

## Effect of Coronavirus on India

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Coronavirus or Covid-19 originated in Wuhan, in central China, around August 2019. This malaise kept a low profile for a short while and Chinese authority felt relieved. Its place of birth is supposedly at a wet market in China, specifically the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, which sells, among other things, the meat of wild animals. On its second appearance, the Chinese Government detected that a lot of people with a history of visits to this wet market had the disease.

By the end of June, 2020, Covid-19 has travelled far and wide to all corners of the globe with movement of people from one country to other by land, water and air. Now every adult knows that it is rampant but may even unconsciously carry it from one person to other as they often willingly refuse to follow minimum safety norms as suggested by experts:

1. Wearing a face mask and gloves and frequently cleaning one's hands.
2. Safe distancing also helps to avoid transmission of the virus and thus helps slow the spread of the epidemic.

The virus is now present everywhere whether we like it or not. Medical science even in technologically advanced countries is yet to find ways and means to completely destroy this virus. As per records, the top four countries affected by Covid-19 are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1 Coronavirus affected patients on 23.6.20 in 3 countries and India with highest number of affected persons.*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Population (x10<sup>6</sup>)</i>	<i>#Cases (x10<sup>3</sup>)</i>	<i>#Deaths (x10<sup>3</sup>)</i>	<i>Death rate (/case)</i>	<i>Case rate (/capita)</i>
<i>USA</i>	331.0	2,355.7	122.1	0.052	0.007
<i>Brazil</i>	212.5	1,111.3	51.4	0.046	0.005
<i>Russia</i>	145.9	599.7	8.4	0.014	0.004
<i>India</i>	1380.0	440.2	14.0	0.032	0.003 (x 10 <sup>-1</sup> )

Out of a population of 1.3 billion in India, the number of virus affected persons is not what one might consider "high" (0.000289 p.c). Considering the hue and cry of our leaders on lockdown for around 70 days and other related issues in bigger cities, doubts are raised about correctness of the information we have! There are two main issues which raised these doubts:

- i. In a country as large as India, and one as lacking in adequate manpower and necessary infrastructure as it is, it is very difficult to carry out widespread testing.
- ii. Both the States and Centre in India are responsible for health care given the Federal nature of the government in our country. This demands better coordination between the political parties ruling in the centre and states than what would otherwise be expected. But, alas, those elected to govern are perennially busy in a blame game even when patients are crying inside for simple care of a medical staff and outside every hospital in India there are unending lines for a bed inside. Situation is such as if India is still in pre-historical age and totally unconcerned about sufferings in this pandemic. There are always complaints for

scarcity of funds and materials needed with states. Given a recession hit economy, India is in a bad shape. After this pandemic, entire economy is facing huge financial difficulties. No one can be blamed for the inadequacy of resources in handling such a gigantic and dangerous pandemic.

*The plight of the migrant workers*

The first group of people who appeared in large numbers on the streets of Indian cities are 'migrant workers' or unorganised labour of India. Almost all of them working outside their homes and having migrated from various states. There should have been and should continue to be periodical reports as required by labour laws. But the Government failed to locate any report of such workers. There are middle men who supply migrant workers to various groups of contractors who supply them to real employers. This is like the old *slave trade* of yester years. Indian workers supported by very militant Labour Unions today are treated as a saleable commodity though prohibited by all labour laws of the country. Poor workers migrate to different parts of the country to escape starvation at home. When all economic activities were closed by midnight of 25.3.20 by order of Prime Minister of the country, no one bothered to tell these lakhs of floating workers what they will eat from the next morning, where they will stay and so on. No one knew when normalcy may return. People are killed all around by this 'monster virus', there was no job, no income etc., so there was no other alternative than to 'return back to villages in respective sweat homes' at the earliest opportunity even without a penny.

The authorities monitoring lockdown from Delhi had to arrange for the peaceful return of lakhs of these men, women, children and elders who can't walk. How many people were migrating, and where to, are questions no Government agency, both at the centre and in the states, has any official answer to. There are many central laws on specific Migrant Workers, e.g. the Inter State Migrant Workmen's Act 1979 is one of these laws, no one exercised any responsibility to implement these Acts, the needful was not done. On the other hand some BJP run states passed orders to 'keep in abeyance' such laws passed by Parliament! BJP has the most militant labour union in India, but it was hiding its head when country was in serious crisis. Lakhs of workers are jobless, homeless and penniless. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, how can we throw them to their fate, given that we are all in a democratic country?

There has been huge financial contribution from many Indians towards the end of helping those in need. University of Delhi collected from teachers and karamcharis a huge amount for example, and the UGC transferred it to the PM Relief Fund. Govt. of Kerala has requested Centre to help them with a portion of PM Relief Fund to help migrated works returning to their home village. They have to be given cash to purchase day to day need. No idea how these displaced people will feed their family!

Since 2014, there was so much noise to revolutionise the entire country by applying the latest digital technology. Digitalisation is now a sacred word in the bureaucracy. These mobile numbers are used to collect votes for political parties. When the press brought out the miserable life of these migrant workers on the roads of state capitals in the months of March/April, the Governments failed to discharge its constitutional responsibilities to its people. It took a lot of time and a large number of charitable organisations took the lead to arrange transport and food for the initial batches to reach their home. Visuals of death not from virus, but from road accidents and starvation touched every Indian citizen. In one state where

migrant workers were ordered to wait for buses, the police was ordered to spread poisonous sanitizers on human beings as if they are corona infected vehicles. So these poor labour in lakhs started to leave their urban homes around mid-April. 'Return to village' was the main slogan of lakhs of poor workers in different parts of the country.

When lakhs of labour with their family members were marching on the streets of Delhi and other state capitals in India to go to their villages, no one had any idea how they will reach their villages in faraway states without food and transport. It is just a coincidence that in the richest country of the world one white police officer was found killing a black man George Floyd in Minneapolis in USA. Their protests under banner 'Black Lives Matters' put a question mark on '*Civilisation*', '*Economic Development*' and what not. In a poor country like India if poor, young and old, children on mothers' shoulder are compelled to walk to reach their home hundreds of kilometres away from their place of work, one has to think to find out the real meaning of 'Indian civilised society' in 2020. In India what happened after the unplanned 'lock down' in March 2020, is simply to tell daily wage labour that 'India has no respect for you. Poverty is a disease in Indian Society'. However, public criticism and an Order of the Supreme Court compelled the Govt. to make arrangements for their movement on train. Being poor is a 'humiliation' in Indian Society in 2020. Supreme Court ordered the Government to have a record of such migrant workers of India. The Union Skill Development Ministry has come out with some rough figures. According to such estimate 67 lakhs workers returned home to 116 districts in Bihar, UP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, W. Bengal, Orissa, MP etc.

**In 2020** everyone in the developed countries are attended to by doctors according to his/her health insurance cover. Our treatment centres in rural India are crowded public hospitals in nearest towns from villages. There too, in most cases, during hospital timing doctors are available in their private clinics adjacent to hospitals and unless private visits are paid, patients may not be checked in adjacent hospitals and doctors regularly withdraw their salaries. No one can assure when every Indian will have a health insurance policy so that one can dream of receiving some type of health care from money making 'private hospitals' in the country. In the initial days of DDA land allotment in Delhi for private Schools and Hospitals, there had been a provision to enrol children from weaker section and hospital facilities for a section of poor families respectively. Now seats in these institutions are unofficially traded as a commodity and this happens when Government institutions are overcrowded and virtually run by God. During such crisis there are reports that in Delhi itself Public hospitals staff did not get their due salaries for some period even during current pandemic.

Largest sections of our people are totally dependent on public hospitals. Some of these hospitals like AIIMS etc. in bigger towns may look great from the outside, but for the ordinary citizens, experiences differ. For AIIMS in Delhi, VVIPs have different treatment procedures and some time back patients from outside Delhi had to sleep on the adjoining Metro station foot path to visit a doctor in AIIMS. Majority of public funded hospitals are simply humiliating to the country. However, not all Government hospitals are bad, in Delhi we have AIIMS, RML and one or two more, all VVIPs prefer them than private hospitals on service point of view. One has to take bold decisions to make all hospitals in the country of same quality and people friendly as far as basic services are concerned. Look at LNJP Hospital and AIIMS hospital in Delhi. Even the Home Minister of India had to visit LNJP with the head of Delhi AIIMS and suggest a number of steps so that patients and their relatives need not be afraid of treatment of Covid 19 patients in the hospital. Is Lok Nayak

Bharat Ratna Jayaprakash Narayan of Emergency Era listening to what people are discussing about a hospital today?

*Conclusion and overview of Covid-19's journey in India*

India got its first Covid-19 patient on January 30, 2020 in Kerala. Anti-Covid actions started in Kerala and when it reached other states, the Government of India imposed a one day curfew on 22.3.20 and people voluntarily participated in this daylong programme throughout the country. Success of 'curfew' was celebrated and the efforts of the healthcare sector were lauded in the evening by beating thalis (metal plates) from roof tops!

On 24.3.20, the first concrete anti COVID-19 action plan was announced by India's Prime Minister. People were given 4 hours to prepare to observe lockdown programmes, initially for 3 weeks as directed by Central Home Ministry. Transport on land, water and air came to a standstill. People were asked to remain at home. School, colleges, offices, factories and commercial establishments were all closed during this lockdown period. After one or two days' experience of 'no work, no income' lakhs of daily wage earners asked the Government who will give them food, how rent will be paid and so on. Lockdown administrators, Ministry of Home, Government of India had no answer. From 25.3.20 to 31.5.20 for 68 long days lockdown continued and yet the infection kept on spreading like wild fire throughout the country, from Kanyakumari to Srinagar and from Gandhinagar to Kohima. Covid-19 has spread its net so tightly that everyone is feeling insecure. Entire country of 1.3 billion people has been suffering from fear of pandemic, specially the sick and elderly. 2020 is a challenging period for the people of this country, Government has to implement such plans to destroy the pandemic at an early date. The New Zealand Prime Minister claimed that her country was free of this monster.

2020 will remain a historical year for decades to come. Some virus, for more than 10 months, has devastated the entire human civilisation. Worst sufferers are countries where poor people have suffered the most. Loss of human life is so large in number that people have stopped counting. Whether developed, developing or undeveloped, colour wise black, white or any other colour, this disease has challenged 'human dignity as better form of life' in the world!

In India, the issues related to this fatal disease are officially handled by Union Health Ministry and ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research). The Home Ministry is coordinating with States and the States are totally dependent on the Centre. Amidst the jostling for power and blame games lies the wreckage of the livelihood, and very possibly of the dreams, of the poorer sections of this country and its migrant workers.