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COVID 19 pandemic and International Migration: An Initial View

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This paper explores how COVID-19 affects the global economy and the short-term measures taken by governments to immunize its impact upon the health of their nations and their economies. This paper also aims to bridge the lacuna in the current related literature based on analyzing the available secondary data, which applies to the nature of this study. Using a mixed theoretical framework (Keynesian Theory, Maslow’s Theory of basic human needs, and the Theory of Social Distancing) was legitimate to interpret this study’s findings. The researcher recommends that a proper policy framework should be planned and its implementation is ensured that protects the interest of the employers and employees. Opportunity for startups or small-scale businesses should be promoted to create employment opportunities and demand for the product, which ultimately helps the countries to come out of the situation of depression.

1. Introduction

As we all are in the COVID 19 pandemic, which is creating two problems for all – well-being and the economic crisis leading to financial instability for an economy. The idea of sickness by COVID has led to various problems from social distancing, isolation at home to completely lockdown for the nations. These problems have generated critical agendas for economies for almost all countries. This pandemic had led to a stop to the ordinary working of the respective governments. Kristalina Georgieva, Head International Monetary Fund, explained the terrible financial aftermath in 2020, leading to negative GDP (per capita) development after the Great Depression 1930s. Khanna [13] analyzed that the COVID pandemic has impacted mainly low-income households. They are less well-positioned to cope with earnings losses during a recession, have no alternative earnings and have no social security available. Most of these workers earn little more than a subsistence wage and have no other means to protect their incomes if they lose their jobs.

This pandemic has rendered the world economy to a halt and brought various social and economic changes across. The scenario in India is also the same. With increasing cases of COVID 19 day by day, the Indian government declared different phases of lockdown. For the current period, unemployment has risen to 24.3% in May (CMIE). As per MOSPI, the industrial production in India descended to 16.7% in March 2020. It has been the sharpest decline after 1994. The possible reason for this can be a lockdown in the nation that led to the closure of many businesses permanently or temporarily. This exposed the workforce to job losses. In this backdrop, this paper will explore the effect of COVID 19 on the Labour Market. Migrant labourers reeling from the mental health tsunami’s impact need immediate support from mental health professionals and policy planners [19]. Mental health and suicide prevention interventions could help to lessen the impact. Crisis intervention in the form of psychological first aid would help save lives and reduce emotional distress among migrant labourers. Helpline services, digitally mediated therapy, and telemedicine health services should be provided.

The present gallop of Indian migrant labourers due to a country’s lockdown in retrospect of containing the COVID 19 pandemic has been an eye-opener situation for all. With every new phase of lockdown and closure of various industries activated to stop supporting activities like transportation, construction and the movement of goods and services. This situation has made these labourers puzzled and muddled. The panic of getting stuck up and their draining finances have caused the labourer to flee to their domestic places. This is a catastrophic situation that also led to the pandemic’s roll-out in various other areas impacting economic activities. This problem needs to be appropriately addressed from present and future perspectives. This situation can be based on economic and humanitarian ground. Different measures adopted by the central and state government barely convince them. Since independence, poor or rural people living in India have always been dependent on agriculture, construction pursuits at native places, or suburban areas near them. In due course, automated machines and tractors, leading to a more increase in these activities’ efficiency, took up their activities. In the past few years, there has been a boom in the IT sector but it is limited to metropolitan states like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, etc. Few strong farmers’ backgrounds have shifted to Canada at that time, lead-
ing to an increased dependence on labourers from UP, Jharkhand and Bihar. These instances lead to a shift of a large number of labourers to fast-paced developed regions. COVID 19 pandemic has brought them deep trouble as the terror of this disease exhausting finances and the situation of joblessness has been aroused putting them into insecurities. The efforts of central and state governments for sending them to their domestic places are praise-worthy. The problem that needs attention is increased unemployment and the economic burden growing on the economy. This problem can be taken care of by absorbing those migrant workers in nearby industries with government partnerships.

The remainder of the paper is formulated as Section 2 gives a detailed insight into the literature review. Section 3 deals with the methods employed in this research work. Section 4 provides discussion and interpretation. Section 5 describes the practical implication of the paper and Section 6 shows the theoretical contribution. Further, in Section 7 the researcher makes the concluding remarks and Section 8 highlights the scope for future research.

2. The conceptual framework and literature review

There has been a varied impact on labour market agents and institutions of the macroeconomic slowdown in respective countries. In developing countries like India, the majority of existence is of the informal sector and workforce with limitations to security and safety nets. On the other hand, there is a proper formalization of the labour market and policies in the developed nations. In addition to it, a large fiscal cover has also been provided due to the small population size. An instance for this government of Denmark has promised and given assurance to the private workforce that they will be paid 75% of wages if they lose the job due to this pandemic.

COVID 19 has impacted almost every state across the country. In terms of Migration, a higher rate has been seen in high-income regions like Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra. On the other hand, regions with low income like UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and Jharkhand, Orissa less rate of migration has been studied. However, there is confined literature related to the developed nations only on labour market performance. Still, it is essential to outline the framework to understand various affected aspects of the labour market, including migrant workers.

A reduction in aggregate demand and reduction in production has led to job losses can be considered as a significant effect on migrant labourers. This downturn in economic terms has led to unemployment [14]. The fall of revenue and increasing the cost of industries implicate the job loss for a workforce [3,20]. Hoynes et al. [8] explained that between 1979 and 2011, workforce with less educational qualification suffered the most in retrospect to unemployment, in another view of the current situation where the pandemic hits all the economies and in response to this process, economies may affect the workforce accordingly.

Jaimovich and Siu [11] justified in their research that most of the job losses in the recession are of the semi and unskilled workers and never get back. Hershbein and Kahn [6] explained the churning between skilled, semiskilled and unskilled labour during the recession or slowdown. This can also be considered as the channel of effect for migrant labourers. The recession period is deemed to be the best period for introducing new reforms for the labour market. This aspect leads to a necessary change in approaches to deal with the labour market distress. So, the government intervening in policies for labour is also considered to be as channel of effect.

3. Methods

Integrative Review (IR) method has always been considered as an international reputation for an evidence-based procedure. This method goes beyond findings and analysis of primary study leading to exploitation of another research dimension. The integrative review method assists in building new theories or develops new problems for testing. Crossetti [1] explained that the IR method prepares a scientific method ensuring scientific research. The creation of IR centres on a structured literature review focusing on redeeming concepts and knowledge associated with a particular situation under study. All the data has been collected from secondary sources.

Published literature has been searched and has been conducted using CINAHL, Web of Science and Scopus, etc. The literature search was limited from 2002 to 2020. Single synthesis has been generated by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. A preliminary exploration of the IR method recognized papers that focused on stress and its counter mechanism in Australia [16,22].

It has been seen that no research has been carried out to combine qualitative and quantitative literature in a single strand. This study is a contribution to research lacuna by initiating an integrative review method. The methodology adopted for the IR method was directed by Whittemore and Knaff [21]. It can be explained as an approach that incorporates diversified techniques and different perspectives to thoroughly understand the occurrence of particularity [7,21].

The IR method aims to include diverse data and help develop a holistic approach to the concept. This process consists of five stages – identifying the problem, search for literature, evaluation of data, analysis and presentation of the synthesized and thus describing various implications [21]. This is similar to what is being adopted in this research paper in an integrative manner by applying the mixed-method process.

4. Discussion

International Labour Office [10] defined the vulnerability of labour in the following aspects:

- If a person’s income is not enough to raise himself and his family from poverty,
- If the performed activity has not provided any social security benefit,
- An amalgamation of (a) and (b)

Saunders [18] introduced one more aspect of vulnerability in terms of unawareness for availing of social security benefits but are eligible to avail. These groups can be easily identified by the PLFS survey, which gathers information on the type of economic activity, benefits, job contracts and consumption expenditure of family to determine poverty status.

In search of work, there is a continuous process of shifting younger people from villages or rural areas, countryside to the major metro city is in search of work, and over the years, this process of migration has created a class of people – migrant workers who contributed a lot for the development of the city. They migrated and created high-density clusters of Hutments without realizing that this boon can also create havoc for them in case of an Epidemic and none from the present generation have seen or faced it in the past.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the government bringing in a mechanism to lock down the entire country with all shops, industrial units and other establishments closed, this has thrown many adverse challenges for migrant workers. They mostly rely on their daily earnings to meet their day, residing in isolation without any work and daily wages far off from all their family members. The spread of COVID – 19 adversely affected such migrant families financially, socially and physically as there was no financial support coming from any quarter, living far away from their family members and unable to bear the agony of who shall take care of them. When they cannot even afford their daily consumption and maintain social distancing in the migrant camps, they have been a luxury than a preventive measure. These uncertainties created a fear in the minds of migrant workers and sensing this fear and glom all around started moving back to their native places even after facing mind – disturbing hardships – a migration process from cities to native villages never seen before.

To alleviate the lockdown consequences on migrant workers, the Government of India announced a package of Rs 1.70 lakh crore in
March 2020. This package was introduced under Padhan Mantri Ga- reeb Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). The scheme also entails 5 Kg White/Rice and 1 Kg pulses to 80 crore people eligible for this scheme for the next three months.

RBI joined the league of extending help to besieged businesses by a cut in interest rate (BloombergQuint, 2020). Central Government and the state government ensured an arrangement of temporary shelters with basic amenities of food, clothing and health measures for migrant labourers wrecked due to lockdown (Press Trust of India, 2020c; Gov- ernment of India, 2020b). The Ministry of Home affairs also came to the rescue of migrant labour by asking landlords not to charge rent and or- ganization to pay wages without deduction during the entire lockdown period (Government of India, 2020b).

States have also got extended help from Non-government Organisations (NGOs), Jail mates and volunteers to help them in this pandemic. The central government has introduced some new initiatives like in Kerala named “Bandhu” for Migration and Inclusive Development for screening migrants for COVID-19 and providing other medical services to the specific group. All the reliefs provided by the central and state government for the betterment of migrant workers during the pandemic, but in this large population, the quantity of services proves to be insuf- ficient. The dual effect of pandemic and lockdown has led to the loss of the job for the workforce and income of people. The main concern is that this pandemic and lockdown will not have any uniform effect on the respective workforce. The outcome will be harsh on a particular workforce as per PLFS 2018-19. It will probably affect the less educated workforce who is into less pay, an unstable workplace sector that will be hard hit by these shocks. ILO (2020) estimates that India will be hit badly as 400 million workers falls into poverty.

This Pandemic of COVID 19 has deteriorated the capacity of every nation of this world to improvise on the poverty level and have taken them back to the stage of poverty alleviation. With severe prob- lems, majorly, the question arises, will migrant labourers will return to towns/cities for work or will they stay in their native place. In case they do not want to return. In domestic places where the resources and oppor- tunities both are limited, whether the state government will meet the belief of people. Few long-term strategies suggested for the same –

Government must ensure that the nutritional needs must be fulfilled for migrant labour and their families. Cereals should be supplied weekly. The public distribution system can be used for giving cereals and grains. This compassion should go to the local body to ensure the supply of daily needs arising from the coronavirus disruption. It needs to be re- membered that lockdown is cheaper in the West countries. However, in India, people cannot stay on an empty stomach for long.

Migrant labourers cannot be abandoned in long-run development. The government must consider the submissions by UNESCO and UNICEF and all groups working on migrant labourers and implement them as soon as possible (Bhagat, 2012; Working Group on Migration, 2017).

In a country of 130 crores, India is unlikely to work from a size perspective. There is a need to adopt decentralization as a strong strategy for delivering health services. Various services, nutrition-related pro- grams and sanitation programs, job and livelihood programs need to be made operative. It is the best time to showcase the synergy between the Centre, state government and extended help from Gram Panchayats and NGOs, to fight the battle against COVID 19.

According to NSS and NFHS, there has been a requirement for up- dating the database of migrant labourers and their families. Accessible data is considered to be very old. A prospect has been shown to intro- duce inclusive policies and programs for migrant labourers in India.

5. COVID 19 and European Nations

COVID 19 Outlook and resulting measures have created a downturn for Europe. It is an expectation of a drop in GDP by 8% in the year, a significant decline as compared to a forecast made by the US. The most important reason for the hard-hit is the maximum share of small firms, particularly in South and East Europe. These small firms are considered financially constrained and dependent on banks compared to large firms [9].

European Union in risk management and regulation is considered a robust regulatory power for addressing emergency in public health. Although in the present situation government are taking shots. A diver- sified response in Europe to this crisis is reflecting a lack of unity. EU having regulatory power assigns assessing and managing risk to gov- ernment at various levels. While European Union guaranteed a harmonized assessment of the risk of COVID 19, as the national government is re- sponsible for the management of COVID 19. This has been managed as per European Union competency. Health policy is an area of national competence as per the EU Treaty. Limited power has been provided to member states for emergency [2].

COVID 19 has been considered a big challenge for managing in Eu- ropean Union. EU was adopting different strategies for managing the issues. Various measures like the closing of borders and limiting the popu- lation’s movement to reduce virus spread. Observation has also been streamlined in the provision of substantive money for vaccine and vari- ous treatment therapy. For a functional economy, the EU has provided financial support [5].

New measures in policy forms were laid down to control the eco- nomic aftermath due to pandemic. National authorities with SME’s centre of attraction provided different support schemes. Support measures like reduction in tax, subsidies in wages etc., have been provided at a regional level.

Eurostat’s latest report depicted that the employment rate remained stable from September 2020 to December 2020 but unexpectedly rose to 7.5% over a year. Altogether, 16 million population found out to be unemployed in Dec 2020.

EU has been badly hit by COVID 19. Italy and Spain have been re- ported with the maximum number of cases. As per the Eurostat report, even the youth unemployment rate has also accelerated to 18.1%. The EU has also redirected certain funds towards research for COVID 19 and is trying to enact various measures in the economy’s highly affected sec- tors.

6. Practical implication of paper

6.1. Pandemic paving a way to unemployment

Due to very little information available on noble COVID – 19, most of the developed and developing countries prefer to go along with one of the WHO advisories to follow lockdown protocols, virtually stopping all commercial, industrial, transport and other related activities. This has been thought off to avoid intra-contact just to slow down the virus’s spread amongst its nationals. This mechanism, though has undoubtedly shown the results with a slow rate of spread, but it has brought every industry to a grinding halt. One significant impact noticed was that the supply chains got disturbed, productivity got affected, demand distribu- tion due to supply-side effects as well as due to the diminishing income of individuals because of various reasons.

The United Nations work agency has reported that it feared that hun- dreds of million people could be left without work due to COVID 19. The jobless data has recently reported by G7 nations shares the same con- cern in its report by reporting figures of 30 million for the US and 1.76 million for Japan that is the highest so far after many decades.

Various developed and developing nations, including many Euro- pean countries, are extending unemployment benefits by way of wage subsidy, job loss claims etc., to mitigate the sufferings of their nation- als. The global outlook is not favourable in the view of U.N. ILO and it has predicted that 1.6 billion informal economy workers could suffer massive damage to their livelihoods and it may further cost up to 305 million jobs by the second quarter of 2020.

The payroll data of a DP release confirms that the US’s private sector has shared about 2 crore jobs in April and the US Congressional budget
office predicts the unemployment rate of about 15% by the third quarter of 2020 than 4% reported in the first quarter. It has been reported that about 4 million Americans have preferred an unemployment claim each week for April 2020. Canada’s official status bureau has also reported the unemployment rate in April as 13% and about 7.2 million people applying for emergency unemployment assistance. Many European Union countries like France, Germany, Italy and the UK have reported their unemployment rate in the 4.5% to 8.5% band by far much higher than what has been reported in the first quarter of 2020. This higher unemployment rate reported is even after these nations have followed very liberal short-time work programs, etc.

The only little better exception is Japan, which has reported an unemployment rate of 2.5%, but the job openings reported are at the lowest in three years. It will take some more time and measures to be taken by every country to improve the supply chain network, create demand, initiate and take steps to spur demand before the economic activity picks up after the lockdown and then only the job cycle shall improve after the next few quarters. Moreover, by then, COVID-19 Vaccination programs may speedup up the economic activity further.

7. Theoretical implications

7.1. Keynes supply shock theory

It can be seen that COVID 19 has a mingling of demand and supply shock. The occurrence of shocks is due to supply chains, resulting in varied sectors leading to demand/supply constraints. This research introduces a concept that is shown by “supply creates its demand”. A negative Supply shock can lead to a fall in demand that in turn causes the shortage in output production and employment greater than supply shock itself. Adverse Supply shocks occurring temporarily like those due to pandemic causes a reduction in output production and jobs. As terrible as it may, recessions by supply shocks are a partly efficient response.

Nevertheless, can a supply shock have led to a sharp fall in output production and unemployment, even going far off an efficient response? Does it also cause a drop in those sectors, which may not be directly impacted by the shutdown? Connectedly, can this process will create anaemic recovery or whether the V-shape recession is guaranteed? These have also been the questions in debates nowadays on monetary and fiscal policies to COVID 19 pandemic, which is also ensuring an economic offshoot. We can define supply shock as a sudden increase/decrease in the supply of commodities in general. The sudden change caused influence the equilibrium price level of a particular good.

In the short run, a negative supply shock occurring in an economy will lead to a shift of an aggregate supply curve to the left, causing a decrease in output and a price increase. Stagflation can also occur due to a blend of the rise in price and a fall in output. In the short run, a positive supply shock in the economy will lead to a shift of the aggregate supply curve to the right, causing a fall in price and an increase in output. A positive supply shock is technology shock causing production to be more efficient, leading to a rise in output.

In this paper, we try to answer the questions by reconsidering the theory of demand/supply shocks in general equilibrium. Our essential justification is that supply shock due to this pandemic COVID 19 is unique, which is affecting varied sectors differently. The expedient impact of lockdown has led to the stop of activities in contact-intensive ventures like gyms, restaurants and hotels. This will redirect consumers to spend on some other sectors. In some cases, there are direct substitutes for sectors, which are directly affected. If a consumer is not eating outside, then they will pay out additional on food items to be prepared at home. Some other sectors are even complimentary too. The consumer who is not going to the gym will pay out less on clothing for sports. The question, which arises, is whether the consumer’s spending has been increased or decreased concerning initial expenditure in the respective impacted sectors. If there is a powerful force of complementarity, then they will pay out less, which will lead to a recession to spread.

The second thing can be that any income earned by workers from a shutdown venture can act as a source of demand for the respective sectors. This concept is based on the incomplete market i.e. the workforce has not been ensured against this pandemic shock. Nevertheless, this pandemic can cause a supply shock in at least one sector. However, if there is a cross-sector, it can cause and can even change the outcome’s sign. In other words, Keynes supply shock can occur due to incomplete markets. Still, in the case of the complete market, an economy might not attribute complementarities leading to a supply shock.

The workforce in the most impacted sector may lose their income and may retrench spend in almost every sector. Even if unaffected workforce partly remunerates by changing demand from an impacted sector to another sector. The changeover may fail to avoid the recession in all impacted sectors. The main reason is that the MPC of no impacted workforce is much lower than the impacted workforce because of its loss of income. Faria Castro [4] builds on studying different forms of fiscal policy in a calibrated neo-Keynesian model. The pandemic is modelled as a significant negative shock to the utility of consumption. Instead, this study focuses on a supply shock, motivated by the shutdowns, and studies the induced effects on demand.

Jordà et al. [12] provide some time-series evidence from historical pandemics on the impact on rates of return. The pandemics they study are persistent, with large numbers of fatalities. They found evidence that pandemics reduce the real rate of interest. It is not clear if this is comparable to the events this study focuses on, since the researcher does not focus on the longer-term effects of death, but instead on the shorter-term effects of shutdowns on the global economy.

7.2. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model

For applying Maslow’s theory, we must find satisfaction following a particular want or a need, and thus the consumer is motivated to prioritize spending. This theory explains the difference between needs and wants. Lester [15] stated that the pyramid hierarchy depicts different consumer behaviour and which one is most important for human survival. The important classification includes 1) physiological needs, 2) Safety needs, 3) Love and belonging needs, 4) Self-Esteem needs (5) Self-actualization needs. A Maslow hierarchy theory model has applied to an emerging and advanced economy. As per [17], the same shifts can be seen in consumer behaviour for the same. This theory analyzes behaviour during stress, anxiety generated due to emotional change and tangible stress like a pandemic.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, there is a negative impact on disposable income. This is due to a fall in wage growth and prioritizing non-discretionary spending. The consumer re-defines their behaviour to complement the economic environment around them. The higher-order needs are mostly deferred during this pandemic situation. In the correlation to GDP, it has been seen during 1960-2010 the recession’s period, which comes across, was in line with Maslow’s theory depicting averaged consumption of luxury goods and an increase in essential goods. So, necessity has always been the most essential consideration over goods examined as optional.

8. Conclusion

This pandemic COVID 19 is threatening all the economies being developed or developing. Till date, an end to this COVID 19 is uncertain. This uncertainty is leading to a drop in public confidence. The macroeconomic impact of this pandemic will deteriorate the economies badly. Nevertheless, as adversities will emerge, better to design and redesign innovative economic policies. If any strong economic activity is not taken, it may lead to an economic depression, which will be unavoidable.

COVID-19 has been an unprecedented dare for almost every country. Due to the large size of the population, the dangerous position of financial sectors of the respective economies and the economy’s interdepen-
dence on the informal labour workforce, social distancing measures and the lockdown has turned into a disruptive problem for all economies. All the governments are working in their respective countries, but it is just a beginning. The eventual harm is likely more badly than current estimates. With respect to the demand side, the government has to balance income support to ensure the fiscal situation not to spin of control. The balance has been reasonable so far, but it needs more significant help for the support of the poor. Policymakers must be prepared to minimize the effect of shocks on the formal and informal sector, thus striving for sustained recovery.

Declaration of Competing Interest

We would like to submit paper on COVID 19 pandemic and International Migration: An Initial View. We further state that there is no conflict of interest.

Future Scope of the study

This paper provides a preliminary review of different aspects, which are coming out during crisis and shock. Different measures can be suggested in further research concerning the planning of economic recovery. Various other influencing factors can be analyzed in understanding the shocks in an economy.

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