

Agony of the laborers and daily wagers during the COVID-19 induced lockdown in India

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To the Editor,

COVID-19 crisis induced lockdown has affected all sections of the society, but the economically weaker sections including the laborers and daily wagers have been hit particularly hard. Broadbent *et al.*'s view of lockdown significantly affecting the poorer segment as compared to the economically stronger sections of the society, and thus, not being egalitarian (1) perfectly fits in the Indian context. Our communication traces the stipulation and misery of the poor in India during lockdown, which was implemented as a necessary preventive measure to contain the COVID-19 outbreak (2). As per the World Poverty Clock, nearly 50,700,122 individuals corresponding to around 4% of India's population is extremely poor (3). While as per the Asian Development Bank estimates, 21.9% of the Indian population still lives below the national poverty line (4). India witnessed reverse and the second largest mass migration of mainly the poor section of the society as an aftermath of lockdown; where approximately 50,000-60,000 individuals migrated from urban to the rural areas of their origin in a period of few days (5).

About 450 million or roughly 90% of India's population works in the unorganised economy (6). These include mostly the poor, daily wagers, construction workers, street vendors, landless laborers, petty traders, tailors, barbers, cycle rickshaw/auto-rickshaw/taxi/Ola/Uber drivers and the homeless. The main source of the livelihood of these daily wagers was

severely compromised due to the lockdown, causing massive disturbance to their livings. A report by Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy estimated that 122 million Indians have lost their jobs during the novel Coronavirus lockdown in April and nearly 75% of them were primarily small traders and wage laborers. Further, it was reported that India's unemployment rate rose from 8.8% in March to 24.3% in May 2020 amidst COVID-19 crisis (7). The lockdown of the COVID-19 crisis, thus, witnessed daily wagers and poorer sections of the society to be the most affected. It would hence, not be incorrect to state that the lockdown was not democratic and tremendously affected the poorer section of the society. In view of the crisis, the Government of India was quick to assess the situation and offered relief packages for the poor and downtrodden.

Poverty is not merely an income deprivation but optimism deprivation as well. In dealing with the inequality, the underprivileged individuals should be assured of basic needs and financial security. They must be motivated to get back to work at the earliest possible time taking all the necessary precautions released by the United Nations and the respective State and Central Governments. Since, social distancing and restrictive movements are one of the major preventive measures on offer at present; the respective governments should make policies and schemes and create jobs for the poor at their native places in order to avoid inter-state movements. It is the time we realize that in the long run poverty may prove to be deadlier than the

effects of novel Coronavirus, unless appropriate and timely corrective measures are taken.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this manuscript. The authors have no commercial associations (e.g. consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangement etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

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Conflict of Interest

None to declare

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