

# The [People's Archive of Rural India](#)

## Covid-19 series – 100 as of June 29, 2020

These are stories from Ladakh and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Bengal and Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, AP and Telangana, Chhattisgarh, UP, Bihar and Haryana, Kerala and Karnataka – and from migrant labourers on the highways and at the entrance of villages they're returning to.

They're about migrant labourers, of course, but also recognise and cover the impact of the lockdown on the many delicately interwoven economies of rural India - weavers, toymakers, other artisans and craftspeople, farmers, boatmen, labourers urban and rural, sugarcane-cutters, sanitation workers, displaced labourers, cancer patients from rural areas lying on the footpaths outside Mumbai's major hospitals, nomadic pastoralists, daily wagers, folk artists, fisherfolk, barbers, brick kiln workers from Odisha, harmonium repairers from Madhya Pradesh, Dalits and Adivasis in various occupations.....

Since PARI covers all these groups, especially migrant labourers (we have a huge section on our site ("The rural in the urban") 365 days a year - and didn't just discover rural India's problems on March 25, we think this is a collection you would like to keep handy - for reading, reference, and circulation.

- **The 80 pieces you see listed first include PARI's field reports, livelihood impact stories, photo essays, videos and more.**
- **About 13 of the 100 pieces listed below are songs, poems, paintings – sparked by the situation brought on by the lockdown. They overlap with the 80 above**
- **As many as 20 are Resources, reports, laws, documents relevant to the lockdown period published in the PARI Library**

80 of these 100 can be found on the masterpage for Covid-19/lockdown coverage: [Covering the Human Cost of Covid-19](#). The remaining 20 can be found in the PARI Library.

**I know 100 is a lot – so suggestions for a quick glance at 12 articles/stories, 3 songs/poems and 3 resources on the PARI Library**

Twelve articles/stories	Three songs, poems and paintings of 13 published	Three vital resources of 20 published on the PARI Library
No. 77: <a href="#">Lockdown has hit UP women hard – literally</a> , by Jigyasa Mishra	No. 50: <a href="#">The long march of the locked-down migrants</a>	<a href="#">COVID-19 induced Lockdown- How is the Hinterland Coping?</a>
No. 67. <a href="#">Cash crops, Covid and the cost of unsold cotton</a> by Jaideep Hardikar	No. 44. <a href="#">Locked down with blood on the tracks</a> – with "Who?," a poem by Pratishtha Pandya and two paintings by Labani Jangi.	<a href="#">ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition</a>
No. 30 <a href="#">ASHAs: fighting a pandemic with no protection</a> by Pallavi Prasad	No. 27 <a href="#">Bags on their heads, fear in their hearts</a> by Gokul GK,	<a href="#">Declaration of Alma-Ata</a>
No. 4 <a href="#">Sanitation workers - the wages of ingratitude</a> By PARI Fellow M. Palani Kumar		
No. 73. <a href="#">Dealing with dissonance, restoring harmony</a> , by Ira Deulgaonkar		

No. 46: <a href="#">Locked-down schoolgirls: no basic needs, period</a> by Jigyasa Mishra		
No.55 <a href="#">Panvel to MP: four days and nights on a scooter</a> by Parth M.N.		
No. 35 <a href="#">Locked into the kilns, brick by brick</a> by Varsha Bhargavi		
No. 63: <a href="#">Rising dust, itchy skin, sweat-soaked masks</a> by Harinath Rao Nagulavancha		
No. 48: <a href="#">Jamlo's journey along a locked-down road</a> by Purusottam Thakur and Kamlesh Painkra		
No. 25 <a href="#">Lockdown burden on little shoulders in Latur</a> by PARI intern Ira Deulgaonkar		
No. 9 <a href="#">Locked down with cancer on Mumbai footpaths</a> by Aakanksha		

**No. 80: [Schoolkids: digital divide to digital partition](#) By Parth M.N.**



A very important story that looks at how the rush to ‘online education’ is playing out on the ground among poor communities in rural Maharashtra. How it enhances already major existing inequalities – moving towards what schoolteacher Bhau Chaskar calls a – digital partition. Only 1 in 6 people in rural Maharashtra have the ability to use the internet. With women, that’s 1 in 11. And not too many households have a smartphone. If they do, there are

serious problems of costs, network, and power supply. The chances of children at the primary school level owning or having access to are very few, especially in a poor tribal area like Talasari in Palghar district. Parth met and spoke to students, teachers, parents in Talasari and to experts elsewhere. He weaves their stories with solid data from the NSS and state Economic Survey. He finds that even kids who do have smartphones and access, can’t wait to go back to school – but that’s another story.

An authentic story from the field, tackling questions that get sharper by the day.

**No. 79: [Songs of love for the migrant away from home](#) by Namita Waikar and the PARI GSP Team.**



While the media discovered migrant labourers on March 26, they’ve actually been around much longer. And they have also fled Mumbai in the past. Like after the 1896-97 bubonic plague outbreak when, in just 5-6 years, nearly half the population of Mumbai – mostly migrant labourers – left the city. This beautiful instalment of the Grindmill Songs Project that Namita brings to us well, accompanied by a gently appealing video edited by Sinchita Maji, is so connected and relevant for the migrant crisis. Looking at the migrants not with the selfishness of those who have lost their services, but with the tenderness of those whose loved ones have moved far away. Like the words in these decades-old *ovi* sung by Muktabai Ubhe in Pune’s Mulshi Taluka....

*We didn’t get a good harvest this year  
O woman, my husband has gone to a faraway place [in search of work]  
He has gone far away, leaving me alone  
There is no one to care for him there  
Dear husband, your eyes shine like the lustre of pearls  
Dear husband, your skin is the colour of javas flowers*

The whole feature is compelling.

**No. 78: [In TN: memories of pox, plague, and pandemics](#) by Aparna Karthikeyan.**



An extraordinary story, so well-written, based on an interview with Tamil writer Cho Dharman. Villages in south Tamil Nadu, as he points out, have dealt with epidemics and pandemics earlier, too. And he points to striking similarities between the response of villagers to earlier crises – and of our own responses to the coronavirus of the present day. At the same time, he also points to the differences in the nature and level of community spirit and action in our time. Dharman, drawn out effectively by Aparna, explains things through wonderful stories of the past, placing them in the context of present-day perceptions, fears, and panic over the Covid-19 pandemic. And

gives us an invaluable oral history of how villages over centuries, engaged with viruses, plagues and epidemics.

**No. 77: [Lockdown has hit UP women hard – literally](#), by Jigyasa Mishra.**



There's been a widespread feeling – and talk of a sharp rise in domestic violence in India and worldwide. Jigyasa brings substance and evidence to those happenings in this story, in three districts of Uttar Pradesh. The beating of an ASHA worker in Mahoba whose in-laws demand she quit the job. The cruelty to a homemaker in Lucknow district from a husband who returns to drink all day at home, losing his job in the city. The terror of another young homemaker in Chitrakoot who wants the reporter to make a note of her injuries. Jigyasa waves into their stories, data, facts,

vital points from major reports, constantly moving between the village and the world, the particular and the universal. One critical element of this story: the additional director general of police of Uttar Pradesh tells on record, in a bright little video, his sense that domestic violence is underreported even worse in this lockdown time because “the perpetrator is right in front of the lady now.”

Another feature of the story: the women are fighting or want to fight back. They demand their story be told, unvarnished. And what a story.

**No. 76. [Lockdown forces Eeswar to climb trees again](#) by Amrutha Kosuru.**



The toddy tappers of Vishakapatnam who seasonally extract toddy, or palm molasses – or pluck *munjalu* (palm fruit, also known as ‘ice apples,’) in the months of April and May, are in a bad way. Normally, they can make Rs. 700-800 a day selling the palm fruit in the *munjalu* season. Now, they’re making barely Rs. 200-300 a day. The lockdown restrictions, curbs on travel, fall in demand and price – all these together really hurt them. Worse, they’re not sure of getting the kind of work

that they normally would, as construction labourers, between July and December. Amrutha, who has previously done that wonderful story on the fishermen of Vishakapatnam in this series, meets the *munjalu* vendors on the busy national highway in Vishakapatnam and gets them to tell us how they are coping. Also fascinating is the



‘compassionate’ upper middle classes arriving in swank cars and bargaining to push their already depressed prices further down by Rs.10-20 per dozen.

**No. 75 [Karnataka silk route: cocoon farmers in crisis](#) by Tamanna Naseer.**



Just a few decades ago, when Karnataka had still not got its present name - ‘Mysore silk’ (and sarees) were legendary. Then liberalisation and ‘opening up’ hit mulberry farmers and silk and the whole industry very badly. Now, the Covid-19 lockdown has hammered the silk industry hard, crushing the hopes of many farmers who daily throng the Government Cocoon Market in Ramanagara – the [largest such market in Asia](#). (India is the second largest producer of silk in the world after China). The disruption of the entire demand-supply chain has badly hurt the weavers, reelers and, particularly, the farmers.

Many marriages have been postponed, events stand cancelled, and apparel stores are mostly shuttered – so the demand for silk has sharply decreased and the sector is incurring heavy losses. Tamanna Naseer explores the situation through the experiences of farmers at the Ramanagara market. Their hardships notwithstanding, one of them tells her: “Once corona goes away, things will be normal.”

**No.74: [Under the over in a time of cyclone and corona](#), by Puja Bhattacharjee.**



How does a homeless person, a street dweller of 40 years, cope with both Covid-19 and the lockdown it brought, and Cyclone Amphan which devastated Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal? Puja’s compelling photo story explores the world of hardship and resilience of Sabita Sardar, who has lived four decades on the city’s streets – since she came there from a village at age 7. A hardy spirit who says of the cyclone: “We are used to dealing with bad weather. I wasn’t feeling scared. In fact, those who live in concrete homes were

more scared.” If anything, Sabita is far more wary of the lockdown – which saw her taken off the streets and moved to a shelter which she hated. Despite Cyclone Amphan, and no income due to the lockdown and Covid fears, Sabita Sardar preferred to evade hostile cops, escape the poor shelter facilities, and returned to her home under Kolkata’s Gariahat flyover. Her story, with some striking photographs.

**No. 73. [Dealing with dissonance, restoring harmony](#), by Ira Deulgaonkar.**



In a series marked by unusual reports, this must stand out as one of the most unusual. Hereditary harmonium repairers? From Jabalpur? And what do they have to do with Covid-19? Well, the lockdown trapped 18 of them, with their families, in Renapur, Maharashtra for more than two months. Theirs is an exceedingly rare, dying occupation, poorly paid – but demanding terrific skills, including a heightened sense of classical music and extraordinary hearing ability. And this group are nomadic for 8 months of the year. PARI intern Ira (all of 19 years of age) met them in Renapur and learned about their trade and how they coped with the lockdown.

We tend to think of the harmonium as synonymous with India classical music, well, read this and be surprised. And don't miss the neat 1.5-minute video that accompanies it.

**No. 72: [Feet of clay: Chhattisgarh's potters, locked down](#) by Purusottam Thakur.**



Once again Purusottam – who has done a lot of work on migrants for PARI – draws attention to the many others who, too, are suffering the impact of the lockdown, the artisans and craftspersons, for example, who continue to produce – but cannot sell. This piece looks at the potters of Dhamtari in Chhattisgarh, one of whom asks him: “Like the vegetable vendors in the market are allowed to sell between 7 a.m. to 12 p.m., we should also be allowed to sell the pots, otherwise we will be in trouble.” And indeed they are, in big trouble. They have lost the summer – the

season when they the largest number of clay pots. Their work of potters obviously stops in the monsoon – meaning a very long stretch with no income.

Told with the sympathy and empathy that marks all Purusottam's stories – and with absolutely wonderful photographs, the lead pic being quite fabulous.

**No. 71: [I am a labourer, not a liability](#) by Anjum Ismail.**



A strong, scathing poem – looking at, among other things, the contribution the migrants made to the building of our world, our comforts. Our “dream homes...metro rails, sliding highways...” In return for which we, “benevolent people, allowed [them] to go home”....allowed them to die, stopped their buses and trains when we could. A theme of their bondage, our bounty, runs through this angry poem, while it reminds us all along that the migrant is a huge asset, not a liability. And lines that answer the question: will they come back?

*Trust me,  
when things get back to normal  
I will come back.  
How would you progress  
if I didn't come?  
How would the cities expand?  
How would the country run  
like a bullet train?  
Of course, I'll come.*

Sudhanva Deshpande presents the poem in an audio reading, always worth a listen. And yet another lovely painting by Labani Jangi. Please read, listen, circulate, share....

**No. 70 [Off guard: Nepal migrants in locked down AP](#) by Riya Behl.**



One group hardly spoken off or even noticed during this ongoing crisis following the lockdown is that ubiquitous yet Ignored entity: the Nepali migrant. There were more than 7 lakhs of them in 2011, the last year for which we had data. And as late as 2018-19, remittance income accounted for more than a quarter of Nepal's GDP. Their distress during the lockdown was made worse by a heightened sense of isolation and distance from their loved ones. Riya Behl spoke to some of those

stranded In Andhra Pradesh, working as security guards In Bhimavaram town, struggling with depleting supplies, sickness and uncertainty about returning home. An unusual and important story, a new aspect and a worthy read. Also, our own Oorna, custodian of our Library, makes her debut in a different aspect - this Is her first edit for PARI.

**No. 69: [Another brick in Telangana's lockdown wall](#) by Varsha Bhargavi.**



The continuing saga of Odiya labourers In Telangana's brick kilns - this time about a group who had to work right through the lockdown. "The owner says we still have a week's work left to finish before leaving for Odisha," one of them told Varsha, late Into May. They, though, were really anxious to return home to Odisha, fearing that "corona affects children below ten years." And so the work went on in 44 degrees Celsius temperatures. This particular group of workers In Sangareddy district did manage to return to their homes. Others were still stuck until the

Telangana High Court came to their rescue and ordered the state government to see they could return to their villages. Another thoughtful, sensitive exploration of the lives of brick kiln workers a sector where they are virtually bonded labourers - under lockdown, by Varsha who has also taken some very nice photographs for her story.

**No. 68: ['Stay and do nothing or go back to do nothing?'](#) by Asba Zainab Shareef and Sidh Kevadia.**



What happens to you if you're a pair of migrant workers arriving at a new construction site in Bengaluru city – 24 hours before the lockdown is enforced? That's what the young reporters who brought PARI this story – both are aged 17 and still at school – try to understand and convey to us in this fine and informative report. They examine what has happened – and is happening – to Amoda, Rajesh and their two children once they got caught up in the lockdown. The 'savings' this family had from their previous job brought them only a week's worth of

food – struggling along with some help from a neighbouring house.

They're also caught in the dilemma that some migrants are: does it make sense to go home or anywhere else? As Amoda puts it: "We either stay here and do nothing or go there and do nothing. The two options are not very different."



**No. 67: [Cash crops, Covid and the cost of unsold cotton](#) by Jaideep Hardikar.**



This is surely one of the most important stories - on what is yet to come. India sits on a huge pile of unsold cotton - in Maharashtra alone, some 80 lakh quintals lie unsold as of last week. Countrywide, that would be much higher. Yet, cotton growers in Maharashtra and elsewhere plan to repeat this crop in the kharif season. Farmers of other cash crops seem inclined to do the same - extremely risky, given that we could be seeing a huge food and hunger crisis. A worldwide crash in income and consumption suggests cash crop farmers will not see the kind of exports they think they will. And with so much of their rabi crop lying unsold: who will buy? If even more cash crops pile up, that could be a threat to the food security of the cultivators themselves.

Jaideep explores the reasons behind the decisions of these farmers, the compulsions that drive them to take these risks - and the ground realities of the unsold stocks. Clear, sharp, authentic.

**No. 66: [No fireworks, but alcohol adds fuel to the virus](#), by S. Senthilir.**



The Arunthathiyars are possibly the most oppressed and deprived community in Tamil Nadu. Senthilir takes us to some women from this Dalit community in Viriduhanagar district who mostly labour at a fireworks factory in Sivakasi, doing the extremely dangerous job of filling gunpowder into rocket tubes and paper shells. With the easing of lockdown restrictions, they are allowed to work - for only two days in a week. While their incomes crashed badly - this 'easing' period also saw the re-opening of government-owned liquor shops. A huge spike in domestic violence and wasting of money on alcohol immediately followed. Senthilir captures the interweaving of processes: the nature of work at fireworks factories, the vulnerability of the Arunthathiyar women to multiple forms of oppression, rising hunger, reopening of the alcohol shops and the rise in domestic violence

People, this is Senthilir's first story as a PARI Fellow year 2020.

**No. 65: [When the water chased people like a mad bull](#) by Ritayan Mukherjee.**



We learned of what the combined impact of a cyclone and the Covid-19 lockdown on cities could be just some days ago, from a Kolkata hit by Amphan – uprooted trees, torn-off roofs, destroyed bookshops. Ritayan's beautiful photo essay takes us through the Sundarbans – letting us learn better what the impact of this deadly duo of lockdown and cyclone is on rural *livelihoods*. Submerged paddy fields, wiped out betel leaf orchards, domestic help who've lost their jobs, blackened, poisoned water in the cultivation fields, devastated fish farms...the focus is on the loss of livelihoods of people, many of whom may not ever fully recover from the catastrophe.

And the inevitable line-up of wonderful Ritayan pics – stark and bruising, yet gentle, and graceful.

**No. 64: [Iron in the migrants' soul](#) by Gokul G.K.**



The tragedy where 16 migrants were run over by a train while asleep on the tracks near Aurangabad in Maharashtra - continues to hurt us, especially the poets and painters amongst us. A lovely little poem by Gokul G.K. with a creative intro, a conversation that is initiated by a migrant in Thiruvananthapuram, that is almost as sensitive as the poem itself. A compelling painting by Labani Jangi goes with it. And a poem so gentle and yet so hurting, which ends:

*On a remote railway track  
lies  
a row of lifeless souls,  
one next to another,  
a few steps away from home.*

**No. 63: [Rising dust, itchy skin, sweat-soaked masks](#) by Harinath Rao Nagulavancha.**



How do you adhere to social distancing norms if you are labourers at a paddy procurement centre? Harinath takes us to one in Telangana's Nalgonda district. How many masks can they change? How many times can they wash and wipe their hands and faces? Here are 48 labourers who will handle, pack, stitch, weight and load into trucks 128 tons of paddy in ten hours – handling that product at the rate of 213 kilograms a minute.

A wonderful photo story, with a text so short but so telling. And which makes you ask if those panning NREGs type following “strict social distancing norms” know what they’re talking about. Great stuff. Read, see, circulate, share....

**No. 62: [‘These women won’t let anyone go hungry’](#) by Gokul GK.**



Beyond the burning hunger of the migrants on the highways, there are others facing food problems: students stuck in their hostels, medical attendants on 16 hour shifts or more, ambulance drivers who are always on call, those transporting essential goods. In Kerala, they have the *Janakeeya* outlets, better known as the ‘Kudumbashree hotels,’ 417 across the state, 22 of them in Thiruvananthapuram alone, cumulatively producing over 2 lakh lunch packets a day of wholesome nutritious food. At just Rs. 20 a packet. As one of the Kudumbashree activists explains: “Most of our customers are those left without an income by the lockdown, who do not have enough money to buy food, or those not in a

situation to cook food on their own.”

Gokul GK visits the MG Road outlet of these indomitable women – fitting representatives of Kudumbashree – the largest gender-justice-cum-poverty-alleviation movement in the world, with 4.3 million members. This is his heart-warming story.

**No. 59: [‘We went from a handful to nothing’](#) by Rounak Bhat, PARI's 2019 intern from Symbiosis, Pune. He is in Jammu**



with his family, from where he writes about a small cluster of migrant workers from Chhattisgarh whose work and income were cut off due to the lockdown. For weeks, they struggled with sparse savings, debt and occasional rations – until residents from better-off buildings and houses nearby stepped in with rations and other help. The workers are also slowly returning to their work sites — they are back from the brink for now, but continue to live in uncertainty.



**No. 58 [Amphlan meets lockdown in struggling Kolkota](#) by the PARI Team** (including Sinchita Maji, Smita



Khator, Suman Parbat, Abhijit Chakraborty and friends like Monojit Bhattacharya and Suman Kanrar). This grim photo essay shows us a city trapped between the massive destruction of a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm and the absence of a vital labour force which has left for their villages in West Bengal and elsewhere due to the lockdown. The departure of the labourers means it is very difficult to restore basic amenities and facilities – or even simply clear the 5,000 + large trees that have been uprooted by the storm. Meanwhile, you can only recognise the historic book market in *Boi-para* by the thousands of books or book pages floating around on the flooded street.

**No. 57 [Hit with cancer, Covid-19 and without shelter](#) by Aakanksha.**



The story brings up to date the continuing saga of suffering of Geeta and Satender Singh from Maharashtra's Kolhapur district. Aakanksha had first reported their awful situation in March when she found them living on the pavement outside the Tata Memorial Hospital where Geeta had been undergoing treatment for cancer. The [story](#) had attracted a lot of attention and the couple received some help from generous readers. But unable to find any place in shelter homes, the two returned to the pavements outside TMH. However, both have since tested positive for Covid-

19. Among other things that means a halt to the cancer surgery Geeta was to undergo.

A story told with the empathy and eye for detail that Aakanksha brings to all her work

**No. 56 [The photographer writes - for better or verse](#) by Purusottam Thakur.**



The impact of the lockdown on the poor and the marginalised, migrants, farmers, labourers, artisans - has had one fallout which - or the scale of it - has taken us by surprise. So many are discovering the poet or the painter within them. Our very own Purusottam Thakur, whom I have known for over a quarter of a century and roamed many thousands of kilometres with, has found the need to express himself in ways beyond his outstanding photography. He has taken I guess a thousand photographs of rural migrants, but finds this time he needs an outlet stronger than his camera. As he says himself: 'I am no poet...' and 'I am a photographer...' but...

The photos with the poem include some - like the lead pic - taken over that quarter of a century. It hurts him to see the same communities, sometimes the same person, look the way they do now. They were always oppressed, but now...

*Do I photograph them?  
Do I ask them to sing?  
No, I am no poet  
I cannot write a song.  
I am a photographer  
But these are not the people  
I photograph.  
Are they?*

**No.55 [Panvel to MP: four days and nights on a scooter](#) by Parth M.N.**



This is Parth's third contribution to the series – and what a story it is. Bimlesh Jaiswal, a man with only one leg – he lost the other in a terrible accident 8 years ago – managed to travel in this lockdown period over 1,200 km from Panvel, Maharashtra, to his home in Hinauti village in Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh. What's more, this labourer did that on a gearless scooter, taking his wife and 3-year-old daughter along with him, coasting along in temperatures often exceeding 40 C. He and his wife rested barely three hours each night – and were on the road the rest of the time.

Parth, who met him on the Mumbai-Nashik Highway – and was pleased to receive a call from him saying he had reached – tells us this story of grit, determination and desperation.

**No. 53. [‘We don’t fear coronavirus or the heat now’](#) by Rituparna Palit.**



Here are workers from Bihar's Gaya district working in restaurants in Uttar Pradesh and in a factory in faraway Tamil Nadu who slowly made their way home during the lockdown. They'd left their farms in the care of their wives or other family members and came to the cities for better prospects. And working as cooks and factory workers, they were ready to brave the heat and the threat of the virus to return after their places of work closed down. Some of them hung on - but the

food packets stopped coming, forcing them to move. They will go back to depending on their small plots of land or wait for the MNREGA jobs to resume – while keeping up their hopes that other opportunities will come their way soon. An important glimpse of what's happening with migrants from Bihar.

Rituparna gets them to speak about how things changed for them within a matter of days.

**No. 52 [‘What's the use of this ration card?’](#) by Jitendra Maid, journalist, and a member of our translation team on PARI's**



Grindmills Songs Project. April was the cruellest month for women earning modest incomes and supporting their families or themselves in Pune's Kothrud neighbourhood. They had a difficult time getting rations from the PDS shops despite having the BPL yellow ration card, which the shopkeepers said were invalid even before the lockdown. But they'd hoped for relief after March 25, when assurances from the central government came that no one would go hungry. It was after the state government started distributing rations for the BPL families whose

yellow cards had been cancelled did they finally get to bring home rice and wheat from the PDS stores. Jitendra captures their anger and appeals in this video story.

**No. 51. [You can't lockdown this mother of all smiles](#) by PARI Fellow Labani Jangi.**



Another scene from the Mumbai-Nashik Highway that stood out amid all the anguish and despair - a mother carrying two children, one on her shoulder, another in her arms, and smiling away as she walked her long journey. That sparked the imagination of our artist Labani Jangi. To her, she says, the mother seemed to be carrying that wriggling weight as though it were a joy, not a burden. Reminiscent of that historic phrase that led to the establishment of a community (and later the making of a film and song) 'He ain't heavy, he's my brother.' But even that seems to pale besides this scene from real life.

I guess we can just say of this painting: It's a Labani.



**No. 50: [The long march of the locked-down migrants](#) - a song by composer, lyric writer and singer Aadesh Ravi.**



This haunting song is surely one of the most powerful cries of anguish that's emerged about the lockdown-driven migrations across India. The song is in Telugu but we bring you the full lyrics and subtitles in English. And how beautifully Ravi has sung the lyrics he penned and put to music himself. He has also written three paragraphs explaining how he came to create this song. Some of these lines will haunt you forever.

*Is there a disease worse than poverty?  
Is there a solace greater than being with one's family?  
or*

*No need of buses or trains, O' saaru  
Just let me go, master! I will walk home*

This video put together by Sinchita Maji, is interspersed with images of the migrants and other poor rural Indians, including some fine photographs by Nityanand Jayaraman and lovely paintings by Labani Jangi.

**No. 49 [Ironed out of an income in Vada this lockdown](#) by Shraddha Agarwal.**



More people than we know or think of, draw an income from pressing clothes, from 'ironing' them - and in most places, like Vada town of Maharashtra's Palghar district, they've been wrecked by the lockdown. As Shraddha's fine story shows us - some are earning much less in a week than they earlier earned in a day: in an occupation that never paid much at the best of times. April-May should have been a peak earning period with huge demand for pressing services during the now halted wedding season. Whoever gives a thought to the *presswalla*? Maybe we should now, with this story that looks at them struggling to procure rations - and get any other kind of work.

Truly a tale of everyday people under the lockdown.

**No. 48: [Jamlo's journey along a locked-down road](#) by Purusottam Thakur and Kamlesh Painkra.**



This is one time the word 'heart-breaking' escapes its cliché prison. Jamlo, a 12-year-old Adivasi girl desperate to reach her home in a Chhattisgarh village, set out a terribly long journey in the April heat of Telangana - where the little one had gone just two months earlier as a labourer, with a group of others. When the lockdown happened, hunger set in and the labourers, working in Telangana's chilli fields, were frantic about getting to their homes in Chhattisgarh. Jamlo walked about 140 kilometres in three days - then died, 60 kilometres from her home, collapsing from exhaustion and fatigue.

PARI visited her village Aaded and spoke to her parents.

**No. 47 [Locked down in Telangana — a basket case](#) by Harinath Rao Nagulavancha.**



While most attention is justifiably focused on the mounting miseries of migrant workers, PARI – which covers them round the year, not just since March 26 – also recognises that almost all other livelihoods in the countryside (to where they are returning) have taken a beating with the lockdown. In this story, Harinath takes us through the survival struggles of a group of Adivasi basket makers in Kangal village of Telangana. March to May is the crucial time for selling the baskets they make. They also work as agricultural labourers during the farming seasons. All



of this has come to a standstill with the lockdown. And the Yerankula Adivasi community has taken a huge blow with the halt to the basket trade across Telangana. They now rely on what little agricultural work is still to be found, and on PDS packages. This sympathetic look at the Yerankula basket makers shows us what a marginalised community actually looks like.

**No. 46: Locked-down schoolgirls: no basic needs, period by Jigyasa Mishra.**



A truly extraordinary story, searching through an unexplored angle on the lockdown's impact. It looks at the predicament of girl students from poor backgrounds in UP's Chitrakoot district entitled to receive free sanitary pads through their schools. With all schools shut – and being too poor to buy pads on the market, many have turned to using unhygienic alternatives. Number of girls eligible for pads, now without the option, in Uttar Pradesh schools? Well, 10.8 million. And consider that's a central government programme said to cover every block of the country - how many crores of girls must be facing this situation? The authorities' response to this in Chitrakoot is that in this crisis,

only the basic needs – food and survival are being attended to. Jigyasa has brought us the voices of such girls – combined with field visits and published data and has written her story with great empathy and concern. And *yet another* terrific illustration from Priyanka Borar that captures the core of the story in a single frame.

**No. 45 Old lady and nephew on lockdown highway a painting by Labani Jangi.**



Labani, our extraordinary new PARI Fellow from West Bengal. Labani was deeply affected by the images she saw on a segment of 'Prime Time with Ravish Kumar' on NDTV India. This one was of a man walking from Navi Mumbai to Akola in Vidarbha, Maharashtra - and carrying his aged aunt with him. As Labani puts it, in a world where people so easily desert the elderly, this astonishing sight restored in her the feeling that humanity exists, even in the midst of poverty and humiliation. Lots more of lovely Labani paintings to come.

**No. 44. Locked down with blood on the tracks – with "Who?," a poem by Pratishtha Pandya and two paintings by**



**Labani Jangi.** The 16 labourers – 8 of them Gond Adivasis – run over by a goods train on May 8 near Aurangabad district in Maharashtra were all in their 20s and 30s. Like so many other migrants, they had started walking home (in their case, to villages in Madhya Pradesh) – but at night, exhausted, slept on a railway track they believed would not see any trains running. Why do so many migrant labourers leave their workplace in the cities? Why do they feel the need to return home with no prospects of income or earnings? Why are they so lacking in faith in their government, their factory owners and their middle class employers - that they decide to move out? What happened to this little group has drawn this hurting, searing poem from Pratishtha Pandya ending with these lines

*Who would have left  
those half-eaten rotis  
on the tracks?  
Who?*

And two paintings by Labani Jangi that cannot be captured in words.

**No. 43 [Seeking lockdown relief in Rachenahalli](#) by Sweta Daga.** The story of how people in a north Bengaluru slum experience the lockdown. No work means nobody's been paid, no one has bought rations. And they can't step outside their Rachenahalli slum for anything. Even if they could, many don't have ration cards or have cards they can't use in this city. Some ration kits have reached them thanks to voluntary agencies working in the area – but there have been communally-motivated attacks on food-distribution volunteers. Meanwhile, regardless of zero income, they've got to pay their rents. Sweta gets the residents of Rachenahalli to tell their upsetting story.



**No. 42 [MP weavers hanging by a Chanderi thread](#) by Mohit Rao** is a story on the weavers who create that beautiful, elegant garment - the *chanderi* saree. The Covid-19 lockdown has brought the centuries-old Chanderi fabric trade in MP's Chanderi town to a standstill. Many weavers like Suresh Koli are in a fix due to no demand, unpaid dues and depleting resources. The weavers of Chanderi are from two rather poor social groups: Dalits, and Muslim OBCs. While effectively tracking the unfolding of the disaster the lockdown brought about - the story also serves as a reminder: the crisis in the countryside - is not just about returning migrant labourers. That is a hugely wounded group - and no one has covered migrant labourers more thoroughly than PARI. But the crisis following the lockdown is devastating every kind of occupation and livelihood practised by rural Indians. A reminder that handlooms and handicrafts together comprise India's second largest employer after agriculture and we mostly remain unaware of how precarious their practitioners were - way before Covid-19.



**No. 41: [The migrant march of red ants under lockdown](#) by Pratishtha Pandya** is a searing poem on indifference and inequality and how it manifests under the lockdown. The metaphor, adjectives and analogies can't help but remind you of the Union Home Minister's use of the word 'termites' to refer to migrant labourers. He was, of course, speaking of Bangladeshi migrants - but the underlying contempt for the class as a whole was also clear. The poem explores such attitudes, too, in the present wave of migrant distress - with powerful lines like these



*They came out  
entire colonies  
like they used to  
when mother put  
some Gammaxene powder  
on the nest mounds--*

And yet another brilliant painting by Labani Jangi

**No. 40 [MFI loans: fear and loathing in lockdown times](#) by Parth M.N.**



He takes us through the sheer rapaciousness of some micro-finance institutions, once hailed as saviours of the poor, the answer to rural poverty. The poor have seen earnings plummet with Covid-19 and the lockdown. But no matter how high the distress, MFIs, in Marathwada for instance, continue to harass their helpless clients for loan instalment repayments. For them, it is business as usual. As Parth's revealing story brings out, they can see that a farmer client is unable to pay because his rabi crop lies unsold - but that doesn't matter. They intimidate him anyway.

Parth's story shows us more than individual misconduct - it gives us powerful insights into the nature of these institutions and the role they end up playing, no matter how well intentioned their origins and theory. Read, circulate, share....

**No. 39 [In lockdown, this is no country for old men](#) by PARI Fellow and regular - Sanket Jain.**



This story through Sanket's painstaking effort and eye for detail and for the artistic, takes us through the lockdown life of three extraordinary people, the youngest of them around 60, two others 83 and 84 years old. All of them in active working life till the lockdown. A repairman, a weaver and a ropemaker – a Muslim, an Adivasi and a Dalit, highly-skilled craftspersons – in Belgavi, Karnataka and Kolhapur, Maharashtra. We had carried a story on each of these three earlier (by Sanket, of course) when, barely a year of two ago, they were in full flow of work. Now he looks at them struggling, running out of money, missing out on what would otherwise have been peak sales time, accessing with much difficulty, the free rations declared by the government.

And of course, we have the beautiful Sanket photographs we always expect (and demand). Read, circulate, share....

**No. 38 [Locked-down on Labour Day: no work, no pay](#) by Ekta and PARI Fellow Yashaswini.**



What a lovely little documentary film. Time was when May 1, International Workers Day, was celebrated by the working class (and others sympathetic to it) all over the world. In the Kolar Gold Fields of Karnataka, it was for many decades - actually the biggest festival of the year running on for nearly a week. In the capital of that state today, as Yashaswini and Ekta show us, even the symbolism of that day is shredded, quite shamelessly. In the film, the migrant labourers who make up most of the workforce on Bengaluru's metro rail project explain their situation in Covid-19 lockdown time. But this film also draws our attention to the working and living conditions of migrants workers in general - long before we knew the word coronavirus. In 13 minutes you get to understand - through the voices of the workers - what the kind of 'labour market flexibility' establishment economists keep whining for actually does to human beings.

**No. 37. [Dola Ram's long and locked-down road home](#) by Drishti Agarwal and Preema Dhurve captures the anguish and**



tragedy of many Rajasthani migrant labourers through the experience of construction worker Dola Ram, a mason at construction sites in Mumbai when the lockdown happened. Dola Ram and his mates spent a lot of money trying to reach their villages in Udaipur, Rajasthan. At first attempt, they were caught and sent back by the police. Next, they walked towards their homes hundreds of kilometres away (his village Baroliya is 700 km from Mumbai). Walking, and hitching lifts, including a 380-km ride organised for them by the Surat police, they made it home after several days. Dola Ram's son was ill when he arrived and overcrowding at the hospitals – all focused on Covid-19 – meant the child's ailment was not even properly diagnosed, and he died a few days later. Drishti and Preema paint a painstaking portrait of the migrant labourers and their lived experience with great empathy.

**No. 36 [Kachchh camel herders: lockdown last straw?](#) by Ritayan Mukherjee.**



What happens when you are nomadic pastoralists with huge herds of animals far away from home and the lockdown is announced? Ritayan, who has tracked pastoralists for years and years in many parts of the country, talks to the camel herders of Kachchh, the Fakirani Jats - who tell him their story. Their situation gets more precarious due to their being on the India-Pakistan border, where ultra-strict security protocols prevail. A



deeply empathetic account - with lovely photographs. But we've long ago run out of superlatives in describing Ritayan's photography.

**No. 35 [Locked into the kilns, brick by brick](#) by Varsha Bhargavi.**



On the unfolding tragedy of thousands of Odiya workers toiling in Telangana brick kilns - where they continue working during the lockdown. Almost all of these migrant labourers are desperate to go home. A few of them had left their homes in Odisha to become migrants after their livelihoods there were destroyed by the November 2016 demonetisation. With the market closed due to the lockdown, all of them find it difficult to access vegetables and foodgrain. They do not speak Telugu and stick out as 'outsiders' when trying to get around outside the kiln areas in search of essentials. That also lands them at the bottom of the pile in relief distribution. A story that takes you through the trauma of migrant workers in one the country's most exploitative industries - brick kilns, and the miserable living conditions which pre-date the lockdown but are greatly exacerbated by it

**No. 34 [AP fishermen: between lockdown and deep sea](#) by Amrutha Kosaru.**



This lively, engaging story presents us with how the lockdown has specifically affected the lives of coastal fishermen in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. And an entirely new angle in PARI's Covid-19 series. Fishermen make their best profits in the two weeks before the annual April 15-June 14 ban that prohibits fishing in the breeding season. This year, both weeks came during the lockdown. That put the fisherfolk families in a terrible situation. Many of them are migrants from villages in other districts staying in slums and chawls in Visakhapatnam. They are now unable to pay the rents for their matchbox like dwellings. And can't, in some cases, pay off the loans they took to buy their boats. All this forces them to take risks that can bring big penalties.

Sensitively and sympathetically told by Amrutha. And through the everyday lives of the fishermen.

**Story No. 33 [Vanavil: rainbow in the storms of lockdown life](#) by Kavitha Muralidharan.**



An inspiring story of a small primary school in Nagapattinam - just 81 students - that has, under the lockdown, become the centre of nutrition for over 1,000 poor families in mainly Adivasi hamlets of that Tamil Nadu district. What began as an effort to reach out to their students who had returned home and feed them - soon extended to supporting their families as well. It then expanded further to include non-Adivasis and other marginalised groups including trans-persons and conservancy workers. Kavitha nails down the canvas and details as she always does. This story throbs with energy and vitality - and while the photos are from two different sources, the ones taken by our M. Palani Kumar (including that *joyous* lead pic) are wonderful.

**No. 32 [Vidarbha's pastoralists paying a pandemic price](#) by Jaideep Hardikar and Chetna Borkar**



This is a compelling, disturbing account of what is happening under the lockdown to herders, semi-pastoralists and dairy farmers as well, in Vidarbha. In just Wardha district, the semi-pastoralist Nanada Gaolis have seen a decline of 25,000 litres in milk sales in the first 15 days of the lockdown. In Nagpur district, say the Bharwad communities, that is a drop from 1.5 lakh litres of daily milk sales "to zero today." That terrible drop in milk demand, happening to other such communities, has battered the dairy sector. Even Mother Dairy has stopped procuring milk.

At the same time, problems of animal health are growing - alongside a shortage of fodder. The story takes us through - in a region of long reigning agrarian distress - the new everyday struggles of people the corporate media rarely think of, or focus on. This is a fine story that Jaideep and Chetana have done - and what a lead photograph! Please read, circulate, share

**Story No. 31 ['Even the boats must be missing their men'](#) by Jigyasa Mishra**



Anyway a poor and marginalised community, the Nishads of Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh - traditionally a community of boatmen - are seeing their livelihoods collapse under the lockdown. Not a single boat can ply on the Mandakini river which divides Chitrakoot between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, a giant blow for those who make their best earnings from pilgrimage tourism. Also, too many of the community have no rations cards, or even other forms of ID and are getting excluded from the distribution of free rations. Jigyasa's sympathetic and poignant tale centres around a 27-year-old woman, mother of three children - who lost her husband five months ago, and is seven months pregnant. The story, authentic and well-told, gives you a sense of what happens if you were one of these families. All work has stopped, so has all income. Hunger has arrived at their homes. The Nishads, expert river boatmen - are now all at sea. Please do read, circulate, share...

**No. 30 [ASHAs: fighting a pandemic with no protection](#) by Pallavi Prasad**



The over one million Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) in the country are - quite literally - on the frontlines of the battle against Covid-19. This excellent story looks at the difficult circumstances these women workers always function under - greatly intensified in lockdown time; little or laughable protective equipment; grossly underpaid - and some of them not paid for months; police beatings, hostile husbands of women under their care; serious exposure to this and other diseases. These are workers the government of India itself describes as "the first port of call for any health-related demands of deprived sections." A story meticulous in its detail, vivid in its descriptions and conversations.

And a killer last line. The main ASHA, a union leader, speaking to Pallavi ends their last conversation because - *her husband is cooking rice for the first time. She is worried he will either burn himself or their dinner.* (a must) read, circulate, share.

*PS: update from Pallavi re the last line: The rice water boiled over. He didn't put a lid on the vessel he was cooking the rice in.*

**No. 29 [Walking 104 kilometres without a break](#) by Jyoti Shinoli**



A story in which she traces the long, often barefoot, walk home of Adivasi agricultural labourers working in the brick kilns of Thane and Palghar in Maharashtra. The lockdown means they've lost their work there - the kiln owners have sent them off without paying them fully even for work already done. One family walked 104 kilometres to their home in Thane district without stopping anywhere, anytime. How powerfully this story captures the fact - how close to the edge the Indian poor, especially Adivasis and Dalits are, anyway. When a Covid-19 lockdown comes along, their lives move from crisis (their 'normal') to catastrophe.

**No. 28. [Washing their hands of hope in Citizen Nagar](#) by Pratishtha Pandya.**



The story takes us through a 'relief colony' in Ahmedabad where victims of the 2002 communal riots were 'resettled' - on the edge of that city's largest and most toxic garbage dump. Pratishtha has meticulously put together a picture of how the lockdown impacts on a people already struggling with appalling hygiene and health conditions. The story, so well written, contextualises current events against a backdrop of communal discrimination, deprivation and despair. Fascinatingly, the

voice most heard in the colony with very little - and highly contaminated - water, is that of Amitabh Bachchan on television advising them not to touch their "eyes, nose, mouth, unnecessarily..."

**No. 27 [Bags on their heads, fear in their hearts](#) by Gokul GK, a young student of the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.**



A vivid, powerful poem, needing to be read, more than explained, on the feelings the images of migrant workers, walking towards their villages, evoked in the poet. And haunting, beautiful pictures by another student, Labani Jangi, a self-taught painter at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. And an audio reading of the poem by Sudhanva Deshpande an actor and director with Jana Natya Manch, and an editor with LeftWord Books. Can't resist signing off with the last lines of this moving poem

*but the earth remained red.  
As for her,  
the bloody footprints were still on her breast*

**No. 26 [Wilting mahua, wasted baskets, silent haats](#) by Purusottam Thakur**



(his third contribution so far to the series). Purusottam visits and takes us through an isolated village of the Kamar Adivasis in Chhattisgarh's Dhamtari district. The weakest and most deprived Adivasis like the Kamaras are classified as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' or PVTGs. Purusottam brings us in their words and eyes, and his own - how the lockdown is laying into this fragile community. The Kamars here are entirely dependent on selling the bamboo baskets and mahua flowers (from which wine is made) they produce. Both items from the forest around them. The lockdown has disrupted these activities, leaving them with little or no

income. A Purusottam story with all the authenticity he always brings from the field. Read, circulate, share!

**No. 25 [Lockdown burden on little shoulders in Latur](#) by PARI intern Ira Deulgaonkar (all of 19 years old)**



A moving, poignant, tale of two young siblings in Latur - *not yet teenagers* - forced to work for a living after both their parents lost their jobs with the lockdown. Neither Paras Madikar, 11, nor his sister Saras, 12, ever expected to do physical labour - yet are selling vegetables on the street under the very risky circumstances of the coronavirus crisis. Their school will surely reopen when the crisis blows over. What's unclear is if they will be in any position to return to school. A great follow up to Ira's earlier story on the barber community. Gently though this tale is told, it hits you hard and leaves you angry.



**No. 24 ['Now the melons are on the verge of rotting'](#) by Sibi Arasu.**



The story captures the dilemmas of watermelon farmers Chithamur block of Chengalpattu district in Tamil Nadu. The lockdown has hit them as hard as it has their counterparts in Telangana and they are stranded with tons of watermelons - and a choice between selling them for a next to nothing price, and letting them rot. Even if there are willing buyers - how they do they transport the melons in lockdown time? As one of the farmers puts it: corona may cause great illness in the cities, in the countryside, it causes an income crash.

Please read, share.

**No. 23. ['Some are eating only one meal a day now'](#) by PARI Fellow Sweta Daga.**



Daily wage workers across Bengaluru, several of them migrant labourers from far off places, are fighting hunger following the lockdown - for which they had not been prepared at all. In one poor colony, the local head of the Dalit Suraksha Samiti says some 300 families, almost all of them daily wagers, find it extremely difficult to step out of home to get food - they fear the police will beat them. Meanwhile the money they'd saved from their earnings is almost gone. The story and the accompanying video take you on a grim journey through reality as experienced by dailywagers and

Dalit. Please do read, see and share.

**No. 22 [Watermelon farmers left with no juice](#) by Harinath Rao.**



The detailed story takes you through the risky realm of watermelon cultivation, in this instance in Telangana. That is a dicey crop at the best of times with high input costs and fluctuating and often plummeting rates. Now, with the lockdown in force, farmers, labourers, traders, transporters - all are taking a brutal hit.

In the district of Nalgonda where this story unfolds, nearly 5,000 acres were to have come under watermelon this year. With 50-60k an acre worth of input costs, that means on just those costs alone, investment of Rs. 250 crores was sunk in. Now many farmers are simply unable to sell their produce except at throwaway rates. An always risky option could see many on the road to ruin. Must read for a quick education on how corona is playing out for these sections of society.

**No. 21 [Barbers in lockdown: a hair's breadth away from ruin](#) by PARI intern Ira Deulgaonkar**



Who ever thinks about barbers and what's happening to them in lockdown time? Ira Deulgaonkar, *all of 19 years old* - has thought about them, tracked them, and presented us with this extraordinary report. Barbers are entirely dependent on daily earnings which fluctuate according to how many customers walk in - and their job has no option of physical distancing. In just Latur district, closure of all salons for 21 days (till April 14) *will cost this struggling community Rs. 125 million or 12.5 crores. And that's in just one district.*

This poor and much discriminated against OBC community - for years, large sections of them have demanded reclassification as a Scheduled Caste - have also been unable to raise rates in Latur for almost two years because the Marathwada drought, but have suffered a 15 per cent hike in home and salon rents since 2018.

**No. 20 [Hunger on the table, city under lockdown](#) by Jitendra Maid**, journalist, and a member of our translation team on PARI's Grindmills Songs Project.



Jitendra takes us through the chaos on the ground that has followed seemingly generous announcements at the top. In a slum in Pune's Kothrud neighbourhood, the women - mostly domestic workers, many of them migrants - are going crazy trying to access the 'free rations' they are to get in lockdown time. Even Below Poverty Line families, with their special ration cards, are unable to get anything. The ration shop owners told Jitendra they haven't received any supplies. In a neighbouring colony, even sanitation workers (supposedly the recipients of the nation's gratitude) are among those struggling with this awful situation. Read for a glimpse of rude reality.

**No. 19 [Locking down craft: handmade, hung out to dry](#) by PARI education editor Priti David.**



A searing pan-Indian picture of how people in handloom and handicrafts industries – together perhaps the greatest employers in India after agriculture – have been devastated by the Covid-19 lockdown. Shibori artisans in Rajasthan, weavers in Andhra and Tamil Nadu, toymakers in Varanasi and Gond artists in Madhya Pradesh are close to hunger and ruin. With the great annual exhibitions where they make their highest sales obviously cancelled in March and April, stockpiles of inventory are mounting. Priti brings powerful individual stories together on a large canvas – in the voices of the affected. What an incisive piece.

**No. 18 [The lady and the lamp - a poem for April 5](#) by Pratishtha Pandya**



The author is a PARI volunteer, translator and author. The nine-minute lights-off, lamps-on event of April 5 impacted different people in diverse ways. This was how one poet in Ahmedabad responded to it...A brilliant, searing look at the hypocrisy of the call for people to shut off all their lights and then dispel darkness by lighting a diya on the night of April 5. With such a powerful ending:

*"Who would have known  
lighting a lamp  
would be unleashing  
the dark?"*

**No. 17 [AP cops elevate Covid-19 messaging to art form](#) by Rahul M**



A quick, entertaining glance at the efforts of the police force to rope in a sorcerer in the fight against the coronavirus; a policeman dressed up as an evil magician - with a corona headpiece - from Telugu mythological tales for children to scare the kids into following lockdown regulations. A new direction for a police force that never needed any assistance to scare the hell out of the public.

**No. 16 [Sundarbans: Mousani eats better in lockdown](#) by Abhijit Chakraborty**



An exceptional twist to what's going on. This little island in the Sundarbans, just 24 square. Km. is actually eating better. The reason: the food they grow - including paddy, bitter gourd, betel leaves - and send to other regions including Kolkota's markets, is lying with them. The trains and lorries to Kolkota from Namkhana and Kakdwip to where they send their produce are not functioning. Even to those two places, only 'special boats' go now and then. So, their fields are full of paddy, the ponds are full of fish. And so the 22,000 people of Mousani are eating better - for now.

**No. 15 [In Tamil Nadu: playing Parai on lockdown, live!](#) by Kavitha Muralidharan.**



It takes us through the idealism, progressive politics, and sheer artistic talent of a folk art group in Tamil Nadu - using the art form of Parai - that has just created a new song educating people on the coronavirus - and debunking false propaganda like: eating non-vegetarian food makes you more vulnerable to COVID-19. Folk art groups are at a particular disadvantage in this period - because by definition, they perform amongst the masses. But the group's leaders Manimaran and his wife Maghizhini are responding by performing every day on Facebook Live. They and others like them have taken Parai (a drum once just played at funerals, only by Dalits) and reclaimed its politics and as an art form. Parai is now an increasingly popular instrument of liberation. What a story!

**No. 14 [Anantapur lockdown diary: March 19-April 3](#) is by our Rahul M.**



Rahul's story gives us a sense and a flavour of how public consciousness is evolving - or not - in Anantapur city and district in Rayalaseema, AP. It's only after AP jumped from the bottom of the Covid counts list to rank number 5 nationally, that a degree of seriousness has begun to set in. At the same time, in the working class locality where he's watching things unfold, people simply cannot afford to follow social distancing guidelines.

**No. 13) [Ladakhis stuck in COVID-19 test limbo in Iran](#) by Stanzin Saldon**



With 254 Ladakhi pilgrims languishing in Iran and a huge amount of confusion over test results, even many of those who tested negative were not flown back. Several declared 'positive' for corona at an embassy-organised test in Tehran, were found by doctors at a hospital in Qom - to be otherwise. Some hundreds who tested negative are in quarantine in Jodhpur, having been flown back – by an Iranian airline. Meanwhile, the families back

in Ladakh are in stress and tension. And Ladakhi students in Jammu and Kashmir are being subjected to communal and racial slurs. Stanzin captures all this and more. The 'national' media rarely give any space to stories like this, except most superficially.



**No. 12) [And miles to go before they sleep - or eat](#) by Mamta Pared**



A musafir story tracking migrant Adivasi brick kiln workers in Maharashtra's Palghar district, stuck between a rock and a hard place: the worksites are still and they've little money or food. And they've also been warned by their village - all of you must return at once or stay away two years. A moving little vignette from their journey.

**11) [Pardhis in lockdown – begging the question](#) is by our inimitable Jyoti Shinoli.**



The story is a moving, most authentic, so very disturbing – and compassionate look at the state of elderly Pardhi Adivasi women in their late 70s, one of them living alone, in Maharashtra's Shirur taluka. They are dependent – like several others from the socially stigmatised Pardhi community – on begging for leftovers to be able to eat at all. COVID-19 has put an end to begging; the villages that used to feed them won't allow them entry – and they are not far away from starvation. This story really hits you.

**No.10) [Where country roads don't take you home](#) by Harinath Rao**



Harinath Rao's story shows how pastoralists in Telangana are faring under the 'lockdown.' The herders are now finding it impossible to purchase medicines for their livestock, to visit their own villages, find grazing grounds for their herds - or even just recharge mobiles (which means they can't reach their families). They are isolated – access to food is decreasing. And they cannot even sell an animal or two for quick cash, as they would normally do. Harinath's story gives us a real insight into the lives of these herders and how their fragile existence is shredded by the kind of lockdown imposed on the country

**9) [Locked down with cancer on Mumbai footpaths](#) by Aakanksha**



A disturbing yet insightful story by our Aakanksha on the plight of cancer patients hit by the lockdown and by the curtailment of other essential medical services as all attention shifts to the coronavirus crisis. Cancer patients coming to the Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai, from all over – distant villages in Bihar and UP for example, are now stranded. They cannot afford rooms on rent - and many of the small lodges around there are not open to them at this point, nor can they return to their villages as train and bus services are at a standstill in the lockdown. This story should make us think about the larger

canvas of health in India as well. Particularly about the socioeconomic determinants of health.

**No. 8) [Still cutting cane amidst corona and curfew](#) by PARI Fellow Parth MN**



M.N. Path has done this powerful, worrying, story on the lakhs of labourers hired by the sugar factories of western Maharashtra, still cutting cane in unhygienic conditions. They're trapped, like bonded labour, between serious risk and certain hunger. These people mostly want to go back to their village homes but the factory bosses are forcing them to continue cutting till the end of the season (for some, that could go on well into April). Parth's story draws out the dilemma and great fear confronting the cane cutters. NOT to be missed.

### 7) [Corona refugees on 538-kilometre journey](#) by Purusottam Thakur



Second of two stories from our Purusottam Thakur, is on the scenes at Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh, brought to light by Satyaprakash Pandey, a Bilaspur-based journalist and wildlife photographer. While the scenes of departing migrants in the metros and towns are well reflected in the media, Satyaprakash is reaching out to poor migrants in distress trying to cover absurd distances on foot.

### 6) [In Chhattisgarh: barricades as social distancing](#) by Purusottam Thakur



The first of Purusottam's two stories: across Bastar, villages are barricading themselves, denying entry or passage to 'outsiders.' Even migrants returning to their home villages run into these problems at some level. Since the 'rules' of quarantine are being diversely issues and interpreted by states, district administrations and local officials - this seems to be a logical, if sad development, adding to the hardships of returning migrants and to the general chaos.

### No. 5) [Sanitation workers - the wages of ingratitude](#) by M. Palani Kumar



That lead photograph is really something!

The whole brilliant photo story captures the hypocrisy of the March 22 show of 'gratitude' to those on the frontlines of the battle against COVID and, indeed, most other diseases. Sanitation workers across the country -- in this case, in Chennai - battle disease round the year. Here they are on the COVID trenches - with little or no protective gear, no extra allowances or payments for this period, often walking long distances to work (and threatened with sacking if they take a day's leave now) - and sometimes journey to the workplace in

lorries meant for transporting garbage.

### No. 4 ['Soaps won't save us if we die of hunger first'](#) by Shraddha Agarwal



This is a powerful, upsetting look at the unfolding fate of Warli Adivasi families in Vada taluka of Palghar district in Maharashtra. The people in this fine but disturbing story, mainly daily-wage construction labourers, are now finding no work in the lockdown period. They are already experiencing serious hunger and not too far off from starvation.

Do NOT miss that powerful 2-minute video of the Adivasi daily wager expressing her anger and anguish. She just stays in my mind, she will stay in yours.

### 3) [Tuljapur's temple economy goes into viral mode](#) by Medha Kale



On the collapse of that town's temple-centric economy. It's a powerful report on how small vendors, shopkeepers, farmers dependent on the weekly markets - all are finding themselves crushed by the steep drop in visitors and the cancellation of the Chaitree yatra. Medha's story rubs in the fact here are virtually no survival strategies clearly available to the poor and the marginalised here - a picture that could possibly be the same across rural Maharashtra.



## 2) [Essential services, expendable lives](#) By Jyoti Shinoli



This is a terrific story on the frontline warriors against COVID-19, the safai karamcharis who take grave risks - the year round, not just in times of a COVID-type crisis. From Chembur's Mahul village. It gets to the heart of many hypocrisies

### No. 1 [What we should do about Covid-19](#) by P. Sainath



My piece which kicked off our PARI series. It first appeared in The Wire on March 26, a couple of hours after that 'package' announcement by the Finance Minister. And my take on what we ought to do.

*We need to get down to these measures right now. The government's 'package' is a curious blend of callousness and cluelessness. It's not just one virus we're fighting – pandemics are also a 'package.' Of which economic distress can be a self-inflicted or self-aggravated part – driving us from calamity to catastrophe.* Also included a brief tracing of the globalisation

of communicable diseases.

43 stories female authors.

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## Section 2

### Poems, songs and paintings sparked by the situation brought on by the lockdown – 12 of them

#### No. 56 [The photographer writes - for better or verse](#) by Purusottam Thakur.



The impact of the lockdown on the poor and the marginalised, migrants, farmers, labourers, artisans - has had one fallout which - or the scale of it - has taken us by surprise. So many are discovering the poet or the painter within them. Our very own Purusottam Thakur, whom I have known for over a quarter of a century and roamed many thousands of kilometres with, has found the need to express himself in ways beyond his outstanding photography. He has taken I guess a thousand photographs of rural migrants, but finds this time he needs an outlet stronger than his camera. As he says himself: 'I am no poet...' and 'I am a photographer...' but...

The photos with the poem include some - like the lead pic - taken over that quarter of a century. It hurts him to see the same communities, sometimes the same person, look the way they do now. They were always oppressed, but now...

*Do I photograph them?  
Do I ask them to sing?  
No, I am no poet  
I cannot write a song.  
I am a photographer  
But these are not the people  
I photograph.  
Are they?*



**No. 15 [In Tamil Nadu: playing Parai on lockdown, live!](#)** By Kavitha Muralidharan (song with article)



It takes us through the idealism, progressive politics, and sheer artistic talent of a folk art group in Tamil Nadu - using the art form of Parai - that has just created a new song educating people on the coronavirus - and debunking false propaganda like: eating non-vegetarian food makes you more vulnerable to COVID-19. Folk art groups are at a particular disadvantage in this period - because by definition, they perform amongst the masses. But the group's leaders Manimaran and his wife Maghizhini are responding by performing every day on Facebook Live. They and others like them have taken Parai (a drum once just played at funerals, only by Dalits) and reclaimed its politics and as an art form. Parai is now an increasingly popular instrument of liberation. What a story!

**No. 18 [The lady and the lamp - a poem for April 5](#)** by Pratishtha Pandya



The author is a PARI volunteer, translator and author. The nine-minute lights-off, lamps-on event of April 5 impacted different people in diverse ways. This was how one poet in Ahmedabad responded to it...A brilliant, searing look at the hypocrisy of the call for people to shut off all their lights and then dispel darkness by lighting a diya on the night of April 5. With such a powerful ending:

*"Who would have known  
lighting a lamp  
would be unleashing  
the dark?"*

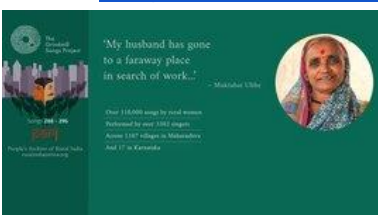
**No. 27 [Bags on their heads, fear in their hearts](#)** by Gokul GK, a young student of the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.



A vivid, powerful poem, needing to be read, more than explained, on the feelings the images of migrant workers, walking towards their villages, evoked in the poet. And haunting, beautiful pictures by another student, Labani Jangi, a self-taught painter at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. And an audio reading of the poem by Sudhanva Deshpande an actor and director with Jana Natya Manch, and an editor with LeftWord Books. Can't resist signing off with the last lines of this moving poem

*but the earth remained red.  
As for her,  
the bloody footprints were still on her breast*

**No. 79: [Songs of love for the migrant away from home](#)** by Namita Waikar and the PARI GSP Team. While the media



discovered migrant labourers on March 26, they've actually been around much longer. And they have also fled Mumbai in the past. Like after the 1896-97 bubonic plague outbreak when, in just 5-6 years, nearly half the population of Mumbai – mostly migrant labourers – left the city. This beautiful instalment of the Grindmill Songs Project that Namita brings to us well, accompanied by a gently appealing video edited by Sinchita Maji, is so connected and relevant for the migrant crisis. Looking at the migrants not with

the selfishness of those who have lost their services, but with the tenderness of those whose loved ones have moved far away. Like the words in these decades-old *ovi* sung by Muktabai Ubhe in Pune's Mulshi Taluka....

*We didn't get a good harvest this year  
O woman, my husband has gone to a faraway place [in search of work]  
He has gone far away, leaving me alone  
There is no one to care for him there  
Dear husband, your eyes shine like the lustre of pearls  
Dear husband, your skin is the colour of jadas flowers*

The whole feature is compelling

**No. 41: [The migrant march of red ants under lockdown](#) by Pratishtha Pandya**



is a searing poem on indifference and inequality and how it manifests under the lockdown. The metaphor, adjectives and analogies can't help but remind you of the Union Home Minister's use of the word 'termites' to refer to migrant labourers. He was, of course, speaking of Bangladeshi migrants - but the underlying contempt for the class as a whole was also clear. The poem explores such attitudes, too, in the present wave of migrant distress - with powerful lines like these

*They came out  
entire colonies  
like they used to  
when mother put  
some Gammaxene powder  
on the nest mounds--*

And yet another brilliant painting by Labani Jangi

**No. 44. [Locked down with blood on the tracks](#) – with "Who?," a poem by Pratishtha Pandya and two paintings by**



**Labani Jangi.** The 16 labourers – 8 of them Gond Adivasis – run over by a goods train on May 8 near Aurangabad district in Maharashtra were all in their 20s and 30s. Like so many other migrants, they had started walking home (in their case, to villages in Madhya Pradesh) – but at night, exhausted, slept on a railway track they believed would not see any trains running. Why do so many migrant labourers leave their workplace in the cities? Why do they feel the need to return home with no prospects of income or earnings? Why are they so lacking in faith in their government, their factory owners and their middle class employers - that they decide to move out? What happened to this little group has drawn this hurting, searing poem from Pratishtha Pandya ending with these lines

*Who would have left  
those half-eaten rotis  
on the tracks?  
Who?*

And two paintings by Labani Jangi that cannot be captured in words.

**No. 45 [Old lady and nephew on lockdown highway](#) a painting by Labani Jang**, our extraordinary new PARI Fellow from West Bengal. Labani was deeply affected by the images she saw on a segment of 'Prime Time with Ravish Kumar' on NDTV India. This one was of a man walking from Navi Mumbai to Akola in Vidarbha, Maharashtra - and carrying his aged aunt with him. As Labani puts it, in a world where people so easily desert the elderly, this astonishing sight restored in her the feeling that humanity exists, even in the midst of poverty and humiliation. Lots more of lovely Labani paintings to come



**No. 50: [The long march of the locked-down migrants](#) by Adesh Ravi**



This haunting song is surely one of the most powerful cries of anguish that's emerged about the lockdown-driven migrations across India. The song is in Telugu but we bring you the full lyrics and subtitles in English. And how beautifully Ravi has sung the lyrics he penned and put to music himself. He has also written three paragraphs explaining how he came to create this song. Some of these lines will haunt you forever.

*Is there a disease worse than poverty?  
Is there a solace greater than being with one's family?*

Or

*No need of buses or trains, O' saaru  
Just let me go, master! I will walk home*

This video put together by Sinchita Maji, is interspersed with images of the migrants and other poor rural Indians, including some fine photographs by Nityanand Jayaraman and lovely paintings by Labani Jangi.

**No. 51. [You can't lockdown this mother of all smiles](#) by PARI Fellow Labani Jangi.** Another scene from the Mumbai-Nashik Highway that stood out amid all the anguish and despair - a mother carrying two children, one on her shoulder, another in her arms, and smiling away as she walked her long journey. That sparked the imagination of our artist Labani Jangi. To her, she says, the mother seemed to be carrying that wriggling weight as though it were a joy, not a burden. Reminiscent of that historic phrase that led to the establishment of a community (and later the making of a film and song) 'He ain't heavy, he's my brother.' But even that seems to pale besides this scene from real life.



I guess we can just say of this painting: It's a Labani.



**No. 64: [Iron in the migrants' soul](#) by Gokul G.K.**



The tragedy where 16 migrants were run over by a train while asleep on the tracks near Aurangabad in Maharashtra - continues to hurt us, especially the poets and painters amongst us. A lovely little poem by Gokul G.K. with a creative intro, a conversation that is initiated by a migrant in Thiruvananthapuram, that is almost as sensitive as the poem itself. A compelling painting by Labani Jangi goes with it. And a poem so gentle and yet so hurting, which ends:

*On a remote railway track  
lies  
a row of lifeless souls,  
one next to another,  
a few steps away from home.*

**No. 71: [I am a labourer, not a liability](#) by Anjum Ismail.** A strong, scathing poem – looking at, among other things,



the contribution the migrants made to the building of our world, our comforts. Our “dream homes...metro rails, sliding highways....” In return for which we, “benevolent people, allowed [them] to go home” ...allowed them to die, stopped their buses and trains when we could. A theme of their bondage, our bounty, runs through this angry poem, while it reminds us all along that the migrant is a huge asset, not a liability. And lines that answer the question: will they come back?

*Trust me,  
when things get back to normal  
I will come back.  
How would you progress  
if I didn't come?  
How would the cities expand?  
How would the country run  
like a bullet train?  
Of course, I'll come.*

Sudhanva Deshpande presents the poem in an audio reading, always worth a listen. And yet another lovely painting by Labani Jangi. Please read, listen, circulate, share....

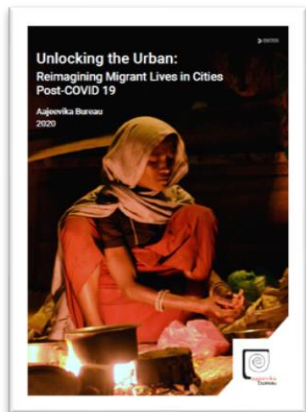
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## Section 3

### Resources, reports, laws, documents relevant to the lockdown period published in the PARI Library

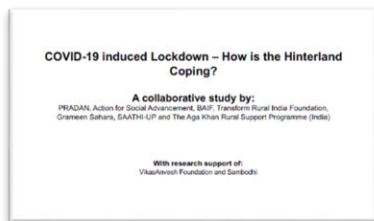
(Nos. 81-100 – roughly a quarter of a million words)

81. [Unlocking the Urban: Reimagining Migrant Lives in Cities Post-COVID 19](#)



This is a report by Aajeevika Bureau (an organisation working with migrant workers in Gujarat and Rajasthan) published in April 2020. The report explores the experiences of exclusion faced by ‘circular migrants’ employed in the informal labour markets of Ahmedabad and Surat. It states that the “...catastrophic results of the lockdown only exposed and aggravated glaring gaps in India’s public provisioning and employment systems, which has, for decades, systematically excluded and extracted migrant workers to facilitate economic growth.”

82. [COVID-19 induced Lockdown- How is the Hinterland Coping?](#)



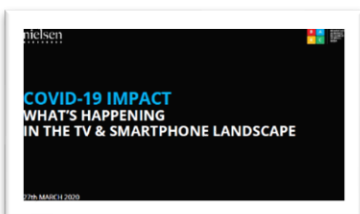
Published in May, 2020, this is a slide deck by PRADAN, New Delhi, and six other organisations, on the Covid-19 induced lockdown’s effect on rural households. It presents the results of a study which covers 5,162 households and 47 districts over 12 states. The data for this study was collected between April 27 and May 2, 2020.

83. [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition](#)



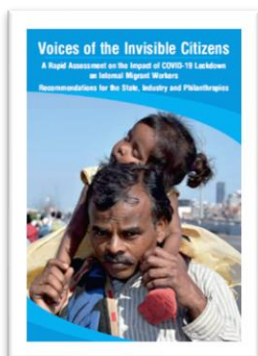
This third edition released by International Labour Organization contains updated estimates and an analysis on the effects of the Covid-19 induced lockdown – implemented in many countries to stem the spread of the virus – on the ‘world of work’.

84. [Crisis Consumption: An Insights Series into TV, Smartphone & Audiences \(Edition 2\)](#)



This second edition of the Insights series by BARC, India, and Nielsen, USA, was released on April 2, 2020. Its 45 slides present advertising trends since the Covid-19 ‘disruption’ and recommendations for advertisers, TV channels and digital services.

85. [Voices of the Invisible Citizens: A Rapid Assessment on the Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Internal Migrant Workers: Recommendation for the State, Industry and Philanthropies](#)



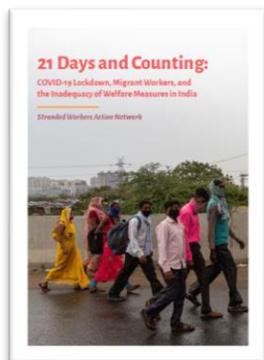
The report by Jan Sahas, New Delhi, presents the results of a survey of 3,196 migrant workers, conducted between March 27 and 29, 2020. The objectives of this survey were to assess the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on migrant workers and on their employment and income, gauge their access to essential services, document their self-assessment of the long-term impact of the shutdown, and analyse the effectiveness of relief measures undertaken by the central and state governments.

86. [Covid-19 Impact: What's happening in the TV & Smartphone Landscape \(Edition 1\)](#)



This first edition of the Insights series by BARC, India, and Nielsen, USA, was released on March 27, 2020. In 29 slides, it depicts changes in the viewing of Hindi TV channels, changes in TV viewing across genres and languages, and time spent on e-retail platforms since the Covid-19 period began. It also contains data on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's TV addresses on Covid-19 on March 19 and 24, 2020.

87. [21 Days and Counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India](#)



On March 27, volunteers associated with the Right to Food Campaign and the Samaj Parivartan Shakti Sangathan formed the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) to respond to distress calls from migrant workers stranded in different parts of India due to the lockdown. This report documents information collected from the calls of 640 groups of 11,159 stranded workers, up to April 13, 2020.

88. [32 Days and Counting: Covid-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India](#)



On March 27, volunteers associated with the Right to Food Campaign and the Samaj Parivartan Shakti Sangathan formed the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) to respond to distress calls from migrant workers stranded in different parts of India due to the lockdown. This is their second report, which documents information collected from the calls of 1,531 groups of 16,863 stranded workers, up to April 26, 2020.



## 89. [Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994](#)



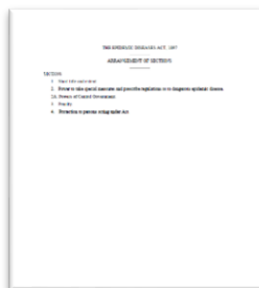
The PCPNDT (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act of September 20, 1994, which stipulates that no genetic counselling centre, laboratory or clinic shall conduct or facilitate the use of any pre-natal diagnostic technique to determine the sex of a foetus. It states that no person shall cause or allow sex selection before or after conception.

## 90. [The Disaster Management Act, 2005](#)



Enacted by the Parliament of India on December 23, 2005, this Act defines a ‘disaster’ as a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area – arising from natural or man-made causes, or by accident or negligence – which results in substantial loss of life, human suffering, or damage to and destruction of property or the environment. It includes the measures to be taken by the government for disaster management, the role of local authorities, and offences and penalties.

## 91. [The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897](#)



The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, aims to provide for the prevention of the spread of ‘Dangerous Epidemic Diseases’. This 773-word legislation was adopted when India was under British rule, in order to contain a bubonic plague outbreak in Bombay Presidency. The Act extends to the whole of India.

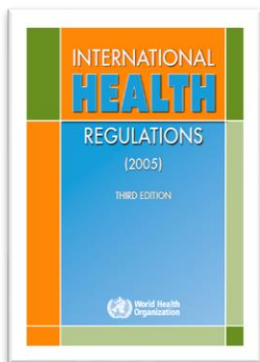
*Published in the Library on March 19*

## 92. [The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005](#)



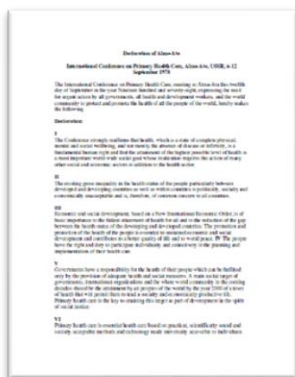
On September 13, 2005, the government of India passed this Act to provide more effective protection to women who are subjected to violence within the family. It defines ‘domestic violence’ as conduct which harms or injures the health, safety, life, limb or well-being – mental and physical – of the aggrieved person. This includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse, and conduct that harms, injures or endangers a woman in order to coerce her or her relatives to meet an unlawful demand for dowry, property or valuable security.

### 93. [International Health Regulations \(2005\)](#)



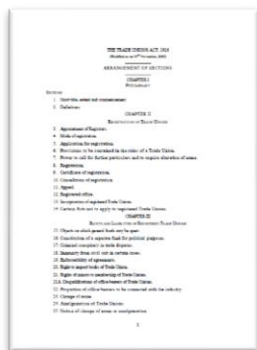
The World Health Assembly – the decision-making body of the World Health Organization – adopted the International Health Regulations (IHR) on May 23, 2005, in its 58th meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. The purpose of the Regulations, Article 2 of the IHR notes, is “...to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.” There are 196 States Parties to the IHR (2005), including India.

### 94. [Declaration of Alma-Ata](#)



The Declaration of Alma-Ata was adopted on September 12, 1978, at the International Conference on Primary Health Care – organised by the World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund – in Alma-Ata, USSR (now Almaty in Kazakhstan). Through this 1,118-word Declaration, the Conference expressed “...the need for urgent action by all governments, all health and development workers, and the world community to protect and promote the health of all the people of the world.”

### 95. [The Trade Unions Act, 1926](#)



The Trade Unions Act, 1926, aims to provide for the registration of trade unions in India, and defines the law related to registered unions. It extends to the whole of India.

### 96. [The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961](#)



This Act aims to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for specific periods before and after childbirth, and to provide them with maternity and other benefits. It extends to the whole of India.

97. [Inter-State Migrant Workmen \(Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service\) Act, 1979.](#)



This Act aims to regulate the employment of 'inter-state migrant workmen' and provide for their conditions of service. It applies to every establishment in which five or more inter-state migrant workers are employed or have been employed in the preceding 12 months. It is also applicable to any contractor who employs, or has employed, five or more inter-state migrant workers on any day of the preceding 12 months.

98. [Equal Remuneration Act, 1976](#)



This Act, passed on March 8, 1976, aims to provide for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers, and to prevent discrimination against women in employment.

99. [The Factories Act, 1948](#)



The Factories Act, 1948, aims to consolidate and amend the law regulating labour in factories in India. It contains provisions on the health, safety, working hours, leave and welfare of workers; inspecting staff for factories; hazardous processes in factories; the employment of young persons (children and adolescents); and penalties for contravening the provisions of the Act.

100. [The Contract Labour \(Regulation and Abolition\) Act, 1970](#)



This Act aims to regulate the employment of contract labourers in certain establishments, and to abolish such employment in certain circumstances. It extends to the whole of India.