

State Response to Labour Exodus during the Pandemic: The Case of Odia Workers in Surat

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped locate inter-state migration at the centre of debates on India's development imagination. It has exposed the vulnerabilities of a powerless and stateless workforce that survived on the urban fringes without identity or reward. This was also the time when the migrant workers of the country deprived of their substantive human rights including the right to life, livelihoods, shelter, and health. Using the case of the mass exodus of Odia migrants in Surat to their native village in Ganjam during the pandemic, we attempt in this paper to portray the enormity of the human tragedy that was unlocked by the pandemic lockdown by piecing together scattered evidence that is yet to be collated systematically to unravel the complex interaction between politics, policy and the lived realities of India's working class. That the pandemic did not permanently reverse the migration flow away from urban areas and the workers continued to move to back to the urban ghettos during and after the pandemic period demonstrates the classic dilemma of a footloose labour force caught in the 'progressive inequality' that is characteristic of capitalism.

Keywords: COVID 19, Odia migrants, state response, labour exodus



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Introduction

Odia workers constitute a significant share of the population of migrant workers in Gujarat. An estimated 8 to 10 lakh Odia workers are engaged in sectors like textiles, powerlooms, diamond polishing, and engineering equipment in the city of Surat alone. Surat has remained one of the most preferred destinations for jobseekers in Odisha, especially from its south eastern district of Ganjam at least since the early 1980s. In later years workers from other coastal and inland regions too have started migrating to the expanding industrial cities of the state like Ahmedabad, Rajkot, and Morbi. While almost all these workers are casual and informal many have settled down in the shabby shanties and many opt for seasonal (typically, annual) migration as the situation demands.

The economic, social and health crisis during the prolonged pandemic had deeply impacted the jobs and living options of a large number of Odia workers in Gujarat as could be surmised from numerous media reports. During the prolonged period of the pandemic, inter alia, the two landmark events were the first and the second lockdowns imposed with such suddenness and authority that lives and jobs of workers, particularly the informal migrant workers went haywire as they were forced to leave the workplaces without adequate finances to support their travel and food. The disturbing footages of such desperate mobility which involved thousands of workers and their family members in the media brought to the fore the crisis of informal workers especially those migrated from other relatively poorer states in India.

The Migration Dynamics in Odisha

According to the 2001 Population Census data, there were about 9.4 lakh inter-state migrant workers in Odisha. The number increased to 12.7 lakh by 2011 (Sarkar, 2023) or 8.07 per cent of the population. Intra-state migrants constituted about 77 per cent and inter-state migrants, 23 per cent. Further, about 58 per cent of the male migration was for economic reasons. According to the Department of Labour of Odisha, work-related migration including seasonal migration has increased in the state between the 2000s and 2010s. This data is drawn upon the registration of interstate migrants under the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979 (ISMW Act). The official sources in the state further report that the number of seasonal migrants rose dramatically from 87, 000 in 2007 to

135,000 in 2014. Bolangir was the source of the largest labour outmigration according to this data.¹ The 64th round of the National Sample Survey (2007-08) estimated that short-term out-migrants from rural Odisha numbered 417,000, mostly male migrants. Another survey done by the Institute of Human Development in 2011 estimated that 15.2 per cent of households in Odisha had one or more migrant members (Srivastava et al., 2020). Most recently, the Odisha Migration Survey, 2023 – a survey based on district-level analysis of 15,000 households - estimated that the number of out-migrants from the state stood at 1.75 million or about 4 per cent of the state's population (Rajan and Datta, 2024).

The available estimates of inter and intra-state migrant workers vary widely across surveys depending on the scope and definition of migration (Government of India, 2017). The Census estimates are considered as underestimates since they fail to capture the short-term and circular mobility of workers. Such migration is fluid in that workers move between the source villages and multiple destinations frequently making it difficult to keep a track of their mobility. Studies have established that circular migration is a predominant mode of labour migration, especially among socially and economically disadvantaged households across regions. Hence, as Deshingkar and Akter (2009) argue the macro estimates typically underestimate migration undertaken under economic duress and social stress as is the case with SC/ST communities. Census data also underestimates women's migration for work as it often gets masked by the visible driving factor of marriage.

Many authors have identified the agrarian crisis in Odisha as the major driver of migration or the main push factor that operates in the source villages. Migration has indeed become a pervasive phenomenon in the state as agriculture faces unprecedented challenges because of unpredictable weather and extreme weather conditions like recurring heat waves and frequent cyclones. Agrarian distress is also characteristic of the tribal region where there has been a secular decline in the share of cultivators and an increase in agricultural labourers as evident from the available population census reports. One estimate shows that in the 2010s about 3.5 million tribal people joined the informal workforce in sectors like construction after leaving agriculture and agriculture-related activities (Disha Foundation, 2020). The other factors that cause livelihood insecurity for the rural poor are landlessness, the small size of operational land holding and the infirmities in land tenure arrangements. The Agricultural statistics have noted the declining average land holding size in the state, which stood at 0.95 hectares in 2015-16 (Government of Odisha, 2019-20). Studies have noted the role played by discriminatory social and gender norms in making people decide to move out to other states (Nag, 2024).

The regional pattern of migration from the state has been an important subject of enquiry in macro and micro studies too. According to the 2011 Census report Odia workers mainly migrated to Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra. A movement was also evident towards Karnataka, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The Centre for Migration and Labour Studies (CMLS), Aajeevika Bureau undertook a study to understand the regional diversity in migration by classifying the districts under four regional groups – northern, southern, western and coastal districts. The study covered more than 100 panchayats and close to one lakh households in select districts of coastal and western Odisha. It found that the share of inter-state migrants was 78 per cent overall with the western districts reporting 88 per cent and the coastal districts, 66 per cent of the respective regional migration flows. Kerala emerged as the most important destination state for the coastal districts. Migrants find work as unskilled labour in sectors such as construction, transportation and factories in the southern state. Gujarat was the second most popular destination, particularly Surat, which offered employment in textiles, diamond polishing and construction sectors. The other

destination states for the coastal districts were Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. As Daniel (2014) pointed out Surat has been a favourite destination for Odia migrant workers who formed the largest contingent of migrant workers in the city. Of the nine lakh Odia migrants in the city, six lakh hailed from Ganjam district alone. He further observes that “The Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput (KBK) region of Odisha...tells a gloomy story of distress migration. The western Odisha districts despatch ... labourers mostly to the southern states of India to work as brick kiln workers. Historically, the migration in this region is triggered due to chronic drought, destitution and social discrimination” (p. 110).

More recently, Sahoo et al. (2023) estimated the regional differences in Odisha's migration based on the data gathered from the first visit of the Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS), (July 2020–June 2021). The study highlights some important aspects of migration. The data confirms the predominant share of OBC in out-migration, though the difference among the various social groups is less in northern districts than in others. In the coastal districts of the state (Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsingpur, Puri and Ganjam) the social group ‘others’ also have a larger representation. Scheduled Tribes (ST) have a very low share in the coastal districts whereas the Scheduled Castes have a larger share in the northern districts (that include Balangir, Bargarh, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Subarnapur, and Sundargarh). OBCs constitute the largest migrant population in the southern region also (mainly including the districts of Gajapati, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nangrangpur, Nuapada and Rayagada). The share of illiterate migrants is the highest in the southern region. Construction is found as the largest sector of employment followed by manufacturing. Migrants, however, find employment in a wide range of sectors including agriculture, hospitality and trade.

Ganjam-Surat Migration Corridor

Odia workers have a significant presence in Gujarat industries like textiles and power loom, diamond cutting and polishing (both in Surat), ship breaking in Bhavnagar and ceramic-tile manufacturing in Morbi. Their number is the largest in the power loom sector in Surat with the unofficial estimates varying between 600,000 and 800,000 (Kumar, 2020). In this paper, we will focus specifically on Surat and the power loom sector to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives and livelihoods of migrant workers. It may be noted that Surat houses the largest contingent of the migrant population – as high as 70 per cent of its workforce is composed of migrant workers from states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, apart from Odisha (Aajeevika Bureau, 2020).

Most of the Odia workers in Surat's power loom industry hail from the district of Ganjam. Ganjam is a predominantly rural and agricultural district. Agro-ecologically, one part of the district falls in the eastern and south-eastern coastal plains and the other, in the north eastern ghat region (Government of Odisha, 2020). The district is known to be repeatedly affected by sudden and unmanageable floods, salinity ingress, cyclones, and droughts that seriously affect the economic life of the people (Behuria, 1992). The cropping intensity of the district has fluctuated significantly over the decades of the 1990s through the 2010s. It showed a marginal upward trend only during the 2000s (Government of Odisha, 2020). The decades prior to and after this period show a clear decline in intensity indicating fewer annual crop cycles, declining productivity per unit of land, less intensive agricultural system, and land degradation. Rural employment and livelihoods are negatively impacted by such factors, which also act as triggering conditions for the outmigration of workers.

It may be noted that migration from Ganjam district to Surat in Gujarat has a history spanning several decades. In the earlier decades of the 20th century, outmigration from the district was mainly to the

neighbouring states like West Bengal as well as countries like Burma². The Ganjam-Surat migration corridor appears to have developed later around the 1980s-1990s. Dalit and OBC communities were the first one to migrate. Over the decades the phenomenon has continued to grow and has become self-reinforcing as successful migrants encouraged others from their communities and villages to follow the same route, creating a well-established migration corridor by the 2000s. Currently, Ganjam is one of the 14 districts identified by the state government as migration-prone³. Some studies highlight that remittance-driven migration from Ganjam to Surat has helped reduce poverty, improve local economy and increase household resilience (Gram Vikas et al., 2024) in recent years. According to the estimates made by Rajan and Datta (2023), Ganjam receives the maximum amount of remittances in Odisha – about Rs. 120 crore a month.

Predominantly belonging to the OBC and SC households, the migrant workers from Ganjam migrate to Surat either alone or with their families. The single male migrants who constitute a larger share of Odia workers in the city are circular migrants as they keep moving between their native village and the city of work every three to six months. The drudgery of long work shifts on the shop floor with the 'loud, repetitive mechanical clatter' of the looms in the background negatively affects the health and hearing of textile workers. For most of them, the trips back home are the much-needed breaks to rest and renew themselves. However, each visit home adds to their financial burden due to lost wages and additional expenses of travel to and sustenance in the villages, often compounded by social and emergency spending forcing them to return to the city soon. Getting back to Surat is no guarantee that they get employed in the same unit they were working prior to the break, in the same job, and at the same wages (WFF and SHA, 2023). As such, they are more likely to be employed in low-skilled operations without any permanent contract and social protection (Aajeevika Bureau, 2020). Long work hours often extending beyond the standard norms, lack of adequate accommodation, and constant exposure to the risk of injuries and fatalities further exacerbate their vulnerability. Political isolation and the consequent effacing of basic citizenship rights make them a faceless crowd in the city they contribute their sweat and blood.

The paper presents a detailed account of how these battered workers navigated the approach and strategies followed by both the host and native governments respectively of Gujarat and Odisha to combat the threat of pandemic spread through the various lockdown and unlock phases. The paper is divided into 3 sections. In section one we will describe the various state-level initiatives to deal with the rather unanticipated health emergency and the following human tragedy of the desperate exodus of migrant workers. Section two discusses the immediate and long-term implications of the pandemic strategies for the working and living conditions of migrant workers. We propose a few pointers for policy attention in the last section.

The Unfolding of the Pandemic and State Response

The pandemic made its official entry into Gujarat with Surat and Rajkot reporting one positive case each on 19th March 2020, a month and a half after the first ever case was reported from Kerala and almost a week after the World Health Organisation declared COVID 19 as a pandemic. Another week later on 24th March the Prime Minister announced a nationwide complete lockdown that restricted mobility of people with a view to prevent the spread of the virus. With all economic activities and

2 <https://thewire.in/labour/how-caste-identity-prevails-among-odia-migrant-workers-in-surat>

3 The other districts are Balangir, Bargarh, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Subarnapur, Sundergarh, Khordha, Kendrapara, Puri, Gajapati, Rayagada, Koraput, and Nabarangpur



transport services suspended, and without work, income and food migrant workers across India started on a gruelling journey back home, many of them trekking hundreds of kilometres on foot with women and children tagging along. According to the limited estimate made by the government 11.4 million migrant workers moved back to their home states during first phase of the lockdown. Close to 1000 migrant workers on their journey back home lost their lives. It was clear that that government of India failed to foresee such a massive and tragic exodus because they had no idea of the magnitude of inter-state migration in the country. Considering the gravity of the situation, in June 2020 the Supreme Court of India directed all states and union territories to prepare a complete list of migrant workers who returned to their native states with details of their skills and the work they were doing at the destination before the lockdown (Supreme Court Observer, 2020).

During the initial phase of lockdown spanning March 24 to April 14, the state government of Odisha was more keen on identifying the vulnerable sections like farmers, informal workers, and migrant workers and putting in place various relief measures targeted at them. Taking advantage of the Central government's advice to allow select activities the Gujarat government relaxed the lockdown conditionalities for factories and IT/ITES firms from the 20th of April onwards. The conditions specified that factories should not make adult males work more than 12 hours per day (six hours at a time) or 72 hours per week. IT/ITES firms were permitted to operate in non-containment zones at 50 per cent strength and maintaining the social distancing norms. It was also laid down that workers should be remunerated as per the prevailing wage structure for the extra hours they put in (Ramakrishnan, 2020). Though the Odisha government tried to assuage the fears of the stranded workers by setting up a 20-line help centre for them to reach out for help, it was impossible to ensure that they actually accessed any help in remote locations only through virtual contact⁴.

By the end of the first phase of lockdown, it became clear that the strategy employed by the state thus far was not yielding much result in terms of containing the spread of the pandemic. By mid-April 2020, both positive cases and casualties in the state started surging steadily (Das and Sagara, 2020). Factories and businesses had to be closed down. However, the government categorically denied permission to migrant workers to travel to their villages during the three-week lockdown period, while they were promised food and accommodation. However, as the factories were shut down, the places of accommodation got overcrowded with the unemployed workers, and relief distribution became chaotic, the workers increasingly grew anxious and impatient about their virtual confinement in the city (Mohanty, 2020). They took to the streets to protest against the state's refusal to send them home. Having lost their means of livelihood, they wanted to get back to the social safety and familial support in their native villages. The violent protests and arrests of Odia workers prompted the Odisha government to initiate a process to bring them back to their villages (Bisoyi, 2020).

The factories in Gujarat remained shut for 57 days in 2020 during the extended lockdowns between April 14 and May 31, 2020. Even as efforts of the Odisha government were underway to move the workers back to the state, many of them hired buses at their own expense to return (Das, 2020). As per media reports by early May Gujarat began to issue travel permits liberally to buses carrying workers which caught the district administration in Odisha unawares. It was difficult for them to monitor the inflow of migrants by road and their safe transfer to the quarantine centres. The workers who travelled by the Shramik Special trains could, however, be supported more systematically. Citing the data furnished by East Coast Railway the media reported that 101 trains carried about 2.55 lakh migrant workers stranded in different parts of the country between May 3 and 24. Of these 48 trains originated in Gujarat, mainly Surat.⁵ Based on the data compiled from the COVID-19 dashboard maintained by the Government of Odisha, Pedi and Adabar (2021) report that in 2020 a total of 130,537 migrant workers travelled to Odisha by train while 11,684 came by other vehicles.

As mentioned earlier, Gujarat's indiscriminate approach to issuing travel permits to workers through third-party agencies reportedly caused significant distress to the administrative arrangements in Ganjam which in turn led to dissatisfaction and complaints on the part of a large section of workers under quarantine. The Odisha government established quarantine facilities for returning migrants with free boarding and lodging facilities in closed-down schools and hostel buildings along with some financial assistance (Mohapatra et al., 2023; Ramakrishnan, 2020). However, there were problems too. Migrant workers complained of sub-standard food given to them at the quarantine centres.⁶ They were also getting frustrated without any employment and income even after completing the mandatory quarantine. The MGNREGS scheme which was promoted by the state as an alternative opportunity for employment did not appeal to most of the migrants.

Moreover, there was a surge in COVID-19 cases in the villages. The district that did not have a single case until the 1st of May accounted for a third of all cases in the state around the third week of the month surpassing Bhubaneswar. The returned migrants and their families bore the brunt of the angst of fellow villagers. The stigma against Surat workers grew to such an extent that there were open protests against them quarantining in the villages. Such protests were reported from across the state.⁷

By July 2020, Gujarat started unlocking the restrictions for businesses in its bid to regain economic momentum. In the words of the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Vijay Rupani, the "wheels of industrial units have started spinning in full speed again" in early July to match activities in the same period of the previous year.⁸ Initially, the manufacturing enterprises tried to achieve their production targets by engaging the workers available locally by leveraging the new government directive of increasing the normal workday beyond eight hours. However, soon the labour contractors and agents from Surat started making rounds in the Ganjam villages urging workers to return to the city's textiles and powerloom units. They carried with them the permission issued by the Surat administration for workers to return. Workers willing to get back to Surat were offered advance payments too. Burdened by joblessness and increasing debt the Odia workers were vulnerable to the lure of such a promise. However, the pandemic started spreading rapidly across the districts of Gujarat in July making it one of the most vulnerable states in India. The caseload of the state crossed the 50,000 mark on the 21st of July. Surat accounted for 20 per of these cases. In light of the rising number of infections, the

5 <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/05/30/80-people-have-died-on-shramik-trains-for-migrants-report.html>. As per the Week report, 3,840 Shramik trains ferried a total 52 lakh migrant workers until May 28. In the East Coast Zone 13 workers died in these trains between May 9 and 31.

6 <https://odishabytes.com/know-the-food-menu-for-migrants-at-quarantine-centres-in-odishas-ganjam/>

7 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/migrant-workers-battle-stigma-bias-back-home/story-0uuRSEZfoickV0rPU2agGL.html>

8 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/factories-fully-functional-gujarat-will-emerge-stronger-says-rupani-6504183/>; Also see <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/gujarat-unlockdown-impact/article32165168.ece>.

state government of Odisha imposed a lockdown by mid-July in the entire jurisdiction of Ganjam along with Khurda, Cuttack and Jajpur districts.⁹

The workers from Ganjam finally started getting back to Surat around August-September. Some estimates suggest that 1500 workers were travelling daily from Ganjam to Surat during this period.¹⁰ By mid-October 2020 the employers in Surat started arranging for transport to bring workers back to the city. Most of the workers returned only to be entrapped once again in the vicious circle of long work days, low pay, and unexpected accidents.

By mid-March 2021, another wave of surge in COVID-19 cases started in India which quickly intensified through April (Misra, 2022). In terms of severity, the second wave surpassed the first. The Surat Municipal Corporation imposed a lockdown on establishments on the 29th of April 2021, fearing a flare-up in cases similar to the previous year. The very next day caseload in Gujarat touched its peak when 14605 cases were recorded on a single day.¹¹ The majority of the cases were reported from the cities of Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, and Rajkot. The memories of the previous year's trauma and panic-stricken exodus were still alive in the workers. But they were more cautious and proactive this time. Many left the city even before the lockdown was announced. But, interestingly, many others decided to stay back and continue working in the operational factories despite the mounting numbers of infected people. They seemed to have weighed in the options available to them – continue to earn their wages as long as factories remained open or idle way their time and resources back home – and chose the former. The estimates made by the Ganjam district administration show that the number of returning migrants was far less compared to the first wave.

The Post-Pandemic World of Work

The eagerness of the employers to reach out to the workers and get back to work gave them a glimmer of hope that the work conditions in the factories were changing for the better post-pandemic. But studies undertaken in the last couple of years show that nothing has changed. Without formal contracts with employers and guaranteed minimum wages, their work is still invisible to the enforcers of labour regulation. Most of them continue to live in overcrowded informal accommodations with poor ventilation and sanitation facilities and have no access to social safety nets (Ajjeevika Bureau, 2020; WFF and SHA, 2023).

More importantly, they seem to be working more hours and handling more machines in the post-pandemic times. It may be noted that using the public emergency exemption Gujarat had notified an increase in the maximum daily work hours to 12 (maximum weekly hours to 72) for all factories in April 2020¹². As per this notification, for any work done beyond 9 hours in a day, or 48 hours in a week, employers will pay proportionate wages at the same rate as the ordinary wage rate. This was a clear breach of a provision in the Factories Act of 1948 of double rate over-time. In October 2020, a Supreme Court bench struck down the notification and directed that overtime wages should be paid to all eligible workers during the three months when the notification was in operation in the state.¹³

9 Government of Odisha, Office of the Special Relief Commissioner, No. 4263/R&DM (DM), Dt. 16.07.2020.

10 As per the Odisha Economic Survey 2020-21, over the six-month period between April and September, a total of 853,777 people returned to Odisha in 277 Shramik Special Trains. Most of them came from the three major migration destination states - Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

11 Understanding the COVID-19 second wave in urban Gujarat | IDR

12 Notification No. GHR/2020/56/FAC/142020/346/M3, Labour and Employment Department, Government of Gujarat, April 17, 2020. Also see, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal, Karnataka, MP, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, UP: Ordinances and Notifications providing relaxation of labour laws, State Legislative Brief, https://prsindia.org/bills/states/changes-in-work-hours-gujarat#_edn6

13 <https://indialegallive.com/constitutional-law-news/courts-news/supreme-court-strikes-down-restrictive-gujarat-govt-rules-regarding-change-in-labour-laws/#:~:text=New%20Delhi%2028ILNS%29%3A%20The%20Supreme%20Court%20today%20has,as%20fixed%20under%20section%2059%20of%20the%20Act.>

However, many ground reports¹⁴ have observed that work days on average continue to stretch to 12-13 hours in Surat. It appears that a 12-hour work day has been accepted as the new normal by the informal migrants who lack any power to collectively bargain for better work conditions in the absence of sizeable labour unions with political clout.

The increase in industrial accidents was a major concern during the pandemic. Though there is no specific evidence available from the power loom sector, reports of casualties in sectors like chemical plants and steel factories indicated that employment of contract labour, pressure on increasing productivity, compromising on labour safety and general suspension of law enforcement have proven fatal for informal workers across industries.¹⁵

All these observations lead us to reemphasise the importance of implementing the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979 and proactively reviewing the new labour codes from the perspective of the millions of informal migrant workers working without legal recognition, adequate economic remuneration and access to basic social security. They are largely invisible in national migration data as there is no registry of migrant workers either in the source regions or destinations. At the same time, establishments take advantage of this gap to deny benefits to migrant workers. For instance, in response to a public interest litigation the government of Gujarat informed the High Court in May 2020 that only 7,512 out of around 22.5 lakh inter-state migrant workers living in the state were eligible for travel support as the rest were not registered under the ISMW Act. Paradoxically, the data on the number of migrant workers came from the state labour department.¹⁶

14 <https://thewire.in/politics/despite-large-numbers-surats-migrant-power-loom-workers-remain-politically-ignored>; <https://www.indiaspend.com/industry/photo-essay-the-frayed-working-conditions-in-surats-textile-hub-934568>;

15 <https://www.industrial-union.org/indias-safety-crisis-industrial-accidents-during-covid-19-kill-at-least-75>

16 Gujarat: 7,512 of 22.5 lakh migrants eligible for travel allowance | Ahmedabad News - Times of India



Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped locate inter-state migration at the centre of debates on India's development imagination. It has exposed the vulnerabilities of a powerless and stateless workforce that survived on the urban fringes without identity or reward. Some scholars consider the pandemic period as a time when the migrant workers of the country were deprived of their substantive human rights including the right to life, livelihoods, shelter, and health (Srivastava, 2020). In this paper we made an attempt to portray the enormity of the human tragedy that was unlocked by the pandemic lockdown by piecing together scattered evidence that is yet to be collated systematically to unravel the complex interaction between politics, policy and the lived realities of India's working class. That the pandemic did not permanently reverse the migration flow away from urban areas and the workers continued to move to back to the urban ghettos during and after the pandemic period demonstrates the classic dilemma of a footloose labour force caught in the 'progressive inequality' (Bremen, 2019) that is characteristic of capitalism.

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