown limitations lifted to allow the rising of migrants to their respective states (Gerwe, O., 2021). Governments opened thousands of quarantine centres to house them, imposing mandatory institutional quarantine of two weeks. Authorities also imposed strict guidelines for migrants to follow, either leaving or entering state borders. Those who all chose to remain behind during the exodus were attacked by their relatives, who said they had the coronavirus and couldn't go to get food because of it. Police on the other hand became the face of brutality if they ever ventured out for essentials. In view of the Pandemic, people have isolated themselves, as the marketplace and public squares since the very inception have been at the heart of social interaction and public life, neither the pandemic nor the catastrophic transition seems to have diminished the centrality and role of these spaces, even social media applications for that matter.

For people who have not directly encountered a deep interference to their lives - hunger, unemployment, disease and dislocation - due to COVID-19, social media have indeed brought comfort and convenience. Yet, people, remember with nostalgia on social media their love for the crowd and brushing of shoulders in public places. Desire to sit in a restaurant & scold for the unpleasant services cannot be replaced by ordering in; the bliss of the company of friends and colleagues was not quite the same in a web-based meeting, small

interactions with others on public transport, shops, have become a thing of value and to be cherished. Covid-19 had an impact on people's life, but it also changed the way people moved around and could have even caused more movement. Even reported that medical personnel were being evicted from their homes because of fears of contagion; others have been subjected to discrimination within their communities. In the future, loss of income resulting from Covid-19 could lead to further evictions. Internally displaced people were particularly vulnerable to the pandemic because millions of them reside in densely populated areas, are unable to self-isolate, and lack access to clean water, proper sanitation, and even the most basic medical care. It is still too early to fully comprehend COVID-19, which will have an impact on the millions of people who have been uprooted within our own nation, many of whom are fragile, with overburdened infrastructure and health systems. We can only imagine what it will mean to those who are displaced, live in congested slums or tiny spaces, lack access to clean water, healthcare, and government support, and will be disproportionately affected by its effects and repercussions. The globe is internally relocating dangers of becoming the Pandemic's most tragic victims as it increasingly learns about the horrific long-term effects of this Virus.

5.1. Limitations

Environmental change is one of the main issues confronting humanity in the twenty-first century. Despite their greatest efforts in recent years to restore nature to its former splendour, humans have only made small progress. In contrast to recent months, the pandemic's effects have flourishingly recovered the ecosystem to a greater extent, which has unquestionably had a good impact on the world climate. Whatever its genesis or origin, the COVID-19 phenomena has in fact improved the mutually beneficial relationship between the former and the latter. To effectively limit the spread of the pandemic, it is now essential to control the disease's source, stop its spread, and use existing medications and protocols. Let's be hopeful enough to believe that, unlike all previous tragedies, humans will triumph over the epidemic in due course. Nevertheless, they should be aware of the boundaries to which they may push nature by overusing the environment's resources before it's too late.

Examining, comprehending, and exploring the difficulties that migrants must have faced are essential if the misery that they are experiencing is to be addressed. In-depth analyses of research on circular migration and their psychological effects from an Indian perspective are required to raise public awareness and develop fresh policies that might be used to protect migrant rights.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to examine in depth the many aspects of the hardships that migrant labourers faced in the Indian environment during the Covid-19 outbreak and the lockdown. The paper that is being presented describes the intricate, multifaceted challenges that employees faced in the Indian environment during the Covid-19 epidemic and subsequent shutdown. The primary goal is to concentrate on the struggles that have caused migrants to migrate in a cyclical and reverse fashion as well as the suffering that the Covid-19 epidemic has inflicted on the migrants. The study also intends to shed light on the linguistic damage that this epidemic has caused to the populace and the new terminology that has emerged as a result. The seamless dissemination of factual information to the general audience is the ideal plot device for tackling infodemics. Instead, the media may play a significant role in encouraging healthy behaviours, increasing social awareness, exposing the truth, and enhancing psychological well-being through its many outlets. To counter the role of media portals in spreading information, governments should prioritise direct public health initiatives. In the conclusion, it offers potential courses of action for launching an efficient and comprehensive reaction to remedy the linguistic impact. The article discusses the merits and drawbacks of the medical system and medical framework, which dominated the daytime response to language during the pandemic with its individualistic overtones, and it offers a different framework based on the "psycho-lingual" paradigm, which sees distress as an interaction between society and social words. To lessen the consequences of the misinformation pandemic and any potential future outbreaks, the infodemics described above should be encouraging more effective health communication practises. Moreover, it emphasises ways to deal with problems relating to their mental health treatment and offers

suggestions for ways to uphold their human rights and defend their lives and way of life.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding Disclosure/Acknowledgement

None

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