

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-2019 ON MIGRANT LABOURERS IN HARYANA

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### ABSTRACT

The Pandemic, Covid-2019 has posed severe threat to human lives across the globe. The socio- economic impact of this deadly virus seems to be serious and is difficult to quantify. It has shown its negative impact on all macroeconomic activities across all the sectors and sub-sectors. The vulnerable sections of Indian economy like migrant labourer have been badly affected, not only in economic terms but socially, morally and emotionally as well. Since 1991, Indian economy has been experiencing rapid growth among the inter-state migrants, it was 27.3 millions in 1991, 42.3 millions in 2001 and 56.3 millions in 2011(census 2011). The immediate impact of Covid-2019 on migrant labourers is visible as all have been uprooted and displaced with future uncertainty. The present paper aims to study the impact of covid-19 on migrant labourers (unskilled, semi- skilled, skilled) and their movements out of Haryana during Covid -2019 lockdown. Haryana is among the top five States in case of migrants. There is an urgent need to deal with this displacement effect of Covid-2019 and design strong policies for the welfare of migrant labourers in Haryana which will help to mitigate the demand supply gaps of labor in Haryana.

**Keywords:** Covid-2019, Migrant labourers, Haryana, Labour shortage, labour welfare

### INTRODUCTION

The Pandemic Covid-2019 has posed severe threat to human lives across the globe. This is an attack on the human existence. There are many variants of covid-19 like Delta and Omicron which are affecting the health of people. Once again the process of lockdown in various areas has been initiated with new guidelines in January 2022.

The Pandemic has shown deeper economic, social and emotional impact on all sections of society, especially the vulnerable groups of society since the beginning of year 2020. Even the super powers of the world have not been able to control this pandemic in a comprehensive manner. This deadly virus is a real and tough challenge for big and democratic nations like India. Presently, we all are part of liberalized and globalized world. The growth of market economies through liberal economic policies has created interdependence of each nation across the globe and within the various regions/states of a nation. The fast spread of covid-2019 has hit very hard each state of India. There is fear, panic, uncertainty and sense of insecurity among all Indian nationals. The announcement of Janta Curfew on March 22, 2020, followed by subsequent Lockdown announcements by the Centre and State governments with effect from March 25, 2020 (Lockdown 1.0) till April 14, 2020; Lockdown 2.0 from April 15, 2020 to May 04, 2020 which was extended by third phase of Lockdown (3.0) from May 5 to May 17, 2020. Honorable PM announced Lockdown 4.0 (from May 18, 2020 to May 31, 2020) in his address to the nation on May 12, 2020. On May 30, the announcements were made that the lock down will be restricted to containment zones only. The first phase of unlock started from June 8, 2020 onwards and unlock 7 was announced in December 2020. Many states like U.P. and Delhi announced lockdown again during April-June 2021. The year 2022 is no exception. In various areas, the partial lockdown has been announced. Educational Institutions have been closed as per multiple guidelines by the government of Haryana and other states also. The impact of lockdown during first wave was a sudden halt to all economic and social activities. As a result, all businesses, commercial establishments, small industries, construction works, farm activities, shops and all such activities were closed down. The immediate effect was a large army of unemployed workforce which was earlier employed as casual workers mainly in informal sectors or as informal workers in formal sectors. The worst affected were the migrant labourers who were left with no source of income/work.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As per International Organization of Migrants (1951)- ‘A migrant labourer is one who moves for the purpose of employment’.

Kanem, N. UNFPA (2017) opines that the migration is itself a barometer of changing socio-economic and political conditions at national and international levels. It is also a sign of disparities in economic-social conditions.

Therefore, it is imperative to understand the impact of this pandemic on migrant labourers for designing proper strategy and provide some useful immediate measures and long term measures in this regard.

Against this backdrop, the present paper is an attempt to understand the impact of Covid-2019 on the status of migrant labourers in Haryana.

Review of studies/recent surveys:

Bhagat,R.B., Reshmi, R.S., Sahoo Harihar., Archna.K.Roy, and Depti Govil.(2021) opined that understanding of migration and livelihood could be helpful in designing a mitigating strategy of economic and social impact of COVID-19 in India. There are many challenges faced by migrants due to COVID-19 like lack of food, basic amenities, lack of health care, economic stress, lack of transportation facilities to return to their native places and lack of psychological support.

Abdul A., Dandub.P.N., Asha, R., and Senthil Kumar. (2020) studied the impact of covid-19 on migrant women workers in Delhi and Gurugram. They calculated on the basis of 6 factors like loss of livelihood, debts ,experiences, emotional aspect and income. The study suggests that urgent policy interventions are required to address their impoverishment.

In his works, Economist Aacharya Arun DivakarNath Bajpai (2020) stressed that the migrant labourers are badly affected by Covid-2019 because they are part of informal sector and are not united.

In her article, Ganguly, Meenakashi (2020) South Asia director at Human Rights Watch says that India must understand the malnutrition and illness of marginalized workers and they must be provided with all essential goods.

In their field work, Mukhopadyaya,Partha and Mukta Naik(2020) found that due to outward movement of migrant labourers, during Covid-2019, the highways have been pedestrianized.

In its recent Survey, Bhaskar,N.(2020)found that 79 percent did not get salary till April 07, 2020.

In its empirical study, Venugopal, A. (2020) found that during this lockdown, the migrant workers are in a bad condition without food and shelter. The latest survey shows that out of 3196 workers, 90 percent lost their incomes, 55 percent were underpaid, 62 percent had no information about emergency welfare measures of the government and 37 percent did not know how to access these benefits.

Mohan, D and Yadav, N. (June 19, 2020) found in their study that the scale of damage caused within the production-distribution-sale agriculture network was hardly addressed by the package of the government. The study was made around the parameters like a curfew-style lockdown, the social distancing and the the reverse migration of labour.

Rozgaar survey report (2021): a study on the impact of Covid-19 on migrant workers in India. There is over 450 million internal migrants in India today. Daily Wage Worker Platform in collaboration with Jindal Global University and prominent Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) surveyed 8000 migrant workers from September 2020 - February 2021, spanning across states of Bihar, Odisha, and Maharashtra in order to understand the plight of migrant workers during the lockdowns and in 2021. It was found that almost 75% of the surveyed workers did not have any source of income after the lockdown and almost 45% reported difficulty due to food shortages. 31% still have no access to basic healthcare. Millions of migrants lack access to government welfare schemes with little awareness about their rights or access to legal aid. The review of studied and surveys show that the migrant labourers are worst affected as they are compelled to move out of their work places and has no option but to return to their home states.

The review of studies shows that the pandemic covid-19 has severely affected the migrant labourers. There is no study on the impact of Covid-19 on migrant labourers in Haryana. The present paper aims to analyse the situation of migrant workers in Haryana during Covid-19.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1) To understand the immediate impact of Covid-2019 on migrant labourers in Haryana.
- 2) To analyse the problem of shortage of labourers due to covid-2019 in Haryana.
- 3) To make suggestions for the welfare of migrant labourers during Covid-2019.

**METHODOLOGY AND DATA:** The present paper will study the migrant labourers (unskilled, semi- skilled, skilled) and their movements out of Haryana during Covid -2019 lockdown and sudden shortage created by covid-19. The main sources of information are recent surveys and recent announcements of the government and news from the e-media and print media. The data have been obtained from statistical abstracts and reports of Labor Department, Haryana.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:** There is no latest data on migrant labourers in Haryana and very few research studies are there.

## **Profile of Haryana Economy**

Haryana economy is amongst the fast growing states of India. The migrant labourers come to Haryana especially in the NCR region for employment in rapid growing sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, construction, transportation, hotels and alike. The Haryana state is selected because Haryana is among the top five states in case of migrants along with Maharashtra, Punjab and Delhi. There is an urgent need to deal with this displacement effect of Covid-2019 and design strong policies for the welfare of migrant labourers in Haryana which will help to mitigate the demand supply gaps of labor in Haryana.

There has been sharp rise in the number of In-migrant workers in Haryana mainly from U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The NCR region of Haryana- Gurugram, Manesar, Rohtak, Sonipat, Faridabad, Rewari and nearby areas offer large employment opportunities to skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers in factories, shops, commercial establishments, construction sites, trade, tourism and hospitality sector, automobile, machinery, handlooms, footwear, health and health care, textiles, plywood, scientific instruments, farms and farm markets (mandis) and MSME. Migrant labourers come on permanent basis or on seasonal basis. The growing sectors and subsectors in Primary, Secondary and Service sectors in Haryana offer lots of employment opportunities.

In Haryana, Primary sector experienced a low growth rate of employment while the growth rate of secondary sector was above 5 percent during the decade of 70s and 90s. The service sector experienced a continuous rise in its employment growth from 3.94 percent in 70s to 7.31 percent in the 90s and 7.84 percent in the first decade of 20s (as per data from DESA, Haryana). There has been fast growth of all the three sectors-Agriculture, Industry, Services and their sub sectors in Haryana. The GSVA at constant prices (2011-12) grew at the rate of 9.8 percent, 7.8 percent, 7.3 percent (QE), and 7.4 percent (AE) during the year 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively. The sector wise composition of state's economy at constant prices (2011-12) in 2019-20 shows that 16.6 percent, 32.8 percent and 50.6 percent is contributed by Primary sector, Secondary sector and Service sector respectively. It is the service sector which has been experiencing a high and consistent growth in Haryana. The Per capita Income in Haryana rose from Rs. 159892 in 2017-18 to Rs.169409 in 2018-19 to Rs. 180026 in 2019-20 at constant prices 2011-12. (As per ESO, economic survey report 2020-2021)

**Table1 Contribution of Haryana in National GDP (At constant Prices) Percent share**

Year	Percent share
2017-18	3.71
2018-19	3.69
2019-20	3.84
2020-21	3.94

Source: DESA, Haryana. Economic survey report 2021

Table 1 show that the share of Haryana in National GDP rose from 3.71 percent to 3.94 percent in four years.

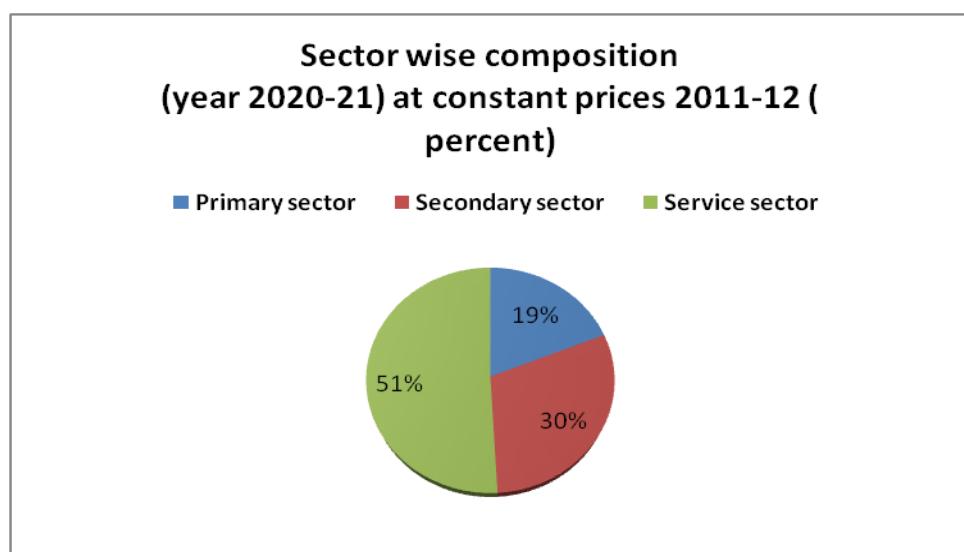
**Table 2 Sector wise composition constant prices 2011-12 ( percent)**

Sector	Share
Primary sector	18.9
Secondary sector	30.2
Service sector	50.9

Source: DESA, Haryana. Economic survey report 2021

Table 2 shows that the share of Primary sector is less than 20 percent while share of Secondary sector is 30 percent and Service sector contributes 51 Percent in State Income during 2020-21 at 2011-12 prices. (Refer chart 1)

**Chart 1**



Based on table 2

Haryana's growth has been service sector led.

**Table 3 Sectoral Growth Rate, Haryana**

At constant prices (2011-12)

Sector	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22 projected
Agriculture & Allied	5	5.6	4.3	0.8
Construction	7.0	8.8	-12.6	20.3
Industry	4.9	7.8	-9.6	16.3
Services	7.4	9.0	-5.7	11.5

Source: ESO, Haryana. Economic survey report

Table 3 shows Service sector experienced high growth rate as compared to other two sectors. The years 2020 and year 2021 are abnormal years due to Pandemic covid-19 when the entire country experienced lockdown. As a result, Haryana underwent negative growth rates in construction, industry and service sector. However, government is hopeful to have positive growth rates during the year 2021-22. Some areas are still having partial lock downs/ strict covid-19 restrictions and guidelines due to rise covid-19 cases during January-February 2022.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SITUATION IN HARYANA**

Haryana depends on the migrant workers especially in the informal sectors.

1) Having a look at registered workers in Haryana, table 4 depicts that the number of registered workers rose from 0.2 million in 2011 to 0.9 million in 2019 with cagr of 23.7 and 0.5million were registered during 2020 lockdown period.

**Table 4 Registered workers in Haryana**

Year	Number (in Millions)	remarks
2011	0.2	
2019	0.9	23.7 cagr 2019 over 2011
2020	0.5	Live registered
2020	0.35	Account seeded with Aadhar card

Source: NSSO 2011-12, PLFs 2018-19 & Ministry of labour, GOI July14,2020.

2) There has been informalization of employment in Haryana with the introduction of economic reforms as shown in Table

3) 5. The share of informal sector workers to total workers rose by 3.56 percent points in a span of 15 years and the share of total informal workers to total worker rose by 2.69 percent points in the same time period.

This informalisation of employment means insecurity of work/job and no social security.

**Table 5 Percent share of informal sector workers to total workers in Haryana**

Year	Share of Informal sector workers to total workers (%)	Share of total informal workers to total workers (%)
1999-00	82.44	87.51
2004-05	83.45	90.20
2015-16	86.0	92.05

Source: Report, Labour Department, Haryana , various years.

According to International Labor Organization (2019), India's informal economy employs more than 90% of the country's total workforce, and approximately 94% of the total number of working women in India are engaged in informal work, with 20% located in urban centers. Haryana is no exception.

Analyzing the nature of work/jobs of migrant labourers in Haryana, it is found that most migrant workers are engaged as contract labourers/casual labourers in the informal/unorganized sector in Haryana. As per the reports of labour department, Haryana, the percent of informal sector labourers to total labourers rose from 82.44 percent in 1999-00 to 83.45 percent in 2004-05 to 86 percent in 2015-16. The percent of total informal labourers to total labourers in Haryana rose from 87.51 percent in 1999-00 to 92.05 percent in 2015-16(Table 5). This indicates that even within formal sector, the nature of employment is becoming more and more informal and casual. These informal jobs are mainly low quality jobs associated with low wages, poor working conditions and absence of social protection.

4) Given such a state of affairs for migrant labourers in Haryana, the Covid-2019 pandemic has added to their miseries and sorrows. A large number of informal migrant workers are engaged in farm/agricultural activities, farm mandis, manufacturing, trade, hotel and restaurant and construction work, industries like ply wood,steel utensils etc. with no job security and no facilities at work. There is no assurance and system of provision of any monetary or kind- help during any worst situation like Covid-19

5) High demand for migrant workers in Haryana: Haryana offers attractive employment opportunities to the migrant labourers from Bihar, U.P, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and other states. Haryana is an employment providing state with better wages. Table 6 shows that the wage rate has been higher in Haryana.

**Table 6 Minimum Wages in Haryana**

As on Sep 2021(Rupees)

Skill level	Basic per day	Basic per month	Total per day	Total per month
Unskilled	292.31	7600.00	377.04	9803.24
Semi skilled classA	306.92	7980.00	395.89	10293.36
Semi skilled classB	322.27	8379.00	415.69	10808.02
Skilled classA	338.38	8797.95	436.47	11348.43
Skilled classB	355.30	9237.85	458.30	1191

Source: Haryana minimum wages notification 1st July 2021

5) There is demand - supply gaps in labour markets in Haryana: As per the skill gap report, Haryana (2012), there will be shortage of 6.40 lakhs minimally skilled labourers, 6.15 lakhs semi-skilled labourers and 0.57 lakhs skilled labourers in Haryana during the period 2017-2022.

Table 7 and chart 2 shows the shortage of manpower as per skill gap report, Haryana 2012. It shows that there will be shortage of 0.57 lakhs skilled workers, 6.15 semi-skilled and 6.40 minimally skilled workers up till 2022. The occurrence of Covid-19 definitely has led to engrave the situation of shortage of labor in Haryana.

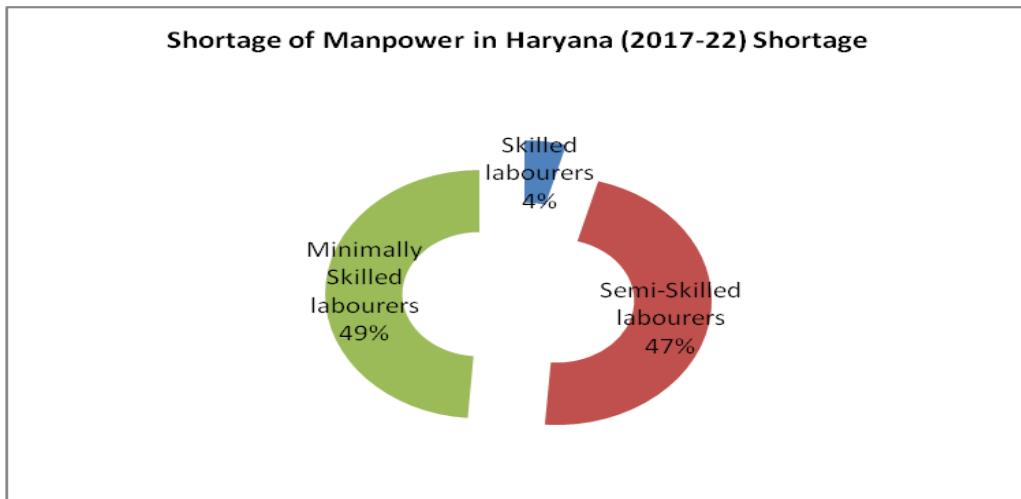
**Table 7 Shortage of Manpower in Haryana**

(2017-22)

Category	Shortage (in Lakhs)
Skilled labourers	0.57
Semi-Skilled labourers	6.15
Minimally Skilled labourers	6.40

Source: Skill Gap Report, Haryana 2012.

**Chart 2**



## 6. IMMEDIATE SHORTAGE OF LABOUR DUE TO LOCKDOWN

All the sectors and sub sectors of Primary sector, Secondary and Service sector in Haryana faced shortage of labour due to announcement of lockdown. This shortage was high during the year 2020 and year 2021 and it continues even during January, February 2022 because most of the migrant workers went back to their homes and were not willing to return back to their work. The industries/sectors badly hit by shortage of labour due to covid-19 in Haryana are Real estate/construction, farming and all related activities, small industries.

The announcement of Lockdown 1.0 was made exactly at the time when Haryana farmers was about to start the harvesting of crops, lifting them and transporting the crops to the mandis. The harvesting of rabi crops like wheat, barley, mustard and sowing of kharif crops like rice, maize, millets, arhar, cotton cannot be put off for a long period. As per Times of India dated April 04, 2020, there are 107 grain markets, 174 sub yards, 195 purchase centres in Haryana. As per the estimate, around 300 labourers per mandi are required for all activities like lifting, grading, filling, marking, transporting etc. Therefore, a total number of around 1,50,000 labourers were required during April-May to carry all the activites. In

addition, much more number of farm labourers was needed at the farms as well. Although, only 25-30 percent of the farms in Haryana are harvested by labourers and rest with the help of machines, yet there was shortage of farm labourers in Haryana during Covid-2019 first lockdown period.“Our nursery (paddy) will be ready for transplantation by June 15, but there is no confirmation from the labourers yet. We don’t know if they will reach by then or not,” ((Economic times May 02, 2020).Analysing the Pre-covid data, it is found that construction industry has heavily dependent on migrant workers. These workers are wage workers in informal employment.

**Table 8 Type of workers (%)**

Type	Construction	Overall
Wage workers	88.8	48.3
Casual wage	83.1	23.6
Regular wage	5.7	24.7
Self employment	11.2	51.7

Source: Estimation PLFS, 2018-19

As per the statement by J.K.Bihani, the plywood industry in Yamuna Nagar district with 1300 plywood, peeling and sawing units and with employment of 50,000 workers depends heavily on migrant workers from U.P., Odisha, M.P and Bihar. Due to labour migration back to their homes, units are working with only 15-20 percent of workforce only. The demand of plywood from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi has fallen due to lock downs.(Hindustan Times, Jan 20, 2022). In Gurugram district, 15-20 percent workers (2000 workers with their families) have left for their homes in the fear of third wave. Those who are still in villages are reluctant to return for two reasons – normally workers anyway return to their villages in April, May, June due to the farming season, but there are also many who have not come back fearing another lockdown since there is a rumour of a third wave,” said Ashok Kohli, president of the Chamber of Industries of Udyog Vihar. There is a 30 to 35 per cent shortage of workers right now. Workers are reluctant to return because they feel, firstly, that they will not get their jobs because the government of Haryana has announced 75% reservation in jobs in private sector for Haryana residents( although HC has put interim stay on it) (The Economics Times Feb. 03, 2022) and secondly because they fear that there will be a third wave of infection.

#### **MEASURES FOR FARMING: COVID-19 HAS DEEPLY AFFECTED THE LABOUR MARKET IN HARYANA.**

It is rather difficult to find alternative ways to meet the labour shortage. Every state including Haryana is facing shortage of labour and the impact is reflected in terms of changing government policies and cropping patterns. Haryana government is encouraging farmers to go for other crops rather than paddy to promote crop diversification and short-duration varieties of other grains. Farmers are also shifting away from paddy cultivation to grow cotton, due to lack of availability of about one million migrant labourers. The transplantation of paddy seedlings from nursery beds to fields being a highly labour-intensive process and requiring specialised knowledge. While mechanised transplantation is possible, equipment for this largely needs to be imported. Using this window to wean farmers off rice production means restructuring agri-policies.(Feb 02, 2022 Indian Express). Farmers are being encouraged to paddy plant varieties such as PR 126 and full and medium duration varieties like PR 121. Also, the Haryana government is formulating strategies for farm mechanization in transplantation and sowing activities to boost the use of direct seed planter and pneumatic maize planters to remove the effects of the labour shortage.

Besides, government is providing adequate cotton and maize seeds to the farmers. Expecting shortage of labour for paddy transplantation, farmers in the state are showing interest in government’s incentive-based crop diversification scheme ‘Mera Pani Meri Virasat’. The scheme was launched with the aim to conserve ground water by making farmers shun the traditional water-guzzling paddy cultivation technique. As per the official figures, nearly 48,500 farmers have registered themselves for crop diversification on about 1.40 lakh acres of land. They will replace paddy with maize, pulses, bajra, cotton and fruits. Most farmers are expecting an acute shortage of labour during the transplantation season. It led to diverse crop production and management practices. With regard to other sectors, on April 27, 2020, the government allowed work on construction sites with 10 or less than 10 workers outside the containment zones. Government also distributed rupees 134 crores to 3.10 lakh construction workers during the first wave (July 2021, CW, Construction World. in). After first wave, Haryana Government acted smartly in at least allowing the factories to work, which resulted in a lot of workers staying back. Even from those who returned to their villages, at least 60 to 70 per cent are back. Despite the labour law on migrant workers namely ‘The interstate Migrant workmen (Regulation of Employment and conditions of Service) Act, 1979’, there was no systematic plan of action for the welfare of migrant labourers in Haryana during Covid-2019 period. Had the Haryana government got a disaster management plan for migrant workers, the plight of these workers could have been much less. The impact of Covid-2019 on migrant labourers is visible in terms of increased poverty and unemployment. There is exclusion of migrant labourers from the main stream of growth. The goal of Inclusive growth seems defeated as reflected in the miserable conditions of migrant labourers. On one side, Haryana knows that migrant labourers play a significant role in the production activities in each sector of the state economy, on the other side; they are left with no jobs. A large army of unemployed migrant labourers is wandering on the roads struggling for their survival. These labourers are unable to get all the benefits provided by the government in the absence of the required documents.

They don't have a ration card or voter card because they are registered in their home states and can't register in Haryana for a ration card in the absence of proof of residence. Therefore, they cannot get benefits of Public Distribution System. Moreover, 42150 labourers failed to get the benefits due to non-mapping of Adhar card with bank account. There is no safety net umbrella for these labourers which could assure them of their subsistence and assured employment in the Post Covid-2019 period. This speaks volumes of the plight and misery of migrant labourers in Haryana. The lack of social security measures has created fear, panic and emotional trauma among the migrant labourers and their families. There is sharp rise in unemployment and poverty. The grim situation reflects a weak socio-economic fibre of the society. The social and ethical responsibility of businesses is non-existent. The grave impact of Covid-2019 on the migrant labourers aroused many questions regarding the development process which is market centered based on competition and profitability.

First, the relevance of market economy and its liberalized and globalized nature which failed to protect the migrant labourers during this pandemic.

Secondly, the claim of the planners that the marginalized sections of the society have been part and parcel of growth process and the goal of inclusive growth has been achieved.

Thirdly, there has been failure of the government to win the faith of migrant labourers and to keep them in their workplaces.

Fourthly, the most pertinent question is that whether human lives are above the economic growth rates.

Fifthly, there is need to redefine the role of private sector so that it could support the marginalized sections like migrant labourers.

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