

The Idea of Self-reliance and its Impact on Socio-economic Conditions of Migrant Laborers

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Abstract

This article is based on an ICSSR sponsored project where attempt was made to comprehensively approach the idea of self-reliance from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The first part of the article undertakes a theoretical overview of the idea of self-reliance and the second part ventures to study the impact of different schemes of ABA on migrant laborers during and after the pandemic. This has been done through a field study of seven different industrial areas of Delhi-NCR region of which four fall in Delhi, two in Uttar Pradesh, and one in Gurugram, Haryana. The field visit and data collection in various industries of Delhi-NCR region was conducted from 15 July to 15 September 2021.

Keywords: Aatmanirbharata, Narendra Modi, Self-reliance, Migrants, Laborers, Covid-19

Introduction

Self-reliance is an apt response to contemporary economic challenges especially in the backdrop of the Corona crisis as it creates windows for sustainable development models and improves the socio-economic conditions of migrant laborers. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, we were a society that increasingly developed a sense of social definition through dependency. The Covid-19 pandemic has invoked the relationship between the 'Self' and 'Labor'. As the social was distanced, there was a concomitant discovery of the Individual and a revival of that worn-out cliché, discovering *oneself*.² In an increasingly globalised world, the pandemic has revived the concept of 'self-reliance' which makes a strong foundation for future growth and also provide durable localized solutions to various challenges. One of the first steps to developing self-reliance is appreciating one's own character, sensing self-worth, accepting own uniqueness, and

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building confidence in one's own values. Self-reliance culminates in problem solving, decision making, positivity and happiness, self-acceptance, local epistemology, and unique perspectives. The concept of self-reliance has a special significance in democracy as George Kateb called self-reliance a "philosophy of democratic individuality" and "the soil and fruit flower of modern democracy."³ It is usually considered an ethical disposition that encourages democratic institutions and ways of life in a democracy.

The Idea of Self-reliance

The idea of self-reliance can be understood in the historical context of Swadeshi. Gandhi considered Swadeshi as a constructive program. The word 'Swadeshi' is the conjunction of two Sanskrit words, 'swa' which means self or own, 'desh' which means country; hence *swadeshi*, the adjective form, refers to that which is of one's own country. The idea of Swadeshi was a defence of the national economy against the colonial economy, found in the writings of Dadabhai Naoroji, MG Ranade, and Bipin Chandra Pal. The Partition of Bengal in 1905 created widespread agitation in the country, which marked the beginning of the Swadeshi movement followed by a boycott of British-made goods. On 7 August 1905, with the passage of the boycott resolution at a massive meeting held in Calcutta Town Hall, the formal proclamation of the Swadeshi movement was made.⁴ The Swadeshi movement paved the way ahead of the Indian National Movement towards its ultimate climax in 1947 i.e., Independence of India.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the foundation of Swadeshi is three-fold i.e. self-respect, self-realization, and self-reliance. He described swadeshi as a 'law of laws'⁵ ingrained in the basic nature of human beings. It is a universal law. Like nature's law, it needs no enacting. It is a self-acting one. When one neglects or disobeys it due to ignorance or other reasons, the law takes its own course to restore to the original position like the laws of nature. According to Gandhi, *swadharma* in Gita interpreted in terms of one's physical environment gives us the Law of Swadeshi. Gandhi quotes Gita "It is best to die performing one's own duty or swadharma. Para dharma or another's duty, is fraught

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with danger”.⁶ Swadeshi means reliance on our own strength. Our strength means the strength of our body, mind, and soul. As rightly quoted by Gandhi, “The Soul is supreme and therefore soul-force is the foundation in which man must build”.⁷ Gandhi, thus defined swadeshi as the “spirit in us which restricts us to the use and services of our immediate, to the exclusion of the more remote”.⁸

The concept of Swadeshi has a strong base in the functioning of RSS. The founder of RSS Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar endorsed cultural nationalism and Swadeshi as the keys to regaining glorious Bharat. The Sangh defines progression as an individual development that brings a change in society and later leads to a complete change i.e. ‘*Vyakti Parivartan -Samaj Parivartan Samagrah Parivartan*’.⁹ After Independence, RSS encouraged the use of local goods and Indian craftsmanship by selling them in their shops (*Sangh Vastu Bhandars*)¹⁰ and also followed the principle of using locally made things for their survival. The current RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has repeatedly emphasised that the ‘Swadeshi model of economic development’ does not mean isolation, but equal say in international economic affairs.¹¹ RSS has shown belief in the new model of development based on self-reliance and on the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. In his annual address on Vijayadashami (foundation day of RSS) in 2020, Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of RSS emphasized the core issues like Hindutva, Swadeshi, and family values. As on the pandemic period, he primarily focuses on three things - Seva, Swadeshi, and Swavalamban (Self-reliant).¹² Similarly, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) also looks at Swadeshi from the perspective of the sustainable economic model. It works on the philosophy that capitalism solely rests on the market and state as the twin socio-economic delivery systems. According to SJM, Swadeshi restores economics to its basic definition practical human needs, frugality, savings, thrift, etc., and seeks to remove the latter-day distortion of defining economics as multiplication of wants and efforts to satisfy them powered by greed. Professor Ashwani Mahajan,¹³ the co-convenor of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, emphasized the increasing number of dependencies in the past few years that had led to sudden imbalance during the pandemic crisis, as none of the countries had imagined such a huge crisis.¹⁴ Therefore,

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the pandemic enhanced the importance of self-reliance both at the Individual and public levels. In the interview dated May 30, 2021, Professor Mahajan had suggested three steps that the government should follow to refuel the economy: To ensure the livelihood of people working in small and large-scale industries; State should provide working capital to MSMEs through interest-free loans; Large scale industries should be provided employment-linked subsidies.

Swadeshi remained the soul of the philosophy and vision of Jan Sangh too. Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder and first president of Bhartiya Jan Sangh, envisioned 'self-reliant' Bharat by promoting Swadeshi. The economic model of Jan Sangh for progressive Bharat, became the inspiration of BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a jumbo package of Rs 20 lakh crore called Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (ABA) on 12 May 2020. The package had five primary targets - business sector including Micro, Small, and Medium enterprises; poor, including migrants and farmers; agriculture sector, including animal husbandry and fisheries; new horizons of growth; and government reforms and enablers. In the first phase, policy reforms mainly include Rs 3 lakh crore Emergency Working Capital Facility for businesses, including MSME. The ABA rests on the Gandhian philosophy of decentralized localism wherein local or small-scale industries are given an important role in economic development. IIPA Director SN Tripathi,¹⁵ thus described the transition in government's policies - From Darwin to Moksha; from individual benefit to the community benefit; individual 'self' to the 'nation self'; from Maslow to Mahatma Gandhi; from self-actualization to self-realization; from Marx to Mahatma Gandhi; from the obsession of continuous struggle to value one's own needs or labor. He also mentioned three factors - Samaj which implies inclusive revolution; Sarkar which implies policy implementation; and Bazar which implies maintaining the demand-supply ratio. Thus, he strongly appreciated the changes adopted by the government in policy framing and executing it.

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers were precarious in India. The entire world faced an unprecedented crisis and lingering uncertainty with innumerable deaths, economic depression, and unemployment. Quarantine, complete lockdown, and travel ban (both internal and external) were imposed as necessary measures to tackle the spread of the pandemic. In India, most of the migrant labourers are from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal who arrive in industrial and metropolitan areas in search of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. In the 2011 census, about 37% of India's total population was categorised as internal migrants.

Study of Socio-economic Conditions of Migrant Laborers

To study the impact of ABA on migrant labourers, street vendors and small industry owners a survey study was conducted in the months of July, August, and September 2021 in seven different locations of Delhi-NCR. In the study, field investigators interacted with labourers, street vendors and small industry owners of different industrial areas and in the associated residential areas. The living and working conditions at these units were studied as part of this project. A set of relevant questionnaires were prepared for the purpose of this study and responses were sought from subjects. The data was collected through questionnaires and focused group discussion (FGD).

Earlier, research assistant and project coordinators also interacted with journalists, scholars, professors and social activists associated with subject. The data and observations collected during field visits were duly recorded and analyzed. The data was examined in light of the interviews of experts, activists, labourers, street vendors, and owners in the industrial area and finally, a report was prepared including all the findings.

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In the Greater Noida Industrial Area, as a part of the survey, 106 people were interviewed out of which 14 were owners, 16 were street vendors and 76 were industry labourers. The purpose of the survey was to measure the impact of these popular schemes and to gauge if the benefits could reach the target population amidst the corona pandemic. It was found that factory owners, labourers, and street vendors had faced intense socio-economic problems. The factory owners were facing lack of availability of labourers in the market, reduction in income by up to 50%-80%, loss of business, lack of resources, break in supply chain, and reduced purchasing power parity (PPP). The field study revealed limitations of Employment Credit Guarantee Loan Scheme (ECGLS), tough policy norms, documentation barriers, and red-tape on the banking end. Similarly, the survey showed that street vendors faced complete loss of income and were entirely dependent on PMGKY for ration. At the same time most had not received benefits of SvaNidhi yojana and could not find easy loans from banks. As a result many had to shift to ventures like tea stalls, vegetable and fruit stalls, and small food stall. The labourers resorted to en masse exodus due to the shutdown of factories and workplaces and continued to live in distress because of family responsibilities, debt, job loss, or reduced wages. Salary of most migrant labourers had reduced by 20% to 50% while some had not received any wages during the pandemic.

Among the total respondents at industrial area of Greater Noida, 91.5% were male and 8.5% were female. The data includes 39.6% of people from OBC communities, 33% from general categories, 24.5% from scheduled caste (SC) community, and 2.9% belonging to the scheduled tribe (ST) community. Out of the total respondents, 59.40% of workers were receiving less than Rs 12,000/month and 40.6% were receiving more than Rs 12,000/month. As per the study, 55.7% of respondents had migrated to their hometown and 44.3% opted not to migrate to their native place. During the pandemic, 69.8% lost their job completely and 30.2% managed to retain their jobs with salary cuts or were provided basic amenities by the owners or employers.

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When asked about the ABA, 77.4% respondents said they heard about the programme launched by the Prime Minister. Further, field survey revealed that 72.6% of respondents had Aadhar cards as well as ration cards to avail the benefits of schemes. Under PMGKY 54.7% of respondents received benefit while 45.3% had not received any benefit. In the areas under study, 29.2% of respondents said that they had either tried to become self-reliant by starting their own business or had at least thought of taking a step in that direction. As per the survey 18.9% of respondents had either started their own business or knew someone who had started their business or tried to become self-reliant. Under the provision of direct financial assistance, 92.5% of the respondents said that they had not received any financial assistance directly while 7.5% had received funds from the central government in the form of Krishi loan, COVID relief fund, PM Aawas Yojna, etc. Under the SvaNidhi Yojna, 100% street vendors said that they had not received any financial assistance from the government. Under One Nation, One Ration card schemes, 89.6% of respondents had not received any benefit while 10.4% of respondents said they were receiving the benefits under this same. Under ARHC schemes, 99.1% of labourers and street vendors had not received any benefit while 0.9% said they had availed of the scheme. Responding to questions related to loans availed by business owners under ABA, 97.2% said they had not received any form of the loan under ABA yojna while 2.8% of the business owners said they had received the same under Covid relief fund allocated for MSME sectors. On PM Rojgar Yojana, 97.2% of the respondents said that they had not received any benefits while 2.8% said that they were receiving the benefits from the factory. In response to the direct support from the state government, 15.1% said they had received support from the state government and 84.9% said they had not received any benefits. Regarding insurance cover, 63.20% of respondents had availed some type of insurance either health insurance or life insurance. 40.60% of owners, labourers, and street vendors were vaccinated either with the first dose or second dose as per the survey conducted in the month of July-August, 2021. On the question seeking their opinion on whether the conditions had improved with government intervention at various levels, 48.10% said that the condition had improved with government aid.

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In the Shastri Nagar and Shehzadabagh Industrial area of North West Delhi, a total of 102 interviews were conducted out of which 15 were with factory owners, 67 with factory workers/labourers and 20 with street vendors. Some of the challenges faced by them were - loss of income, debt, problem in securing loans, inaccessibility to schemes. Most of the street vendors and factory workers relied upon others for food, money, and fulfilment of basic amenities. Out of the total respondents who participated in the survey in this industrial area, 2% were females. Around 70.6% of respondents lost their jobs during the pandemic and around 29.4% continued with their jobs in the industrial sectors in one way or the other. A total of 83.3% of respondents said that their salaries were cut during the lockdown. Nearly around 63.7% of respondents knew about ABA. Under PMGKY, 55.9% of respondents had received ration. Similarly, 44.1% of respondents had received direct benefits of the One Nation, One Ration card scheme. On the question of support from the State Government, 37.3% of respondents stated that they had received support from the state government. Given various measures undertaken by the government, 26.5% of respondents believed their conditions had improved due to government intervention at different levels.

As a part of the survey in the Ballabgarh Industrial area, 100 people were interviewed out of which 9 were owners, 15 were street vendors and 76 were industry labourers. Out of these, a total of 7% were female and 93% of the workers were male. Out of 100 interviewees, 9% were factory owners, 39% were permanent workers, 36% were contract workers, 15% were daily wage earners, and 1% others. On the question of job loss 45% said they had lost jobs while 55% were able to retain their jobs during the pandemic. Out of the total respondents, 86% said that they heard about the ABA scheme launched by the PM. About 52% of the respondents said they had faced salary cuts. In the survey, 27% of respondents said that they had tried to become self-reliant by starting some business or thought of starting the same. Under the 'One Nation One Ration', 43% of respondents said they had received the benefits of the scheme. On the question of acquiring loans, 90% of the owners responded that they had not received any form of loan while 10% of business owners had received the same. Under PMGKY,

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67% of respondents had got ration. On the question of whether conditions had improved because of the government intervention, 85% of respondents said the condition had improved.

In the Burari Industrial Area of North East Delhi, the total data collected in the field survey was 107 out of which the labourers numbered 86, street vendors were 11 and the owners were 10. Out of 107 samples collected, most of the workers belong to the OBC category i.e. 50%, General - 33%, SC - 16%, and ST category 1%. Of the total respondents, 65.42% said they had lost their jobs and 34.58% had retained their jobs. The percentage of interviewees who had heard about ABA was 50.47%. 99% of the respondents said that they had tried to become self-reliant either by starting their own venture or at least planning the same. Under SvaNidhi Yojana, 45.95% of the street vendors responded that they had received benefits under this scheme while 54.55% had not received any benefit under this scheme. Interestingly, 71% of respondents said that they were receiving the benefits of the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme. The outreach of the state seemed to have reached the intended as 79% of the respondents said they had received support from the state government. In this industrial area, the responses were mixed when asked about the betterment of the situation and 54.21% of workers responded that the condition has improved.

In the Okhla industrial area, the respondents included 55.10% from General category, 36.70% from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 8.30% from Scheduled Caste (SC) and none from Scheduled Tribe (ST). Out of the total respondents, 82.50% said they had lost their jobs during the pandemic while 17.50% continued with their jobs. A total of 76.50% of respondents said that their salaries had been cut. Out of them, 58.20% were permanent workers in different factories, 18.40% were daily wage workers in factories, 7.10% of them worked on contracts, 11.20% were owners of the factories and 5.10% had other sources of income. A total of 46.90% of respondents said they had heard about ABA whereas 53.10% were not familiar with the term. Under PMGKY, 88.20% of respondents had received ration. Under the SvaNidhi none of the

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street vendor had received benefits. 21.10% of respondents had received direct benefits of the One Nation, One Ration card scheme. None of the respondents had availed loans under the ABA scheme. On the question of whether they have received support from the State Government, 3.50% of respondents said that they had received support whereas 96.50% said they had not received any support. On the question of improvement in the situation, 90.10% of respondents believed their conditions have been improved due to government intervention.

In the Gurugram Industrial Area, the data was collected through interviews with 113 labourers working in the different industries, 4 street vendors, and 4 factory owners. Out of the total, 36.30% of respondents were from the unreserved category, 40.70% were from the OBC category, 18.60% were from Scheduled caste, and 4.40% were from the Scheduled tribe category. On the question of salary, 38.10% of the respondent labourers said they get a salary above 12000/ month, whereas 61.90% of the respondents said they managed their livelihood at a salary less than 12000/month. While 92% of the respondent labourers are working on a contract basis, only 8% are working as daily laborers. On the issue of job loss, 19% of the respondents said that they lost their job during the pandemic, 94% of the respondents said they did not lose their job during that lockdown period, but they faced the salary cut during that time. On ABA, 13.30% of the respondents said that they know or had heard about the program. When asked about the various measures by governments, 51% of the respondents asserted that the things were managed effectively by the government in the crisis time, with controlled rate of food items, timely delivery of the ration, maintenance of strict protocols, the government did its best, and the government officials can easily reach them for their help.

The last industrial area that was a part of the study was Wazirpur industrial area in North Delhi district. As a part of the survey in this area, 109 people were interviewed out of which 4 were owners, 9 were street vendors and 96 were factory labourers. Out of these, 29% of interviewees were females and 71%, male. If we go through the

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participation of workers then 39.45% respondents belonged to the General category, 39.45% belonged to OBC, and 21.10% belonged to the SC category, none of them were from ST category. On the question of job loss, 79.09% of respondents said they had lost their job while only 20.91% were able to retain their jobs during the pandemic. Around 84.55% of the responding workers said they had faced salary cuts while 15.45% said they did not face salary cuts in anyways. On the ABA scheme, 67.27% of respondents said that they had heard about the ABA. Under PMGKY, 74.55% of respondents got ration. In this industrial area, 30.30% of respondents said that they had tried to become self-reliant. The benefits of SvaNidhi Yojana eluded beneficiaries with 95% of responding street vendors saying they had not received any benefits under the scheme while 5% said they had benefited from the same. Under 'One Nation One Ration', 44% of responding labourers said they had received the benefits of the scheme. On the question of receiving the various loans, 86.24% of the owners responded that they had not received any form of the loan while 13.76% of the business owners had received the same. The responses were mixed on the question of improvement of condition because of government intervention with 59.63% respondents saying the condition had improved.

Findings of the Study

As a part of the overall survey, 743 people were interviewed across Delhi-NCR regions out of which 67 were owners, 93 were street vendors and 583 were industry laborers i.e. 9%, 13%, and 78% respectively. Further, the interview consisted of both males and females i.e. 90% and 10% respectively, and there was no presence of third gender. The data was collected cutting across religion, race, sex, caste, birth, and creed as a total number of participants consisted of General - 48%, OBC (Other Backward Class) - 36%, SC (Scheduled Caste) – 11%, and ST (Scheduled Tribes) – 5%. The survey was based on various schemes launched under Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in year 2020. The purpose of the survey was to check the impact of these schemes in the selected areas and to gauge how far people were able to

avail the intended benefits amidst the corona pandemic. A detailed discussion was also conducted by the field surveyors with the respondents during the course of the interviews. The survey aimed to evaluate accessibility and reach targets of the Aatmanirbhar Abhiyan relief packages.

An overview of the study across all regions shows that 62.58% respondents said they had lost their jobs during the pandemic while 37.42% had retained their jobs. On the question of salary cut, 65.87% of overall respondents said they had faced deduction in salary and 34.13% said the salary had remained the same. With regard to awareness about ABA, 67.63% of respondents said that they had heard about the umbrella program while 32.37% responded in negative. Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) 70.29% respondents said they had received ration while 29.71% respondents said they had not received the same. The figures reveal the awareness and success of specific schemes among migrant laborers in the areas of survey.

On the question of whether they tried to become self-reliant or not, 54.7% of respondents said they had tried to become self-reliant in the pandemic time while 45.3% had not tried in any way. The reach of SvaNidhi scheme showed limited impact in the areas under survey as 92.79% of responding street vendors had not received any benefit under the scheme and 7.21% of respondent street vendors said that they had received the benefits.

One Nation, One Ration Card was another key scheme launched under ABA. In the areas under this survey this scheme showed limited impact as 62.24% of responding labourers said they had not received any benefit under it.

In the Covid-19 pandemic, one sector that had been affected severely was Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSME). Under the ABA scheme, the MSME sectors had received due attention with several provisions of loans for small to large-scale owners. However, the schemes like ECGL seem to have made little headway in the areas under this survey as 96.21% of respondents said that they had not received any form of credit under ABA.

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With regard to receiving support from the state government, the responses were mixed as 50.21% of respondents said that they have received some benefits from the state government while 49.79% respondents had not received any benefits. The corona pandemic has posed a serious challenge to everyone in the country and both central and state governments intervened during this period on multiple fronts. With regard to the improvement of condition with government aid, 52.32% of respondents said that despite the government interventions at various levels, the situation had not improved for people; 47.68% of respondents praised the government intervention and said that the life of the people had improved with the intervention.

Due to complete lockdown in the months of April to June in 2020, partial lockdown in the following months, and surge of second wave in the months of April to May 2021, the life of business owners, labourers, and street vendors was hit in a massive way. Lack of availability of labour was one of the major fallouts of the pandemic which deeply affected business and industries. Due to lockdown in the entire country, most labourers moved towards their hometowns or native villages resulting in complete unavailability of labourers in the market. This seriously affected the production cycle in factories. For around 4-5 months during the lockdown, factories faced complete shutdown and later limited operations during partial lockdown which affected the income of the owners severely. The income of the owners, therefore, reduced by around 50% to 80% on average. Some business owners closed their factories entirely because of business loss, unavailability of labourers in the market, lack of resources, break in supply chains and lack purchasing power parity (PPP) of people.

Under the ABA some of the major recommendations include Schemes like Employment Credit Guarantee Loan Scheme (ECGLS). These schemes carry great potential to relieve the economic burdens created by the pandemic and should be made more effective and popular as the survey revealed that most industry owners were either unaware or unwilling to avail benefits under this scheme. The government should take necessary measures such as opening help desks and organizing campaigns so that people can get the benefit of these schemes. People are wary of seeking loans from

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banks due to perceived lengthy documentation involved and difficulties posed by the banking system. Steps should be taken to mitigate such a perception and making banking and availing of loans under schemes easy for beneficiaries.

The lockdown triggered a massive exodus of migrant labourers due to the shutdown of factories and the workplace. They faced mental trauma because of the devastating corona pandemic as they lost their source of earning, lost their family members, trapped in debt and even daily survival became challenging. Millions of labourers moved to their hometown due to gaping insecurities about life, livelihood, shelter etc. Since the cloud of the corona pandemic has not yet dissipated completely, the government should take necessary measures to get rid of the fear related to livelihood and introduce policy in this regard.

Schemes like Prime Minister Rozgar Yojna (PMRY) and SvaNidhi have shown limited reach so far with most people remaining untouched. These measures should be prioritized through aggressive outreach and campaigns for target beneficiaries. Government can coordinate with states to reach out to maximum people through awareness programs, camps, advertisements, and volunteers. The initiatives undertaken by the government of India under Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan are very important for the revival of India's economy and progress particularly in the backdrop of the current pandemic that has forced the world to stand still and brought unforeseen problems. It was observed that the liquidity infusion and direct cash transfers into the accounts of labourers and daily-wage earners was helpful for their survival during the lockdown. The relief package had been a great assistance during the severe challenges faced by the factory owners and labourers when economic activities at a standstill.

The objective of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan is to reach every migrant labourer, street vendor and small industry owner. So, efforts should be undertaken to make policies more effective and penetrative. Long-term intervention strategies for addressing migrant labor issues encompass multifaceted approaches. Implementing a universal registration system upon arrival in destination states, issuing a Universally Valid Shramik Card/Number, ensures access to government entitlements and facilitates

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monitoring of migrant numbers. Eradicating labor market segregation by integrating formal and informal sectors reduces vulnerability to exploitation. Direct employee-employer relationships should replace intermediary roles, with a review of middlemen's functions in sectors where they persist. Mainstreaming migrant workers involves providing social, legal, and occupational security, including healthcare benefits. Encouraging rural employment through small industry support aims to deter migration. Furthermore, relief measures like the funding of Rs 40000 crore in the MNREGA, increasing wages from Rs 187 to Rs 202 per day, ¹⁶ and investing in agriculture infrastructure offer immediate assistance. Initiatives like the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan provide job opportunities, recognizing migrants as assets rather than burdens.

Experts like Dr. Debojit Jha¹⁷ emphasize the pivotal role of research and development (R&D) in the MSME sector to foster innovation and address workforce challenges. They advocate for collaboration between large corporate sectors and small-scale industries to enhance product quality and competitiveness. Similarly, Pankaj Jagannath Jaiswal¹⁸ suggests considering R&D as the foundation of development policy and promoting a shift in societal attitudes towards work and skill development. Dr. Nivedita Haran¹⁹ highlights the importance of migrants being able to earn sufficiently in their hometowns and securing job tenure, while emphasizing the need for better leadership and government intervention to ensure laborer welfare. Niranjana Sahoo²⁰ emphasizes combining government schemes with societal factors to mitigate ground-level mismanagement and invest in sectors that increase opportunities for marginalized communities. Dr. Ajit Kumar Jha²¹ focuses on the importance of skilled mapping of migrant workers and urges state governments to be more cooperative in addressing workforce challenges and reducing dependence on external labor markets.

The schemes under the ABA umbrella programme should not be considered only as stop-gap measures to reverse the economic impact of Covid-19 but should be pursued as a core long-term policy. If pursued with the right gusto and spirit this can be a step towards long-term revolutionary development unbiased, and sustainable in nature.

Dr. Swadesh Singh (October 2022). The Idea of Self-reliance and its Impact on Socio-economic Conditions of Migrant Laborers

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- ¹⁸ Pankaj Jaiswal is an Author, blog writer at Times of India.
- ¹⁹ Dr. Haran retired as the Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Home Affairs, Government of Kerala, India. <https://in.linkedin.com/in/nivedita-haran-9909a010>
- ²⁰ Niranjan Sahoo, PhD, is a Senior Fellow with ORF’s Governance and Politics Initiative.
- ²¹ Dr. Jha is an Assistant Professor at the Institute for studies in Industrial Development.