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SHRAM KO NAMAN
A PHOTO ESSAY SERIES

PHOTOGRAPHS & CAPTIONS BY JIGNESH MISTRY

PUNE, INDIA - A MAN MAKES A WAY THROUGH BAMBOO BARRICADES IN A CONTAINMENT ZONE AT YERWADA AREA IN PUNE CITY ON MAY 09, 2020.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the existing gaps in social class and privilege. The faultlines of class in our society that run deep and wide are clearer now, more than ever. While the quarantine is taking its toll on almost every citizen, certain sections of our society are still vexed with access to food and basic necessities. During this state of uncertainty and global turmoil, migrant workers are perhaps facing the most pressing adversities of all.

THE SHRAMIK (WORKERS) FAR FROM HOME...

Pune, India- Bags are seen lined up as People wait in a Ration line for food grains amid Government imposed nationwide lockdown in Pune city, India on April 27, 2020.
'Migrant workers' are often described as those workers who migrate within their own country or outside it to pursue work with no intention of staying permanently at their area of employment. Due to the way it has been defined, the term 'migrant worker' cuts across people in different industries and income groups to encompass a large section of the society that has changed addresses for work. However, people with higher-income and stable jobs enjoy many privileges that have made the lockdown quite comfortable. Only a subset of the group of migrant workers is facing woes of the pandemic. This subset includes seasonal workers, manual labourers and individuals characteristically involved in physical labour in low paying jobs. These are the migrant workers that need government support and attention.
During this outbreak, work and employment have not come to a standstill for many people. The work-from-home policy being adopted by many corporates is offering saving grace to multiple employees. However, due to the physical and manual nature of their job, migrant workers like construction workers, domestic help, street hawkers, manual labourers etc. are unable to resume their work at full swing. For instance, most construction projects have been brought to a temporary halt, and subsequently, demand for physical labour has fallen. Thus, the pandemic has brewed a state of intense uncertainty for these daily wage workers who have been now pushed to the margins.
The problems faced by the migrant worker seem endless. The absence of employment has cut off their source of income and livelihood. Their low incomes and wages generated little or no savings in the past to fall back on during these rainy days. Access to basic necessities is a struggle while these workers wait in long serpentine lines for government support and rationed food. In the midst of these existential perils, other problems surround these workers. For instance, the issue of travel. During these perilous times, many workers would prefer to be back in their hometowns with the rest of their families. However, travel restrictions and lack of money to explore more expensive alternatives forbid that from happening. Moreover, migrant workers often do not have stable and proper housing in their city of work. Thus, the question of home and housing arises for them as well.
The government is trying to offer relief and aid to such migrant workers, for instance, through relief camps. Unfortunately, these solutions come in a package with long lines and bureaucratic red-tapism. Battling the issues of survival and livelihood, clad in face masks, the migrant workers patiently wait for the times to improve.

Pune, India- Patients recovered from Corona Virus are welcomed by doctors and staff at the campus of National Institute of Construction Management and Research (NICMAR), an Isolation ward at Baner area, Pune city on May 10, 2020. Twenty four Corona Virus negative patients were sent home on the same day.

Pune, India- Rooms are lit up as word "HOPE" of a 5-star hotel as to mark to end the spread of the COVID-19 novel corona virus Pandemic in Pune city, India on April 09, 2020.
Pune, India - Pedestrians cross a wall painting creating awareness against Corona virus at Dahanukar colony amid concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 novel corona virus in Pune city on March 26, 2020.
JIGNESH MISTRY is a Pune-based freelance photojournalist. He has been in the field for over 10 years. He started his career as a nightshift news photographer at a daily tabloid during his graduation. Since then, his work has been published at multiple magazines, wire agencies and national newspapers. He is also involved in undertaking photography workshops for students in academic institutions. Currently, he is a regular contributor at The Hindu, The Press Trust of India and the International Wire Agencies.

PAIGAM (People’s Association In Grassroots Action and Movement) is an aggregator of activists, researchers, practitioners and organisations that aims to bring together social efforts at the local, national and global levels through media advocacy and action research. They wish to bring a seamless bridge between academia, activism, policy and public through our media, advocacy, research, grassroots fellowship and mobilization channels.

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