
Introduction to a set of articles on villages in Karnataka

WOUND AFTER WOUND: LIFE IN RURAL KARNATAKA DURING THE CORONA TIMES

Suresha K.P and A.R.Vasavi



Wound after wound. That is what has been targeted against rural India and its citizens. First, it was demonetisation that ripped away basic incomes and savings and placed most in conditions of penury and humiliation. Then came the poorly implemented GST that slashed the viability of rural home and cottage industries. Now, is the ill-planned 'lock-down' that despite being initiated as a 'janata curfew' is a curfew of the working poor so as to keep the middle and upper classes safe. In its announcement and implementation, the lock-down is a measure that overlooks not only how rural India works and lives but also how its most vulnerable continue to be sacrificed in the name of national safety. The images of desperate migrants struggling to get back to their villages indicated the extent to which a large population of migrant labour services the urban and industrial economies at great cost to their own well-being.

Based on telephone conversations and reports from people in ten villages across Karnataka, we present vignettes of what rural life is now in the times of the COVID-19 lockdown. What emerges clearly is the extent to which the lockdown is a great disruption to the livelihoods and life of rural people. While the efforts of effective administration of relief have staved off

immediate starvation, and the new 'corona soldiers' (trained by the Red Cross) have lent support and information to village residents, the situation highlights the result of decades of economic neglect of rural India.

As agricultural incomes and livelihoods have become economically unviable, a large number of rural citizens resort to urban migration to eke out livelihoods that are without security. Returning as migrant workers in this time of a pandemic, they now face uncertainty about their futures, and are a restless population who are trapped in small homes. Peri-urban villages that are integrated into the dominant urban, industrial economy are now sites of abandonment where shuttered factories and work sites provide no income, and the settlements lack the community and administrative structures that typical villages would have. While government food provisioning keeps the forest-dwelling Solega from starvation, the disruption of their annual festival forebodes among them a concern about their own future. Perhaps in what will mark the real impact of the Prime Minister's cultural strategies of people clanging pans and pots, and then lighting lamps to ward away the corona virus to make the lock-down a collectively acceptable experience, will be the extent to which it has reinforced blind beliefs and practices. Worse still is the inability of the government to prevent the dissemination of misinformation that led the Nizammuddin meet to become a site, and case for Islamaphobia. That Muslim residents, in even remote villages, now bear the double burden of being ostracised and losing their occupational incomes is a matter that should shame us all. Memories of epidemics reside within communities as among the Lambadi of Gadag, who linking this pandemic to the strategies of surviving through plagues, have moved to live in open fields. In other villages, it is people's anxiety about work, food, medical support and the future that constitutes their conversations. In rendering the vast crores of rural citizens into conditions of further vulnerability, we see the fragility of our democratic systems, the failure of economic policies, and the short-sightedness of people who elect representatives who don't care for them. Life in the corona times marks the long-entrenched fault lines of our society and nation. In this, the rural working class are the real victims.

CORONA HALTS A FOREST FESTIVAL: Biligiri Rangan Hills, Chamarajanagar District

Samira Agnihotri, Bengaluru

“Goru goru ko, gorukaanaa...goru goru ko, gorukaanaa...”

Dodda sampige nanna nodayya, kaadhu kaapadi madgonayya”



The lilting refrain from the *gorukaana* song cycle of the Solega people of the Biligiri Rangan Hills, echoes through the forested slopes during their festivals. The words pay obeisance to their central deity, the ancient *Magnolia champaca* tree known as *Dodda Sampige*.

Once every few years, the Solega celebrate their *rotti habba* with a grand *kondotsava*, where the devout walk over stretches of white-hot coals. Preparations for this begin months ahead, and Solega from near and far gather for the community feast, which is followed by song and dance through the night. *Ragi rottis* baked over coals in *Muthaga* leaves (*Butea monosperma*), and *kumbalakai-avarekalu palya* are placed as offerings to their forest gods. For a people whose marriage traditions commonly involve elopement, these festivals are also opportunities for young men and women to appraise each other, and choose their partners.

This year, however, there cannot be a *rotti habba*. The forest clearing lies bare, waiting to hear the drums that herald the beginning of the *gorukaana*. The District Administration has banned large gatherings, and the entire country is under a sudden lockdown.

Like in most situations, the Solega have taken this too into their stride. They watch the news on their televisions, and declare that a “*maari*” (an epidemic of infectious disease; often attributed to a curse from the gods) has befallen the world. They conduct *poojas* and make offerings to *Maaramma thaa*, and to their other gods to forgive these trespasses of mere mortals.

They have recently been given rations through the “Paushtika Aahara” scheme, and the District Commissioner has personally overseen the distribution of extra rations as promised by the Karnataka state government. At the same time, with no buses to nearby towns, and

more time on their hands, many have gone back to the old ways, of foraging for wild tubers and honey. For the Solega, the entire forest is their home, and while the world outside reels under the pandemic, the forest is still a safe haven. It is our collective responsibility that we, the outsiders, allow it to remain that way.

BASAVANNA'S CAULIFLOWER FIELDS: Madhbhavi village, Vijayapura district

A.R. Vasavi

In early February, standing in their two and a half acre field of vegetables, Basavanna and his son, Ravi, had heaved a collective relief. The previous year's rains had increased the water in the tube-well and now they looked forward to reaping a bountiful harvest of cauliflower and other vegetables. The prices were good and they hoped that their investment of about Rupees twenty five thousand, and all their own labour, would help bring in the much needed annual income.



Now, just as they were ready to harvest, the lockdown was announced. They were allowed to go early in the morning to sell their produce in Vijapura/Bijapur town. But the traders at the APMC yard had bargained them down. Yet, retail prices were nearly five times what they received. Crowded and anxious farmers gathered in the APMC yard or in the market and did not follow 'social distance' rules and the buyers were few and far between. After a day's visit and experience of this nightmare, they decided against selling their vegetables. "Why risk contacting corona and then passing it on to the family?" rues Ravi, a young, earnest man, who unlike most of the young men in the village prefers to be identified as an agriculturist. The past years have seen sharp fluctuations in the monsoons. Either excessive rains, or, unusual for this region, even floods, or prolonged droughts have wreaked havoc in the

agrarian communities. Out-migration has only intensified and it has been the remittance economy from those who have joined the swelling numbers of construction, domestic, and urban low-end service labour that has sustained many a household.

The corona virus disruption put paid to all the hopes that Basavanna and Ravi had. With desperation and despondency, the father-son duo decided that it may be best to let the cattle eat the vegetables and harvest a bit for the family and neighbours. They now owned only one cow, primarily for milk, and having sold the bullocks, their large cattle stall stood empty. Tractors now do the work of their bullocks and the loss of cow-dung manure means that more fertilisers, and therefore more pesticides, must be applied to the land. Caught in the treadmill of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, hybrid seeds and external markets, the family has only seen a series of losses and little or no gain. What seemed like a breakthrough in this vicious cycle of loss, is now darkened/blocked by an unseen virus, and the ill-planned lockdown which had no consideration for farmers like them. Like other agriculturists they have submitted to the punitive regime imposed on them. For brave and hard-working farmers like this father-son duo what will the government do for them, citizens who have all these years fed the nation?

The following articles were written in Kannada by village residents. Translations from Kannada to English were done by Ms. Srijaya Char.

ANTI-MUSLIM BEHAVIOUR THAT IS SPREADING IN THE VILLAGES: Gubbi, Tumkur District

(Based on an audio clipping sent by Yatish, Tumkur who talked to Muslim residents in the Gubbi area)

There are no corona cases either in Tumkur district or in any surrounding area within ten



kilometres. It was wrong on the part of Muslim friends to have attended the *Jammat* at Delhi. There is no contact between those who went to Delhi and us. But it is rather sad that people around us are spreading rumours that the corona is being spread because of Muslims. This has meant that our relationships have changed. Earlier, people would come to the 'motor winding' shop and would appreciate them for their work and would get the motor winding work done by them. But now

even when they go to the shop, they say “you are a Muslim, you have corona” and keep their motor at a distance and ask them to repair it.

The second man’s experience: A Muslim man had gone to bring rations. According to rules, he was standing one metre away, but people who were standing there taunted him saying “you are a Muslim, you have corona”, and pushed him a little further. He took his rations with a heavy heart and returned.

The third man’s experience: He was doing business with tamarind trees. The tamarind was now ripe and ready for plucking. When he went to collect the tamarind he felt thirsty and went to a nearby house to ask for water. They said, “you are a Muslim, you have corona - do not come”, and closed the door without giving water. This was what he shared.

A ‘COVID WARRIOR’S VILLAGE JOURNEY: Tumkur District

Kavita Kammanakote

In the presence of the Deputy Commissioner, Dr Rakesh Kumar; the Karnataka Press and the Public Communication Department and the Indian Red Cross Association, Tumkur Branch, have organized a basic fight against Covid-19. During the last week of March, they selected a few people from each district to register for an online course. After the online examination these participants were recruited as ‘Corona Warriors’. Presently there are about 202 Corona Warriors serving the districts that they are assigned to. There are totally 10 taluks in Tumkur District. There are 15 warriors in Tiptur. In the remaining 8 taluks, 10 warriors have been assigned. The Indian Red Cross Association of Tumkur says that there are more than 100 warriors rendering service in Tumkur District.



In the beginning, these associations took up the responsibility of keeping a watch on social distance and giving precautions to senior citizens. With the District administration and citizens’ cooperation they are fulfilling the requirements of distribution of free milk and food in 10 taluks. With the help of the Labour Department they are giving precautions to the unorganized sector of workers. They were able to supply

necessary requirements to them. They also distributed pamphlets. They identified people who were in need of food, home and other necessities and reported to the Deputy Commissioner. Members from the radio programme, *Namhalli* Mobile Radio service go house to house to give consolation. It also helps in spreading the Deputy Commissioner's message to each and every household. The radio media is working to bring a quick solution to problems that people are facing. The radio is bringing the attention of the people to Covid by broadcasting songs pertaining to Covid and also warning them through music. Projects have been planned for people belonging to the backward class, needy, tribes, nomads, etc. There is also a plan to include migrant labourers in the project. The radio has been active in gathering all senior citizens and reviewing the situation. With the result that the *gram panchayat* of that area has been active with 10 officers as a workforce.

In the background of the 'Lock Down' the most difficult task has been countering false rumours. Starting from the health point of view to distributing necessary commodities to the poor, the social service organisations are taking on the responsibilities. Much of this is done through the 'Namhalli Radio Recorder'. It has been successfully reaching necessary information to the Deputy Commissioners through WhatsApp. The Mobile Radio Stations have been going around in the villages of Banasandra, G. Mallenahalli, Kondajji, Vignasanthe, Nonavinakere, Akkalasandra, Gollarahatti and G. C. Pura of Chikkanayakana Halli. For the past six days they have visited more than 30 villages and created some kind of confidence in the people of the villages.

As I am a 'Corona Warrior' from Golur in Tumkur District, I have observed the following situation in this region:

- When we entered the villages with a Corona Warrior ID card and mobile radios, it was five o' clock in the evening. People did not come very close to us. It was difficult for us to go to each house and inform them of our objective for being there. The Deputy Commissioner switched on the speaker in the car and addressed the crowd which was broadcasted. People who sat on the platforms, milking-maids, farmers who came to sell tomatoes and greens, etc. were the centre of attraction for the villagers.
- When the village people were asked to put forth their complaints and grievances in front of the Radio Vehicle and were told that the Deputy Commissioner would look into the matter and would find a solution to their problems, they came one by one and cited their problems.

The Plight of Kaidala Village:

- Farmers' plight: About 500 families live in *Kaidala* Village which belongs to the *Hathnahalli* Village Panchayat. There are only 60 farmers in the village and the Covid-19 has brought great trouble to these agricultural farmers. There was no back-up price for the farm produce of this area. Presently under the refuge of the Irrigation Department the sale of vegetables is being conducted but arrangements for marketing outside, and for fair prices have not been fixed. People demand vegetables for low prices. Farmer Hanumanthayya asks "In this summer I harvested

Rs. 50,000 worth of tomatoes. I have not got even Rs.10,000. I have not got back even the amount that I spent on labour. What am I supposed to do?”

- Chennappa, another resident of the same village, laments. As some miscreants set fire to their Ragi stack they lost nearly 40 bundles worth of Ragi (Millet); as a result they now have nothing to eat. “I am thinking of selling the cattle. We ourselves have no food. If we allow our cattle to die of hunger, it is not good for us.” He wipes his tears with his innocent talk. “We have given representations to more than 25 officers, but nothing has happened. Will we get any compensation? You must only get it for us. The leaders of our village are also not prepared to listen to us. So far after begging quite a few people, we got some grass for our cattle. We do not know what will happen further. The Government should at least provide us with some food.” These are their requests.
- One lady farmer who does not wish to disclose her name says, “We have no alternative for water other than the village tank; the village *Panchayat* has to build drinking water tanks for our cattle and get it filled up. There is no water in the lakes. The animals are starving for fodder. The government should do something for this.” This is their request.
- In Kaidala, Narayan the owner of a dairy says, “Soon after two weeks of lockdown, the output of milk has reduced by 20 percent”.
- The scheduled castes, tribes and the backward community of Kaidala village are mostly below poverty line. They do not have basic food other than from the *Annabhagya* Project. There is no labour work. They are finding it very difficult to satisfy their daily requirements.
- Majority of the aged have not received their old-age pensions. Even widow-pensions have not been received for the past two months. People like them who have no children are supposed to be looked after by the Government.
- “Even when someone comes to our village they are not bothered to find out whether we are alive or dead.” An agricultural labour laments, “The shops will be open after the Lock Down. But, we should have the money to buy what we need. When all the youngsters in the house are sitting at home, will the small bundles we have now suffice?”

K. Lakkappanagara (Kondapura Gomala) and Kondapura

- In the twin places that belong to the Hathenahalli village there are approximately 85 families. Out of them 17 families live in Kondapura. The people of this area are agriculturists. They are dependent on irrigation. Other than this there are some who are in government jobs.

- The residents of Lakkappanagara are inhabitants that have come from different parts of Karnataka and even India. There are very few farmers here. About 90% of them are poor; labourers, auto drivers, and domestic workers. Some are workers in *beedi* and other factories. Only about 10 percent are farmers. Out of that about 10 percent of them have received the lands on contract and are doing farming depending totally on rainfall.
- Due to the Lock Down, most of the labourers are sitting empty handed. There is an anecdote to show that they are waiting for someone to come for their help. As soon as the Radio Mobile van enters the village, all the men, women and children besiege the van: and ask “Have you brought anything? Are you giving us food? Are you giving us milk?!” We respond by saying, “No, we have come to study the condition to make arrangements for it”. Hearing this, quite a few of them have narrated their woes.
- **Day to day conditions:** Under the guidance of the *Namhalli* Radio and Indian Red Cross, after inviting the leaders of the twin-villages for a meeting, we discussed the problems and requirements of the villages. Along with the points raised at the meetings, the conditions of the people of the village were also recorded.
 1. Two days ago, in front of Somanna's (name changed) house people had gathered and were talking in a way that was hurtful. Somanna had taken loans from different landlords for celebrating the weddings of his two daughters and was paying interests. Presently, when the ‘Lock Down’ was announced, this had stopped. He had only two alternatives, either he had to pay the interest or else work in the farms of the person who had given him the loan. Now, as he was not getting any daily wage work, it was becoming very difficult for him, for his day to day living. Quite a few of the villagers are now in the same condition as Somanna.
 2. After marriage and three children, Amreen's husband left her. She has come back to her mother's house. Since nobody is employed in this household and the house is full of children, they are finding it difficult to feed everyone. Amreen's mother makes a request that arrangements have to be made at least to feed the children.
 3. Farida is suffering from mental illness. She did not want to get married and is living alone for the past 10 years. She has not received her pension (government support) for the past three months. She says she does not want to be a burden to her parents. She has made a request for her pension and some food requirements.
 4. The petitions of the leaders of the village are like this: The police should stop the entry of strangers during the patrol. And the government must appoint a Health officer, organize mobile health services and provide sanitizers and masks to prevent the onset of Corona.
 5. The result of the ‘Lock Down’ has fallen heavily on Self-help Womens' Organizations and Charitable Institutions. Sundramma, a resident of the village says, “There are no facilities to deposit money in the bank. We cannot even take a loan in times of distress.”

Common man's condition in Gulur

Gulur is traditionally and historically a well-to-do place along with the Hubli station. It has a Government Hospital and it also fulfils the requirements of the people in many ways. Attached to Tumkur District, the labourers of this place have no employment. Most of the factories around this place are under lockdown. Even the auto drivers have no work and are frustrated. This village shares the problems of all other villages. The Government Hospital in Gulur has no doctors. The nurses do not interact in a proper way. Diabetics who encounter problems find it difficult to get medical support.

"Yesterday when a mad dog bit my child, I could not get proper treatment. I was asked to go to Tumkur. Even there, I did not get any help", says Puttathayamma who is a vegetable vendor from the Gulur circle. This is corroborated by many others.

The *Namhalli* Radio and the Corona Warriors have recorded the problems of the village and sent them to the Deputy Commissioner. With the result, a work-force of 10 people in each *Panchayat* has been organized, and has been ordered to become active. Immediately the *Panchayat* development officers have surveyed the places and have reacted to the requirements of the villages. Recently they have contacted the tailors of the village and have asked them to manufacture masks. They have said that remuneration will be paid for those who abide by it. The Gram-Panchayat's elected representatives and the Red Cross Association have announced that police, health care, essential requirements and their supply will be looked after.

BURDENS OF SILK FARMERS: Talagavadi village, Mandya District

Rajendra Prasad

These are the reflections of two ordinary farmers (Hanume Gowda and Swami) of Malavalli in Mandya District in the *Gram Panchayat* during the lockdown.

The sudden 'Lock down' has created a number of problems in the villages. There have been deficiency in commodities; transport is in disarray, a downfall in the market for agricultural produce, dairy business, silk and fishing. Agriculture and their subsidiary businesses have suffered extreme losses.

Deficiency in consignments: There are provision stores in Talagavadi village. It has enough commodities for the time being; but the prices are rising by the day which may lead to dearth of stock. Ready-made goods that have to come from cities, household articles, condiments, etc. are becoming expensive. Majority of washing soaps come from Tamil Nadu. As the traffic between states have become very less, and as factories are presently closed, they have not been arriving. Likewise, lentils, cereals, vegetables, ready-made food products, etc. are becoming scarce and expensive as demands are increasing.

The traders that are selling chicken, fish and meat are also facing acute loss due to virus panic. They have buried live chickens in the farms. Some of them have sold them at random prices. The fish in the rivers have been let as they are. Rumours have ruined the supply and markets.

Dairy: Majority of the farmers' subsidiary business have been Dairy. Due to 'Lock Down' the ready-made foods (variety of fodder-feeds) are not available. There are no stores and high prices are a pain. When the cattle are fed only by hay/grass, the proportion of milk produced becomes less. It is very difficult to go out of town to procure grass. While these are some of the problems, the Milk Producers Co-operative Societies are hesitant to buy milk. The



reason is that some dairies and depots are going through loss as there are no takers. In Talagavadi village, there are local milk producers' association and cattle sales centres.

Silk: Silk producers are also in plenty in the district. Just at the time of the "Lock Down", a large amount of processed and in-process silk cocoons were available. Sometime ago, this silk manufacture had also closed. But, recently due to the government's initiative, they have been opened. The prices have now declined. From Rs.400/- per kilogram it has now come down to Rs.150-200. The factories that were weaving silk have also stopped as there is no turnover. The growers have panicked. Silk producers have faced total loss. Due to the virus pandemic business people are not prepared for any transactions. There is a small market in Malavalli; but, it is the Kollegal silk-cocoon market that is bigger.

Farming and vegetables: The farming and vegetable growers are very badly hit. The 'Lock Down' was announced just as they were about to harvest these vegetables. There are no local markets and even if some marketing is available, there is no transport. When they finally they try to transport the vegetables, there is no price for them. Further, there are no workers available for harvesting. As a result, a lot of fruits and vegetables are rotting in the farms. Families that are totally dependent on these are at a loss.

Seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. are not presently available. They have to wait until the 'Lock Down' is lifted. Time that could have been spent working on the fields is being wasted. Similarly even flower growers are at a loss as they are unable to sell. Here, marigold and *sevanti* are grown in abundance.

Though the paddy, millet and sugarcane have not been destroyed, the people who grow them are small-time growers. They were dependent on subsidiary occupations on a daily basis. Now they have to get along with empty pockets!

Agricultural labourers who do not own personal agricultural land and who were doing daily labour work in cities, do not have any income nor do they have any savings. There have

been a number of discussions about the city's daily wage workers. As they are unable to migrate and quite a few have stayed back in their own villages. Most of them have been able to get government rations. Those who had migrated to the cities have now come back. Presently there are no serious situations. But, they are all staring at a blank future.

Circulation of money: Money that common people were able to get is also in a bottleneck because of the 'Lock Down'. People are unable to spend even small amounts of money. As the lockdown was suddenly imposed, a number of lower middle class people have become empty handed. People are not even able to get any loans and advance salaries. Talagavadi village has a Canara Bank Branch. It has been working even in the 'Lock Down' days. Those who have savings account here are able to do some transactions. Quite a few of them have not received their salaries and payments. Dynamic and practical self-help groups have also gotten into trouble.

CORONA THAT RAN AWAY FEARING LIGHT

P. Veerabhadranaika

People who are home-bound due to the corona pandemic are anxious and fearful. There are some rumours in certain areas of Karnataka that *ekka*, butter-milk, nut (a nut that is shaped like corona), thistle plant, and *neem*, are auspicious and should be tied at the door-steps. They believe that this will ward away the corona. On April 5, Sunday, the Prime Minister made a request to the people to put off the lights at 9.00 PM for 9 minutes and light lamps, candles, etc. and drive away the darkness. People did not ignore the request and gave a sentimental value to it and lit lamps. The media also joined in the publicity.

On April 5, in Kullur village (Chamarajanagar District) a number of people cleaned their



homes in the evening, sprinkled cow urine both within and outside their homes, decorated the outer area with *rangoli*, had baths and lit lamps to drive away the coronavirus. Some of them were saying that Modi had asked people to light lamps. Some of them who had put off the electric lights in the evening did not switch them on again until the next day. In another house in Honganur, they have sprinkled water at the door-step, decorated with *rangoli* and have lit 9 lamps on the *rangoli*. A resident of the village, Radha, has said that the significance of the number 9 is that April is the 4th month and the date is 5. If you add 4 and 5, it becomes 9. This 9 is representing the '*navagraha*' (nine planets). Worshipping them will drive away the coronavirus. A resident of Doddamole has said in a WhatsApp message that by lighting

lamps the temperature will rise by 37 degrees and this will kill the coronavirus. We do not know whether this is true or false; but it has come to our notice that the lighting of lamps has been like a festival. In Chamarajanagar district, along with lighting lamps, people also lit crackers.

At a time when we should be looking at the Corona and its spread from a scientific perspective, superstition has raised its head. It is natural that people succumb to such beliefs in times of adversity. But the government should not encourage such instances. The clanging of vessels (which the Prime Minister suggested) and the lighting of lamps, etc. has only encouraged people's ignorance.

(With inputs from Mahendra)

EMPTYING THE VILLAGE: Villages in Mundargi taluk, Gadag District

H. B. Vaddatti

The global pandemic of the monstrous Covid-19 has created an unprecedented condition in the villages. All agricultural work has come to a standstill and each cultivator has become helpless and sits at home.

The coronavirus, born in China and spreading world-wide, has taken strides into small, remote villages in India. It has created confusion in the lives of the people. It is a tragedy in which someone has been punished for someone else's mistake.

Agriculture

The commercial agricultural produce grown by farmers is rotting in the farms without being sold. Important summer crops like the water melon, musk melon, *chikoo*, and plantains etc. that were grown in plenty are rotting in the farms as the commercial facility for selling is not available. Dealers are quoting exaggerated, low prices saying that they have no



request for the produce. Due to this, the farmers who have grown them have either buried them in the farms or are just distributing them to the neighbors. It is a tragic state that they are forced to leave them in the farms to rot. This has happened because the government is unable to manage these issues in times of emergencies.

Korahalli is a village in Mandaragi district. Though Imaam Sahib has grown plantains here on three acres of land, three lakhs rupees worth of plantains are rotting in the farm. If you calculate the expense that the farmer has incurred for growing them, one can estimate that he has lost nearly four lakhs with the expense of growing and the profit that he should have got. Nagaraj another farmer of the same village, has grown papaya in 3.5 acres of land spending 2 lakhs of rupees. Unfortunately due to heavy rain and strong wind, fifty percent of the trees collapsed. The other half that was harvested had no buyers and all the fruits rotted



in the farm. The farmer lost lakhs of rupees. A youth farmer, Vishwanath Gadda, of another village of Hesarur who had grown water melon in three acres of land, had to abandon the fruits in the farm due to falling prices. Hundreds of such stories are making the rounds in the villages. On the one hand it is due to nature's wrath and on the other hand it is due to the coronavirus. The crash of the market has put farming into an economic breakdown.

An interesting news is that in the village of Dambala, about a hundred farming families have left their village and are staying in their farm house or in an erected tent and are spending their days quietly working on their farms.

Migration

In every village, those who migrated to other places have gone through hell and returned to their villages. Roaming around in the villages has become very common for quite a few who have been home quarantined. About 15 percent of people have returned to their villages; and about ten thousand of them that have chosen to work away from their homes have been quarantined in Goa. They neither have work nor food. They are waiting to get back to their villages. People who have been locked down in Goa have been receiving food and grains from some ex-minister and legislators' society. The amounts of food grains that have been sent to them are hardly enough. This is more of a tragedy.

No work, no affordability

People are sitting at home without work both in cities and villages. Those who are dependent on daily wages to feed their families have absolute need for work. The Government is giving rations to every family. Though it has been announced that organizations and institutions will also help in distributing rations, there is always a doubt as to how long this can continue? Is it possible to satisfy the requirements of a family just by providing rations? Most importantly, the Dharmasthala Manjunatha Self-help groups have completely stopped their economic activities for three weeks.

Further, it is true that provisions and other items are being sold at high prices in the villages. When there is no work and no money how will people buy provisions and other necessities? For example, it has become compulsory to pay Rs. 10 more for each item. One kilogram of jaggery that costs Rs. 40 is sold at Rs. 50. Vegetables and provisions cost extra 10 rupees

per kilogram. Though the rations take their own time to arrive at the shops, it has been a blessing in the life of the people.

CORONA THAT SENT MIGRANTS BACK TO THEIR ROOTS: Nagavalli, Chamarajanagar District

Sundaramma and P. Veerabhadranaika



The lockdown has made lakhs of migrant workers return to their native villages and places. People belonging to Nagavalli village who had migrated to Bangalore and Mysore have returned back to their village after the 'Lockdown'. There are about 2,400 families in this place. Of these, either one member or some members (son, daughter-

in-law, daughter, husband-wife & children) have migrated to cities for the sake of work. Some of the people who have migrated from Nagavalli to the towns and cities usually work in factories, garment shops, hotels, bakeries, garages, repair shops etc. Some sell food such as *pani-puri* on the roads or work as drivers. Quite a few of them possess two-wheelers, trucks and second-hand cars.

As migrants they were able to send their respective families about Rs.5000 to Rs.10,000 per month for household expenses and agricultural work. They were also able to build houses and help with wedding expenses to the tune of one to two lakhs. In many cases, the men work in the cities and the wives and children stay behind in the villages. The fathers support the education of these children. When children send monetary support to their parents in the village, the parents send millet flour, rice, cereals, *sambhar* powder, etc. from their homes to the children's homes in the city. During festivals these migrants would return to their respective villages.

Now they are 'locked down' in their village and suddenly there are major changes in their interactions and life in the village. Though the 'lockdown' has given an opportunity for the family to spend time together, some differences between parents and children, and in the behaviour of men and women can be observed. Bored and restless, some of the migrant men have taken to gambling and are losing money and have even taken loans to gamble. One of the parents reported that a week ago, a loan of Rs.70,000 was taken from an organization by the family out of which the son spent Rs.2000-Rs.3000 in a day in gambling, totally losing Rs.30,000. They said that the father is unable to say anything to the son.

Women, who were working either in garment shops or factories, are now confined to the house with housework and have started gossiping with neighbours. Sometimes they watch TV. Some of the youth have started playing games like cricket and are wandering around without face masks. They are not even following social distancing.

A number of boys are getting together in streets and cooking food and eating. If people question them, they say that they have no problems and no fear of 'Corona'. Migrants who have come back home are using the millets, grains and cereals that were stored in their homes and most do not have any problems accessing food. Some of them who were doing some work are now forced to stay home and this has created some psychological problems. So, they spend most of their time on their mobiles and play online games.



Migrant workers who have got used to working in cities are anxious to return. They are not interested in staying back in the villages to work in the farms. But only 50 percent of the migrant labourers may get their work back. The other 50 percent of them are caught in a dilemma and may be forced to stay back in their villages. There is a necessity to re-skill them so that they can get some employment in the villages itself.

One thing that has to be observed is the gender bias. When women return, they get busy with housework, converse with neighbours and seem quite normal. Men are unable to get back to village life and are quite dissatisfied with their lot.

THE PLIGHT OF A VILLAGE DURING THE 'LOCK DOWN': Linganapura, Ramanagara District

Kaveri Das

About one thousand people live in Linganapura village, which is a part of Ramanagara District. Among them, some of them are daily wage workers. Some of them are construction labourers and some are tree-cutters. The youth and the women of the area work in cardboard factories in nearby Harohalli and some are menial labourers in the cooker, doll making and ice-cream factories. They receive an average salary of about Rs. 7000 or 8000 per month.

Some of the people of this village cultivate small agricultural plots. They do not totally depend on agriculture. They just grow some millets and legumes for their own requirement. They are totally dependent on daily wages and factory labour.

Presently with the 'lockdown' they are unable to do any work. The factories have declared 'lock down' and they have not received any salary. They should have at least given them half the salary; but no; they have not given them anything of that sort. Further, as there is no work, they are forced to spend their time at home. Almost fifty percent of them are very poor and are totally dependent on their daily wages. As no work is available they are almost starving as they have no money for food.

None of the benefits that the government has announced have reached these villages. Moreover, from the time 'Lock Down' has been announced, rations have not come to the ration shops. The pension for old age that is given to senior citizens and which was supposed to be given for three months has also not reached them. None of them have received any of the benefits that the government has announced. Currently, they are forced to take loans with interest for their living.



There are no provision stores in this village. They have to travel five kilometres to Maralavadi to buy provisions. Right now, some of the people from the neighbouring villages are selling a few vegetables that they have grown. This is only once in three days. As a result they get only a few vegetables, that too for high prices.

There are no health centres in this village. If they encounter any health problems, they have to go all the way to a hospital at Maralavadi. It is not easy to take the patients there. Added to this, proper medications are not available in this Government Hospital. The patients have to pay more and get them from the medical shops. In the current situation, they are trying to take home medicines and get some first aid within their homes.

Neither the Village *Panchayat* members nor the representatives responsible for this village are bothered about the problems. They have not even bothered to ask for certain commodities that are supposed to be supplied by the government. Further, they have not taken any trouble to take precautions for the emergency regarding the Corona pandemic. The drains in the village are filled with putrid matter and the elected representatives of the village have not taken any action to get them cleaned. The continuous rain that has lashed for the past three to four days is the right time for ploughing the farms. But, no tractors are available. Even if they are available, the cost is too high and small farmers cannot afford them. They have no money and they are in great trouble.

In case they have any bank work, they have to go to the UCO Bank at Maralavadi. This is the only bank available in the hobli. Presently, some people have received Rs.500 deposited

into their account from the central Jan Dhan Yojana; but they have not been able to withdraw the money from the bank as there are no transport facilities to go to the bank. As there is only one bank in the hobli, quite a number of people from all around will have to gather together near the bank which is presently not possible and is dangerous.

Recently when Modi requested people to light lamps, people had spread rumours that lighting the lamp and doing *poojas* will kill the corona virus. Quite a number of people have done this. During difficult times like these, spreading of false rumours and superstitious beliefs will push these village people into more problems.

The most important thing is that almost 50 percent of the people in the village are poor and they have exhausted their rations. They have been borrowing money as loans from their neighbours. Quite a few of them have been generous enough to lend. In the present situation people who are lending could also become bankrupt. Now, the government should at least provide the poor with what is required for their daily food.

There are first generation learners who have been to high school and done their PUC. Due to poverty, about 75 percent of them have discontinued their studies, and have started working in factories. Only three-four of them are able to continue their degree and post-graduation studies on a part time basis. The students of this village do not have proper internet connections and mobile phones and are unable to participate in the online classes.

Only a limited number of people migrated to the towns from this village and therefore those who have returned are also very few. This is the picture of our village Linganapura.
