

A REPORT ON HOW DHARAVI WORKERS AND FAMILIES ARE FARING AWAY FROM MUMBAI

We contacted 24 previous respondents and asked them about their current situation. Some of them are single migrant workers, others have lived in Dharavi for years with their wives and children. Some of them traveled alone, others with their families. This report highlights their journey and life back home in the time of Covid-19.

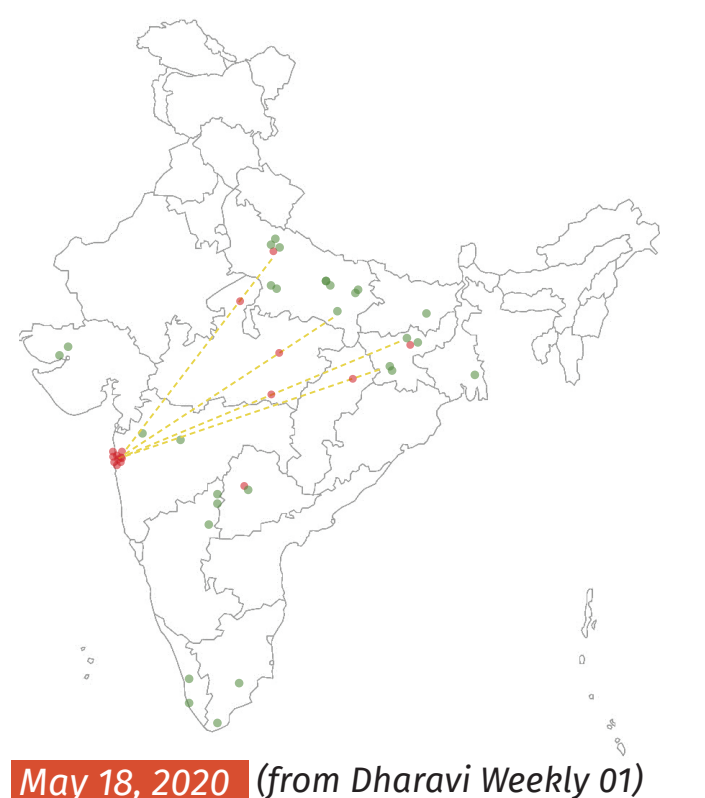
**MORE THAN
CATCHING CORONA,
PEOPLE WERE SCARED
OF THE POLICE
STOPPING THEIR
VEHICLES ENROUTE**

How they reached their native villages; the problems they faced.

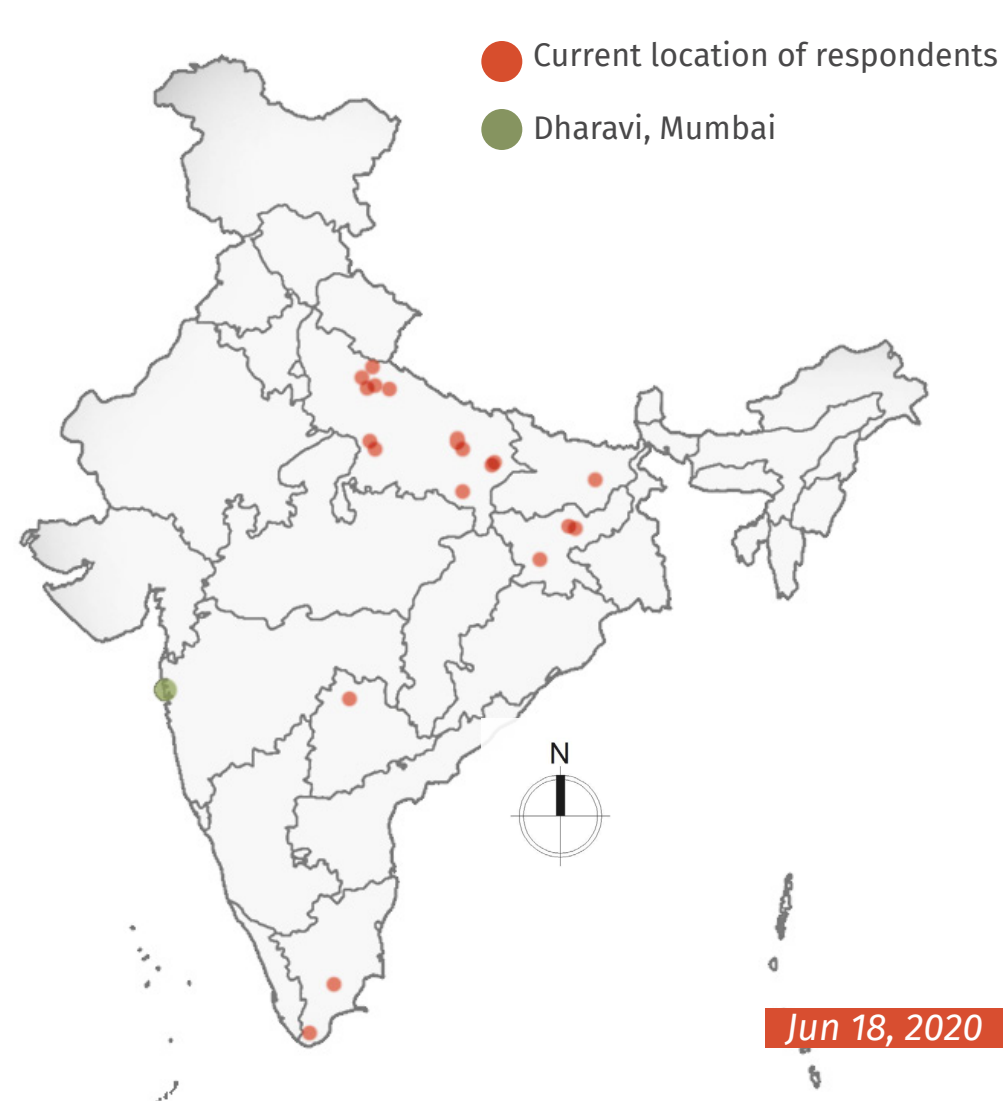


Testing before entering Uttar Pradesh

After a long month of waiting and trying, many stranded workers finally managed to leave Mumbai and go back to their villages. They used trucks, trains, buses, cars, and even auto-rickshaws, whatever they could manage. Their only goal was to reach home. On an average, 50+ people were crammed into a truck. For some, it was a safe and smooth journey, but for others, it was a struggle to get enough food on the road. Every state had a different set of rules and restrictions. Many of the vehicles were stopped and checked multiple times. In some cases, they were not allowed to enter a particular state. It was only after a thorough check, that the authorities arranged buses for people on the road to reach their respective villages. Many of them faced police brutality. The workers had to wait for 8-10 hours to be permitted to enter a particular state. In spite of these challenges there was hope and a sense of security because most of the travellers had been tested for the virus, before boarding.



These maps show the movement of the respondents over a period of one month as they travelled back to their villages.



"I was not scared of traveling with so many strangers. All of us were tested before boarding the train. I just wanted to reach home."

- Bhagirath Yadav, Uttar Pradesh

Living with a tumor

**follow up of 'Quarantined' from Dharavi Weekly 02*

Abhimanyu Modi has spent a better part of his work-life in Mumbai. After the lockdown, it was getting financially difficult for him to manage. Besides, the fear of rising corona cases in Dharavi brought him back to his village in Jharkhand. Abhimanyu has a brain tumor and is highly dependent on his weekly medicines. After being in quarantine for 15 days, he is finally resting at home. He is in touch by phone, with his doctor from Mumbai and has ordered medicines that will last him only for 10 days.

Tamil Nadu Beckons

"I am not coming back to Bombay. Life in Bombay is very expensive as compared to my village. I was paying Rs 4,000 as monthly rent for which I had to pay an additional Rs 20,000 as deposit. My landlords have debited 4 months' rent from my deposit. My brother-in-law in the village is asking me to join him in his new venture. I think I will. Once this lockdown ends, I am only going back to Bombay to pack up my remaining belongings. The TN government gives Rs 5,00,000 to build a house so I am planning to start my new life here. I will enroll my kids in the local school."

-Prem, Tamil Nadu

Food debt

Many workers who moved back to their village don't have any work. They were the sole bread earners of the family and because of a loss of income. It is getting difficult for them to manage basic necessities.

"We don't have enough money to buy food as I am not currently working. I've had to take a loan to sustain myself."

-Mehboob Alam, Bihar

Quarantined in the village

After many days of struggle, when people finally reached home, they were immedeately quarantined. After entering the state, everyone was tested once again before being quarantined. Local schools, wedding halls, community rooms were converted into quarantine centers. In most cases, these quarantine centers didn't provide food or other basic facilities. Their families had to bring home-cooked food daily.

"My house is away from the main village so my sister-in-law had to travel 45 mins-1 hour to get me food."
-Shankar Mandal, Jharkhand



Sageer Khan and his family in home quarantine, Uttar Pradesh

Life in the village - Food, Shelter, and Services

The majority of the villages depend on their agricultural production. This means that for most people farming is the next resort. Their families have enough food to survive through the pandemic. Because of a relatively smaller density of population, the fear of catching coronavirus is limited. People are still following the government mandate of wearing masks and washing their hands or using sanitizers regularly. Unlike Mumbai which is starved for open spaces, villages

have the advantage of ample open space. Neighbors can still meet every evening for a cup of tea while maintaining social distance norms. Apart from this small social respite, the village also has other advantages. The most attractive one is the monthly expenses, which are highly affordable compared to Mumbai's basic living costs. Some of the respondents are now reconsidering their return to Mumbai, as they experience the benefits of embracing their lives in the village.

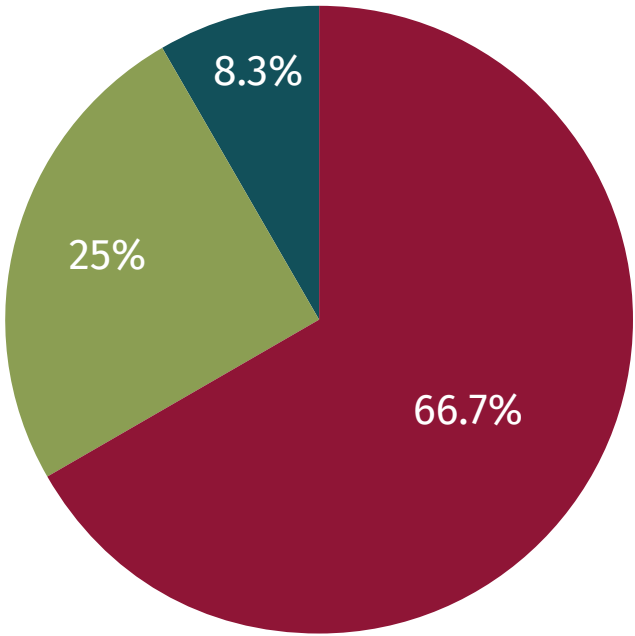


Village scenes in Covid-19 times. Open spaces and free time.

Coming back?

Even though village life gives security and comfort, for many staying behind is not a viable option. Their kids go to schools in Dharavi. Their work is based in Mumbai and sustaining without regular income is getting difficult every day.

"I don't want my kids to miss school. I will come back as soon as they start the trains and Mumbai is corona free."
-Stephen Raj, Tamil Nadu



- Will come back to Mumbai
- Not sure
- Won't come back