Workers thicken the Sugarcane juice from one vessel to another, a three hour process at a Jaggery making plant.
Migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh would find rich employment opportunities in the Sugarcane belt around Pune. As migrant workers scurry back home amidst coronavirus concerns, jaggery production schedule has taken a different turn. This small-scale business is working on diminished capacity as only 10% of migrant workers decided to stay back.

Now these workers burn the midnight oil as production facility runs 24 hours a day, with workers working in 3 shifts.

As the Maharashtra government allowed over 1 lakh cane-cutters to return to their hometowns, the workers face a dilemma — to continue sugarcane cutting over virus fears or risk taking the virus home with them. The promise of some employment offers respite, but the days are still only bittersweet.
Women carry water at temporary staying facility for sugarcane cutters next to Sant Tukaram Sugar Factory at Kasarsai-Darumbre village in Pune district, India on April 20, 2020.

Workers carry dry Sugarcane Bagasse to be used as fuel at Jaggery making plant.
A temporary staying facility for sugarcane cutters next to Sant Tukaram Sugar Factory at Kasarsai-Darumbre village in Pune district, India on April 20, 2020.
Workers carry dry Sugarcane Bagasse to be used as fuel at Jaggery making plant.

A worker puts sugarcane in a crushing machine to remove juice at a Jaggery making plant.
A worker empty a cart of dry Sugarcane Bagasse after crushing at Jaggery making plant. The dry Bagasse is used as fuel or natural fibre for Textile industries.

Trolleys loaded with Household items of sugarcane cutters next to Sant Tukaram Sugar Factory at Kasarsai-Darumbre village in Pune district, India on April 20, 2020.
Pune, India- A Migrant Sugarcane worker folds a Tarpaulin sheet next to Sant Tukaram Sugar Factory at Kasarsai-Darumbre village in Pune district, India on April 20, 2020. The Maharashtra state government has ordered to allow over a lakh migrant sugarcane cutters to return to their native villages amid Government imposed nationwide Lockdown from the Sugar Factories.

A worker stand next to Jaggery stock to be delivered at Jaggery making plant at Thorat Wasti in Sahajpur village on Pune-Solapur Highway in Pune district on May 14, 2020.
A worker cools down the jaggery to be put into buckets measuring 9 kilos at a Jaggery making plant.

A worker puts plastic cover on dry jaggery blocks to be delivered at Jaggery making plant.

A worker puts plastic cover on dry jaggery blocks to be delivered at Jaggery making plant.
Workers dry Sugarcane Bagasse after crushing at Jaggery making plant.

Facing the uncertainty and trials of seasonal employment as the sugarcane season passes by, the migrant workers from UP are caught between a rock and a hard place. With the fear of the virus looming over them and the closure of many sugarcane mills for the time being, the migrant workers are weathering this storm to the best of their abilities.
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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