COVID-19 LED REVERSE MIGRATION: SELF RELIANCE AHEAD

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ABSTRACT-
In addition to growing urbanization, the push and pull factors have played the primary role in influencing the population mobility trends and initiating Migration from Indian villages, which are not devoid of resources, but lack proper opportunity identification and tracking. Migrants often end up landing with precarious jobs with meager income or daily wages, with no or minimal social and economic security. The circumstances are so appalling that these people do not usually find a place in the identity directory of the other citizens of the nation. It takes crises and pandemics like COVID-19 for their presence in the Indian society to be felt by one and all. Apart from shuddering the whole economy world-wide, novel corona virus has shifted the focal points towards the inopportune category of migrant laborers in India who otherwise play a noteworthy role in shaping up the Indian economy. Intended to safeguard millions of lives, the launch of lock down has solidified the blow which was already being faced by the migrant labors in the form of extreme poverty and misery characterized by hand-to-mouth situation. With no other alternatives left and a bleak future, they opted what they were forced for- to leave the cities in droves, paving way for a massive “Reverse Migration” which would be difficult to be absorbed at a later stage owing to minimal opportunities at the destination places. What went wrong? Why these masses remained unaccounted? What needs to be done for the betterment of the migrant labors who eventually are the back-bone of Indian economy? This paper is an effort to document the beginning of a Reverse Migration trend (i.e., urban to rural) in India paving ways for the “vocal for local” revolutionand to provide suggestions for overcoming the anomalies in the policies meant for migrant laborers. The paper is based on review of literature related to migration and migrant labors in India as well as review of prevailing situation.

Key Words-Covid-19, Reverse Migration, Self-Reliance, Vocal for Local

Executive Summary:
Migration has been palpable since centuries and is a distinguishing attribute of human existence. Migration in groups or as individuals have been always resorted to for a number of reasons like seeking freedom from war situations, religious intolerance or political repression; seeking escape from hunger and poverty; finding novel economic opportunities and avenues for employment; or even for conducting favorable trade. Also, variety of patterns can be witnessed with respect to migration of people over different time periods. The current generation is a witness to a catastrophic phenomenon called COVID-19. The brunt of negative effects generated as the result of widespread novel corona virus disease, continue to be borne by the migrant laborers across the nation. Lock down subjected restrictions have halted industries, production units and the whole nation at large which has led to unprecedented levels of unemployment and food security issues for the most susceptible segment of the Indian population, who portray varied patterns of migration and are usually found struggling with the precarious working conditions, meagre income and above all an unidentifiable identity. The massive exodus of these migrant laborers came as an obvious response which showcased its own challenges. People have been forced to walk for long miles to reach the point from where it all started, empty handed but with a blurred hope of life. Containment of COVID-19 would turn out to be a challenging task in view of such convoy that lag behind in terms of access to healthcare facilities and hygienic lifestyle. Life post COVID-19 will also not be easy for these migrants as large scale absorption at native place would be difficult owing to minimal finances and resources under their control. Amidst all the odds there is an innate need to work out turn around strategies to counter the long lasting consequences of COVID-19 so as to work for the betterment of the migrant labors and for the nation at large. Attaining self reliance, focussing on indigenous development and going back to the roots is being viewed as one of the basic options which can bring the
economy back on track and can work wonders for the upliftment of the deprived class who lack abundant resources but possess varied skills which could be utilized manifolds.

I. INTRODUCTION-

With the raging number of COVID-19 hit cases around the nation, the country wide lockdown was declared as a resort and key to saving lives. But the dearth of planning has hit the deprived and most susceptible citizens of the country, the migrant workers, really hard. With neither food nor money, migrant workers have been pushed to the brim of starvation, with upsetting intensities of vulnerability and extreme humiliation. Lock down may have been a plan to save lives throughout the nation, but if the lock down continues, hunger and starvation will kill millions. The life lines of the urban sector are struggling to save their lives. The real implication of the constitutional features of “Unity in Diversity” and “freedom to reside and settle anywhere in India” are in vain and have been loudly split open amid the pandemic. Along with disparities in the form of regional cultures, social norms, geographic patterns, economic and natural resources, development is a major feature which is found in varied magnitudes, resulting in the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. Also, these factors are the stepping stones leading to “migration” in the country. With the hold of COVID-19 getting stronger and the lockdown slowly leading to a more stringent one, the war against the pandemic is slowly getting transformed from a national war to a civil war which will be fought out not by the army but by the individual citizens of the country. In a war, the army either increases the boundary or protects the boundary from enemies and foes, declaring the victory. But the current war is a war for life.

In the current scenario, the retreat of migrant workers from their place of work to their hometown will not only push back the wage earners to poverty but it has to be considered as a sign of chronic economic breakdown which will make evident its deep reaching impact not only in the present time but also in the not so distant future. We have commonly known Migration as an aid for employment and livelihood but fleeing back to home for life is rather a new ideology.

The aim of this paper would not be the discussion of theories and the process of migration. Rather, it will focus on the causes and consequences of the Indian face of migration and the way forward for dealing with the pathetic conditions and status of migrant workers.

Broadly, the paper will address the following issues in the Indian context:

A. What has been the real cause and what all would be the unprecedented effects of the Inter-state reverse migration caused by COVID-19 pandemic on the migrant economy?

B. What could be the way forward with respect to the migrant labors for the purpose of gaining a sustainable existence and identity?

C. Is “Vocal for Local” or Self-reliance strategy the best counter response to such situation?

II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MIGRATION-

Migration of labor is not a new phenomenon. Rather it is a world-wide phenomenon which witnesses people leading to different destinations within and outside the country, for earning a better livelihood as the supreme objective. History has witnessed over a period of time that mobility leads to humanity towards a better standard of living and in turn towards a better life style. Darwin’s theory of evolution postulates that human progress is the consequence of movement. Earlier, men used to get his food, by wandering for the hunt of food. History has witnessed a number of invasions which were conducted for searching and gaining of more power. In fact, the history of the evolution of modern society can be traced back to Hunter and Gatherer Society, where people used to hunt for fulfilling their needs and requirements and were truly dependent on their immediate environment and existing resources. Depletion of resources in one area made these social elements to move in search of a more life sustaining area. With the recognition of people about their ability to tame and breed animals, the Pastoral Society came into existence. These inhabitants relied on domestication of animals as a source of livelihood. As a contrast against the hunter-gatherers, pastoral groups were able to raisefarm animals for food, clothing, and transportation, and they were able to generate a surplus of goods too. Pastoral societies also remained nomadic as there was a need to search for fresh feeding grounds for their animals. Pastoral societies also led to the emergence of specialized occupations and trading with local groups. Pastoral Societies were followed by Horticultural
Societies where people acquired the new skills of growing and cultivating plants in areas which allowed for growing stable crops. This was rather a more stable society as people were not required to relocate and permanent settlements emerged. Unlike pastoral and horticultural societies, Agricultural Societies relied on permanent and technology driven methods to conduct a profitable farming activity. Effective and long-term tools were utilized resulting in better harvests and food surpluses, paving way for conversion of human settlements into towns and cities, acting as a hub of trade and commercial activities. Signified as “Dawn of Civilization”, this era offered plentiful resources, leading to recognition of divisible social classes. Those who had more resources could afford better living and developed into a class of nobility. Difference in social standing between men and women increased. As cities expanded, ownership and preservation of resources became a pressing concern. Further, the 9th century witnessed the emergence of Feudal Societies which was enclosed within a firm hierarchical system of power arising out of possession of land and protection. The lands owned by the lords were cultivated by the lower class in return of a guaranteed place to live and protection against enemies. Power was handed over from one generation to another through family lines. Ultimately, the social and economic system of feudalism failed and was replaced by capitalism and the technological advances of the Industrial Era, as a result of Industrial revolution. Inventions which were capable of influencing the daily lives of people, were the highlights of this era. The person or animal-based work suddenly shifted to the mechanical mode, resulting in better outputs. Quality of life soared high. The concern now shifted from maintaining family land and traditions and was more alert upon acquiring assets and achieving upward mobility for themselves and their families. Increased capitalism gave rise to increased social mobility. People flocked to factories for jobs, and the urban population became all the time more varied. Life changed drastically for people who were now moving to new environments and this often made them land upon situations of grime, congestion, and dearth. It was during this time that power moved from the hands of the upper classes and “old money” to business-savvy newcomers who ended up making fortunes and used their influence to direct governmental aspects as well. Eventually, workers ended up being exploited and various labor unions and laws emerged.

The concept of modern Migration is in line with the primitive means of gaining a better status in life. The modern phase is characterized by industrialization which has forced people to migrate for the upliftment of their lives. A close study of the historical development of the “Migration” concept is capable enough to gain insights into the fact that migration patterns have been evolving over time. The modification in the patterns of migration over the years, among other major factors, can be attributed to the socio– economic background of people and the place of their origin (De Hass, 2007b). With changes happening in the socio-economic conditions over a period of time, the pattern of migration also changed and thus influenced the economy in its own way. The present day COVID-19 led situation has also acted as a catalyst for the economy and for the migration patterns undergoing a change. Post-Independence, discussions and provisions regarding industrialization, urban development, green revolution, etc. were well made in place. But no consideration was given as to how to counter the issue of Migration in India. The Novel Corona Virus pandemic is a big paradigm shift in social development, which has led to a rethink possibility.

III. CONCEPT OF MIGRATION-

India is primarily an agricultural country. But with growing population over the years, the total agricultural produce has gone down, because of low productivity of land on one hand and attraction towards lucrative jobs in urban cities on the other hand. Along with the biological events of birth rate and death rate, “Migration”, which is influenced by social, cultural, economic and political factors, is capable of bringing about changes in the population. Migration is known as the movement of people (Zelinsky, 1971) from one permanent residence to another permanent/ temporary residence for a substantial period of time by breaking social and cultural ties primarily because of economic reasons. Migration has been always considered as an indicator of persistent social collapse, i.e., an implied reflection of a society's incompetence to provide for the social and economic conditions which let people to lead an adequate way of life in their native place. Some other views hold that migration is one of the most vital mechanisms for the rearrangement of wealth from rich to poor areas. Migration of workers often believed to be a more effective instrument for income redistribution, poverty reduction and economic growth than large, bureaucratic development programs or development aid (Jones, 1998, Kapur, 2003; Ratha, 2003). The Indian constitution with a federal structure allows migration among and within the state of India. Migration in India primarily takes place in the rural to urban format and is typically long term in nature (Skeldon, 1986).

Due importance can be attributed to the study of internal migration owing to the fact that the magnitude of internal migration is about two and a half times that of international migration. Therefore, the concept, categories,
estimation, composition and Interstate migration needs to be understood. So, broadly, the concept of Migration can be categorized into three categories as follows:

1. Long-term Permanent Migration, where migrants come in search of employment but have settled permanently at the destination place. The long-term migration and Permanent Migration are considered as a quasi-synonym.

2. Long-term Circular Migration, where migrants have progressively acquired a toe-hold in the areas where they have migrated but they still strongly hold on to the connections with the villages of origin.

3. Short-term Circular Migration, where migrants tend to work at places away from their villages and periodically return back for few months or seasons.

Majority of the migrants belonging to the categories of long-term circular migrants as well as short-term circular migrants are engaged in precarious jobs without any tenure or defense. They typically form a part of informal employment.

**Estimation of Migration:**
Although, the Census data is the most authentic source of information w.r.t. the population. But surprisingly, when it comes to the information regarding the migrations, the data seems inadequate. The currently available data about migration only provides partial insights into long-term permanent and semi-permanent migration, the latest one being census 2011. Based on the survey of 2007-08, the National sample Survey (NSS) estimates data on four types of migration, namely, out-migrants, entire house migration, short-duration employment related migration and in-migration; buts fails to estimate short-term circular migration. As per informal estimates, there are around 6 Crore short-term circular migrants in India. With respect to Inter State Migration, it has also been estimated that there are around 3 crore short duration and about 2 crore long duration circular migrants, who are forced to work in undesirable working conditions.

**Composition and Role of Migrants:**
Migrants, who offer economical, consistent and easily accessible service, form an essential part of Indian urban workforce. De Haan (1999) provides a review of literature on the role of migration on livelihoods and poverty from a policy perspective. He argues that migration of workers, between and within urban and rural areas, has to be seen as a critical element in the livelihoods of many households in developing countries, poor as well as rich. Indian population includes more than 40 million migrant laborers across the country, which makes it pretty difficult to provide relief to each and every one in this era of crisis. Most of these are the ones who have moved into cities from their villages to work as domestic aids, drivers and gardeners, or as daily-wagers on construction sites, building malls, flyovers and homes, or as street merchants. These workers contribute to almost 50 percent of India’s national income and make up a large fraction of the human capital base of the nation. (Source: https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/east-west-india-migrant-crisis-looms-large-during-covid19-64880/).

(Source: Better Place blue collar jobs report *Based on a sample set of 198,539 from amongst 2 million people employed in 532 companies.)
In fact, the composition of Indian workforce has always been a matter of concern. As stated by International Labor Organization (ILO), only 22% of the Indian workforce qualifies as salaried employees, whereas a glaring 78% of the workforce works without an assured salary. What worsens the situation is the absence of formal hiring practices as well as mechanism for capturing experience, resulting in lack of systematic and not so substantial rise in salary. This is one of the factors which are responsible for migration in Indian subcontinent. Yet another feature characterizing Indian workforce is the high rate of “vulnerable employment”, just after Saudi Arabia (Source: https://www.deccanherald.com//national/national-politics/over-76-of-indias-workers-are-in-vulnerable-employment-wef-796852.html ). According to The World Bank, on an average, three out of four workers in India are affected by vulnerable employment, i.e., around 77% of total workers (derived from ILO data).Vulnerable workers are the ones who are basically self-employed or are out of formal labor markets and are devoid of social protections. According to Lawrence Jeff Johnson, workers in vulnerable employment are the total of own-account workers and contributing family workers. They lack formal work arrangements, and are therefore more likely to lack decent working conditions, adequate social security and ‘voice’ through effective representation by trade unions and similar institutions. Vulnerable employment also signifies inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine workers’ fundamental rights. (Source:https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_120470/lang--en/index.htm)

Further, the meagerly available data about migrants point towards an altogether different reality about Indian migrants. While, as stated under Census 2011 analysis, the entirety of internal migrants has been captured at 450 million—roughly 30% more than the 2001 figure—the actual figures possibly are much higher than the revealing of the census. Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar qualify as the major source states of migrants, followed closely by Madhya Pradesh (MP), Punjab, Rajasthan, -Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal. The key destination states being Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and -Kerala, a recent surge in migrants leading towards southern states has been witnessed (Source:https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/coronavirus-would-reset-distances-labour-market-experts/articleshow/74965143.cms?from=mdr). The initiation of special railway services during the lockdown period showcased maximum number of trains destined to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar; this decision alone indicates that the maximum number of migrants to other parts of India belongs mainly to two these states. According to an estimation of The Economic Survey 2016-17, a minimum of around nine million people migrate per annum within the country, mostly hunting for work (Source:https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/coronavirus-would-reset-distances-labour-market-experts/articleshow/74965143.cms?from=mdr).

The migration patterns have changed over a period of time signifying an increased drive to newly identified growth centers specifically from small and medium cities to big cities. As the migrants keep on moving it becomes hard to register them because the migrants are generally defined on the basis of place of birth or last place of residence and a deviation from it. So, these characteristic ways put a number of constraints to comprehend the issue of migrants in this form of definitional context.
Interstate Migration in India-

The growth of Migrant Labors within India is very slow because India primarily is an agriculture country, where 70% of the population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. But slowly and gradually as a consequence of industrialization, migration of labor gained momentum and ended up becoming a vital component of Indian economy. The growth of migration of workers can be attributed to reasons like uneven economic development, inter-regional disparity and differences in living standards between socio-economic groups and insufficiency of cultivable land. Absence of livelihood options, migration is commonly envisioned as the way to access employment. Migration is even perceived as the “only available” livelihood option. The researchers had identified broadly two reasons for migration and categorized them as “Push Factors” and “Pull factors” (Lee 1966, Harris JR, Todaro MP, 1970; Sridhar KS et.al,2010). Push factors are all those factors or reasons which compel a person to leave the native place and move to some other place; like non-availability of employment opportunities, low productivity, joblessness and underemployment. On the contrary, Pull factors are defined as those factors which attract the migrant to an area, such as opportunities for better employment, higher wages, better working conditions, facilities and good amenities.

Push Factors

- Partial or complete landlessness among the poor deprived people.
- Deteriorating livelihood through agriculture
- Low growth opportunities
- Low quality of employment
- Decline of traditional industries

Pull Factors

- Higher availability of employment opportunities
- Possibilities of higher earnings in growth centers outside the state
- Labour Circuits
- Labour market features

Causes of the exodus:

Although, as evident, the reason behind the struggle-full and tragic trudge of migrants for miles, with luggage-borne heads and arms, was the sudden imposition of the 21 days national lockdown with a view to curb the massive spread of Corona Virus Disease observed by Chistopher J. Lee’s the “arbitration of death”. Also, the story behind these nowhere people shifting from rural to urban setup are also worth understanding. Owing to the economic development and transition of any country, a major transition of workers from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sector has been evident (Harris and Todaro, 1970). Seasonal migration for vocation has been a persistent actuality in rural India. Every year, an irresistible 120 million people or more are projected to migrate from rural areas to urban labor markets, industries and farms. Migration has been essential for inhabitants from regions that face frequent climatic issues like scanty rainfall or floods, or where there is high density of population with respect to the available land. Additionally, areas facing vague social or political conflicts also develop a high tendency of out migration. Further to this, poverty, deficiency of local vocational options and the accessibility to work elsewhere escalates the whole story of rural migration. A real point worth noting here is that it is not the reasons which made the masses migrate from their houses to the urban world, nor the COVID-19 outbreak which made them travel back, are of concern here; rather what happened in between is the main theory to be pondered upon. The desires of gaining a better life made the migrants leave their native origins and move towards the urban category of the country. With meager and dwindling resources, they somehow manage to sustain their lives either at the work sites or in a rented accommodation. Minimal or no provisions for registration of these working components usually leads them to situations like lack of access to bank accounts, lack of social security measures, inability to be the beneficiaries of central and state government schemes. The poor conditions were further aggravated by the implementation of country wide lockdown, bringing the economy to a standstill. Sudden lock- down led to loss of employment and earnings. In few cases, middlemen disappeared along with the arrears. With worksites shutting down, access to dwelling place was also compromised. Those staying in rented accommodation faced inabilities in paying off the rents and in certain extreme cases, were ousted by the land lords. Among all these issues, acquiring food for self and family became a big problem. Ultimately, the poor living conditions, the fear of the unknown as well as the desire to re-unite with ones’ kin and family were the major triggers of the enormous exodus of migrants during the COVID-19 Lock-down.
The current scenario: Reverse Migration

Imposing lockdown is the need of the hour. The lockdown is intended to “flatten the curve”, so that the number of cases do not overwhelm the health facilities, but it has also set the stage for a concept called “Reverse Migration”, whose absorption is a problematic issue. The lockdown in India has impacted the livelihood of a large proportion of the country’s nearly 40 million internal migrants. With employers shuttering their business, landlords ousting the migrant workers on grounds of inability to pay rent, soon to dwindle paltry savings and the fear of starvation, the convoys of migrant workers were forced to be set on foot to reach their far-flung homes. This massive exodus is being considered as one of the biggest mass movements of people in the country since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Suddenly the otherwise invisible and unaccounted category of Indian population has started appearing and is all set to make its presence felt by one and all. Around 50,000-60,000 moved from urban centers to rural areas of origin in the span of few days. The migrant laborers mostly perform unskilled or semiskilled jobs. Most of them are daily wage earners who are facing economic precarity due to sudden lock down, barricading their access to work and there by means of subsistence. For most of the laborers, returning home was the only feasible option of survival and the most apparent logical response to sudden lockdown. The ban on movement has expelled millions of migrant laborers from the cities where they are left with no opportunities to earn. Thousands of laborers along with their families had to walk hundreds of miles to their villages as all the transportation services were halted after the lockdown was announced. These workers just simply want to be home despite of the fact that they are returning home empty handed and there is no clarity as to what they would do in future.

Lock downs may have restricted the boundaries but it is an unprecedented fact that pandemics like COVID-19 refuse to accept any restrictions or barriers. With the unstoppable spread of COVID-19, migrants face similar kinds of health-related threats as faced by their host populations. Nevertheless, insufficient adittance to indispensable services and the social segregation may render it difficult for the migrant populations to subject themselves to early detection, testing, diagnosis, contact tracing and seeking care for COVID-19. This very fact enhances the outbreak risk among this category of population manifolds and thus adds on to the perils to health of the general public. The risk of contracting COVID-19 is comparatively high among the migrants owing to the kind of overcrowded dwelling places they are forced to sustain in, with no or minimal means to follow public health measures as well as compromising access to sanitation facilities. Lack of health-care amenities as well as shortage of medicines and medical aids further worse the conditions. Loss of income owing to shutting of employment avenues is something which forces the migrants to think about and attempt receding back to their native places. With minimal or no income flowing in, migrants are left with no option to counter the insecurities posed at the economic, social and health front. What is even more attributable to the worsening condition of migrant laborers is their doubtful legal status.

COVID-19 has led to the loud exposure of the anomalies existing in the national consideration given to the protection of constitutional rights of migrant labor. The problem which has become evident here is that India glaringly lacks the focus upon the collation of up-to-date data relating to migrant populations of varied states and ensuring social security for them based on labor standards.

The Ripple effect of the pandemic-

While India approaches extensions to the ongoing lockdowns, Indian Government has been coming up with ways to bring the economy to a restart. But with states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh bringing back their migrant workers, it is going to be a tough task to re-track the economy. According to Chandrjit Banerjee (Director General, CII), getting the migrant Labors, deployed extensively in transportation, construction and MSME sectors, back to work will be a challenge because of the duo of uncertainty and fear. Resumption of industrial units is a matter of concern for industrial representatives who view it difficult to start with laborers moving back to their native places. With extending lockdowns and Migration of labors set to continue for a number of upcoming weeks, the effect of these not-so-important part of the urban population (as they were considered till now) will be seen not only on the industries but also on the millions of urban dwellers who were dependent upon these migrant workers in some or the other ways.

As the history holds, whatever be the position of a country or nation on the socio-economic scale, when crisis hits, it’s always the segment at the bottom of the wage distribution pyramid who take the blow the most. Although, COVID-19 has resulted in a complete standstill of economy world-wide, the low earning class of the society, who imperatively are the ones who contribute the most in maintaining the economic
well-being of any nation, have been affected the most. Industries would be losing their business, individuals may be losing their jobs, but these unaccounted members of the society have lost access to a stress-free life.

2 Migrant labors have been playing a really important role of service providers in cities and towns, where their absence is going to be felt immensely. Households, organizations and service providing institutions have been rendered handicapped. The migrant workers are the backbone of the urban economy as around $30 billion cash flows from urban sector to rural sector in India each year.

3 As already stated, the ongoing pandemic has suddenly drawn the attention of Government, policy makers and general public towards the underprivileged class of the society. A scenario has aroused where nobody can ignore the existence of these migrant labors or their contribution to the economy.

4 It's not only the migrant laborers who are facing the problems but the small and medium scale industries are also going to face the consequences. The current scenario is going to face a backward integration as the trained and skilled workforce have left and returned back to their village and a forward integration is likely to occur as the local people will have an opportunity to land upon work/job.

Swift economic growth: The Future Implications

India has always been envied upon as a result of abundant resources, whether it be the vast amount of cultivable land, rivers, or immensely capable workforce. In fact, Indian civilization is the oldest one in the world in terms of Leadership, Entrepreneurship, development etc. Prior to the emergence of British rule upon India, as a result of self-sufficiency, the attributes of demand and supply were in total balance with each other. Breaking the strength of self-dependency was the only tactic which was used to establish a ruling position upon the Indian sub-continent. As a result of the British rule, the masters became servants, because of the readiness of the then lords to embrace the western culture and concepts. But distressfully, even after independence from the western rule, we as Indians have still not been able to break the shackles of the western culture and its influence in all spheres. We are so much impressed by the industrialization of west that we have lost our ability to think rationally and logically. If we look at the historical development of Indian Economy particularly after independence, the growth pattern of Indian economy was majorly based on western pattern instead of self-reliance, which was advocated immensely by Mahatma Gandhi. He always opined that for the sake of national growth, rural economy development and its self-sufficiency was the key. But the then Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and the eminent economist P.C. Mahalanobis, opted to proceed with the Soviet model of growth, which emphasized developing heavy industries and rapid industrialization which gradually led to the neglect of the rural economy. Focus has shifted from enhancing and addressing agricultural issues to reduction of imports and enhancing the exports. Despite of all the positives, we have fallen prey to the consequences of being over dependent on non-Indian practices, quite a number of times. It is high time to reconcile the fact that India is truly a land of opportunities. For whatever reason we are dependent on other nations, we are abundantly resourceful to become independent.

The current situation of crisis has led to a number of issues and problems- humanity has been ravished, industries like real estates, tourism, aviation, etc., have been shut; manufacturing units are not operating causing acute shortages; supply chains are struck; masses have gone jobless leading to restricted purchasing power; education industry has seen massive shifts; and above all Reverse Migration tendency has risen beyond imagination. In fact, economists have even indicated about a negative growth rate for Indian economy. Better capacity to reorganize the economy and society at large is the only viable solution to counter the prevailing pandemic era. This situation has forced us to think about villages and their eco-friendly development, for the sake of real development in all true senses. Although, it is a way too challenging goal to be achieved but it is not an impossible one.

As already stated, the migrant population in India, primarily belonging to the rural sections of the society, is somehow the one contributing immensely towards complementing the urban as well as national development. COVID-19 spread has forced the players to return back to the pavilions in hope of a safe if not better version of their lives leading to the handicapped situation of the Indian economy. As per the theories of sociologists, crises and crashes expose cracks in the systems upholding inequality and provides for clues as to how to go about transforming the society for reducing inequality. The current crisis must be taken as an opportunity to improve upon employee protection on a rather permanent basis. This is also an opportunity to revisit the policies and make
a lasting change to the status quo & improve conditions for all workers. Despite of all the hopeful packages of the Indian Government which have been promising better conditions for the migrants, being in place, in order to really make them work, a number of serious considerations are required to be done, which requires new directions and capable leadership. Past stories have shown that humanity has the remarkable potential to rise from the ashes and reinvent itself. Hence, some suggestions upon possible solutions to the problems pertaining to the migrant laborers can be summarized as follows:

1 **Skill Mapping:** Owing to the widespread pangs of COVID-19, anyone having a travel history has to be quarantined. The same requires proper tracking of people entering a particular city or village. The returning migrants, before being quarantined, as a part of other formalities, must be scaled according to their skills and competencies. This data would be very helpful in arranging for vocational activities for each one of them, post COVID-19 era. Furthermore, a brain drain can be accompanied by a significant brain gain, (Worldbank, 2005; Stark, Helmenstein, and Prskawetz, 1997; Lowell and Findlay, 2002)

2 **Setting up of a Migration Commission:** Setting up of an exclusive organization/entity to look after the migrant workers’ related movements and activities is the need of the hour. The entity should be involved primarily in recording and tracking the interstate movement of migrant workers and the sector which employs them. Strategizing moves for registration of migrant workers is yet another area to be seriously considered. This would enable allowance of identity to these important components of Indian economy.

3 **Social security, protection and insurance:** Government need to address the challenges facing internal migrants by including them in Occupational Safety, Health and working conditions, paid leaves and other special programs and protecting them from discrimination. There must be a provision where in companies maintain annual records of migrant workers and the kind of allowances (for e.g. Journey allowances etc) have been paid to them.

4 **Adapting the Gandhian Model of development:** Gandhi’s vision of “Village Swaraj” i.e. the organization of a village republic, was based on the effortless man-centred village economy, capable of arranging for full employment for each of its citizens on the basis of intentional collaboration and operating for achieving self-sufficiency in terms of basic requirements or necessities of life. Efforts to develop strategies to meet indigenous requirements will contribute towards engagement of local population at their native place itself. The government needs to instil the moral courage to be economically self-sufficient, producing and fulfilling its own primary needs though home-grown, indigenous ways. This would not only revive the economy of India but also give an angle of sustainability for longer term. But this requires clarity of concepts and support in all terms.

5 **“One District, One Product” Initiative:** Every Indian state is famous and specialized for something or the other. For instance, Kannauj is famous for distilling scents, Anand for dairy products, Firozabad for glass, Sindri and Nangal for fertilizers, etc. Also, every Indian state possesses almost all the resources required for a fruitful produce of their speciality. The only thing needed is to identify the opportunity which every state and every district has and to convert it in to reality. “One district one product” should be the strategy which will be complying with the requirements of the rest of the nation.

6 **“Vocal for Local Strategy”:** Post Independence era in India has witnessed too much reliance on public sector, industrialization and globalization for the nation’s development. The new capital based system with Foreign Direct Investment, MNCs and foreigners as the lead players, truly resulted in the growth but led to joblessness among the masses, economic inequalities and deprivation of indigenous industries. COVID-19 has fostered the realization of significance pertaining to local manufacturing and supply chains. India is rich in resources, manpower, skills, ideologies, capacities and capabilities; all of which could be utilised fruitfully towards attaining self-reliance rather than being on the mercy of foreign lands. The concept of self-reliance does not advocated withdrawal of global aspirations; rather it is all about becoming indispensable for the world. (Source:https://theprint.in/talk-point/vocal-for-local-can-india-afford-self-reliance-or-is-it-a-slogan-to-please-swadeshi-lobby/420667/). We need to utilize the local proficiencies to compel the world to rely on us rather than our reliance upon them. (Source:https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/opinion-india/new-india-vocal-about-local-but-still-aspiring-to-be-global/). There is a need to reverse engineer the whole system and return to the roots which will utilize India for India and by India.
7 Working on the root cause, viz. Unemployment: It is a well-known fact that unemployment is one of the major push factors which forces the masses to migrate in search of better employment options and better quality of life. So, in order to reduce the tendency of migration, strategies must be framed to employ and engage the rural powerhouses in the form of manpower. Focus must be on large scale participation rather than large scale production. Models like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) should be resorted to in large numbers to counter unemployment.

8 Employment in agricultural departments and dairy co-operatives: India is a country of vast population of which 70% lives in Villages. So, India already possesses a full setup of agriculture and allied activities in place. It has almost 16 crore hectares of land for agriculture out of which only 7 crore hectares have been used. But, agriculture is also manifested by a high degree of risk; accordingly, considerations of risk are a mark of agricultural decision making (Moschini & Hennessy 2001). There are two broad categories of risk in agriculture: production risk and marketing risk. There is a simple need to restructure and redesign the agriculture sector in lieu of the mentioned risks, wherein the Government has to take the lead role. The Agro-centric economy needs to be accepted as the basis to create an economy of permanence.

9 Connect to production and manufacturing of value-added products: During this pandemic period two terms are continuously buzzing, viz., essential commodities (food items) and non-essential commodities (other than food items). With this categorization itself, essential commodities got the priority over other commodities. The Essential commodities come through agriculture, which is the main frame activity of India as a country. Hence, India needs to retain its uniqueness and become the largest producer and exporter of Agriculture dominated value added food products. Further to this, development in fields like cottage, handicrafts, etc. is also to be focused upon.

10 Creating a more nimble and innovative economy: The prevailing situation pertaining to COVID-19 emerged as a very unprecedented phenomenon leaving no or very little time to counter respond in any manner. These tough times have made it to the realization of all that India needs a more robust economy, which calls for government’s investments and interventions in research and development activities leading to innovations and inventions in all the sectors so as to derive a multi-faceted contribution towards the development of the economy. Migrant labors must be specially focused upon as they possess the basic knowledge and skills pertaining to their forte. There is just a need to foster a conducive environment which will enable the workers to transform themselves into contributing entrepreneurs. Working on models like Kudumbashree or Shri Mahila Griha Udyog could contribute in the desired outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION-
COVID-19 has presented both challenges and opportunities to reinvent the systems, policies and structures. This is the time to learn from past and look ahead for securing the future of India through that of the sons of the land. The challenge posed was in the form of saving the lives of migrants both from COVID-19 as well as hunger whereas opportunities lies in backward integration in the light of the fact that these migrant workers have skills which can be used easily and fruitfully by investing in various forms of projects in rural and semi-rural areas. Such initiatives would not only engage and employ the millions of migrant labors across the nation but will also encourage trusting indigenous industries, local resources and entrepreneurship, which will in turn provide a breakthrough for moving to close proximity to the self-reliance consortium.

REFERENCES: