

Module E1- Pandemic, Migrants, Refugees and Public Health

Lived Experiences of Pandemic by Waste-picking Migrants in Delhi: A Glimpse from an Informal Settlement

Submitted by

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Abstract

Migration has received renewed attention in the wake of the global pandemic COVID19. In his book “Borders of an Epidemic” Ranbir Samaddar highlighted the ethical and political implications of the epidemic in India – in particular reference to India’s migration crisis due to corona outbreak. He argues that like all other wars, this crisis too has recreated “race” as a physical reality of life. Race originates from the obligation to defend a society in as much from the dynamics of conquest and subjugation. Once again corona crisis brought this reality out. In this play of power, the migrant stands on the borders of entity. In fact, COVID-19 has brought to fore the forgotten knowledge of bordering exercises of containment, isolation, mass scale nursing and treatment, rapid evacuation, zoning, erecting corridors, guarding, respecting the implications of age differences, guarding vulnerabilities and getting on top of the enemy. Bordering will also mean border managing in terms of jobs, spaces, economy and life. Pushing the migrant workers to the fence and robbing them of access to public distribution of food, public health provisions, and employment in public works to tide over the crisis of epidemic became willingly or unwillingly a part of disease control measure. Migrant is portrayed like a virus. The migrant’s body is suspect. Like the virus, the migrant symbolizes as the enemy from outside. Therefore, this study is an attempt to unravel the episodic illustration of accumulated vulnerabilities which brought out by COVID-19 pandemic for internal migrants in particular.

In such situation, the phenomenological experience of migrants engaged in waste picking becomes crucial to understand. This waste picking community has vulnerability in manifold; social, cultural and economical. Though they play vital role in urban waste management, their contribution never be acknowledged. Therefore, this paper tries to understand their response to

pandemic by unraveling the different aspects of their social, cultural and economic life. It is an effort to underline the everyday anxieties and their ways to deal with the severity of pandemic. In order to meet the objective of the study one informal settlement of waste picking community in Delhi is purposively selected in Uttam Nagar. For the holistic understanding of the phenomenon ethnographic approach would be adopted.

Key-words- Lived-Experience, Pandemic (Corona Outbreak), Waste-picking Migrants and Informal Settlement