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Lockdown 2020's impact on migrant fishworkers will last longer than the season did

Andhra Pradesh's fishworkers stranded in Gujarat reach home, another dies in Maharashtra.

[Karuna John](#) 01 May 2020



This May Day, around 4000 fishermen have reached home to their villages on the Andhra Pradesh coast. These migrant fishworkers were stuck on their boats anchored on the Gujarat coast, where they work as contractual labourers during fishing season. As the national Covid-19 lockdown was announced without warning, they, like lakhs of other migrant workers, were stuck without work and unable to make their way home inland. It took days of negotiations between the two state governments to enable the workers to return home. While they had been supplied basic food, and water by their contractors the fishworkers, had been living under difficult conditions on the cramped boats.

While the boat owners have faced massive losses, the migrant workers of Andhra Pradesh stranded on the boats faced great mental and emotional stress too. Two of them died while waiting to go home. After a month-long ordeal they finally boarded buses and braved the long journey by road to get home.

Tragically yet another death of a fishworker from Andhra Pradesh was reported from Mumbai on April 29. He too had died on the fishing boat in which he was stranded. This, once again highlights the rising human cost in the fisheries sector has been forced to pay as the Covid-19 lockdown continues.

Kori Jaganathulu (35), a native of Andhra's Srikakulam District is said to have died of kidney failure as he was not able to get medication due to the lockdown. According to information shared by the NFF around 120 migrant fishworkers from Andhra Pradesh are still stranded on board their fishing boats in the village of Uttan Pali, Mira Bhayandar, Maharashtra.

According to NFF, Kori had arrived in Mumbai three months ago and soon developed a kidney problem. Before the lockdown was enforced he was undergoing dialysis. As his condition did not improve, Kori's friends hired a private ambulance to take him back to his village. They reached the Karnataka-Maharashtra border on March 26, but since the lockdown had been announced the ambulance was turned back. The NFF says that Kori had been living on the boat since, without access to medical care, and finally succumbed to the illness. His friends told NFF representatives that they collected wood for the pyre and cremated Kori's body themselves as no one else stepped forward to help.

The NFF also shared that two Covid-19 cases have been reported from Uttan Pali village and fishing vessels had been prohibited from going back to sea. The fishworkers remain stranded on their boats without much access to health facilities. According to the NFF, here too the boat owners may now be exploring the possibility of making arrangements to repatriate the workers back to their native states. It is said that between 1200-1500 workers from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand work on boats in this area.

Even those workers who have now been sent home from Gujarat, will have to deal with bigger challenges once they emerge from the 14-day self quarantine period. Most of them have barely managed to work in Gujarat, first due to bad weather, and then in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown.

The workers stranded in Maharashtra have been working for 3 months before the lockdown was announced. They are yet to receive the wages for this period, though it has been promised by the owners. "They are however, not going to be paid their wages for the period during the lockdown; though entitled to these wages as per directions from the Gol, they are not demanding these. Their immediate demand in the aftermath of the death is to be repatriated to Andhra Pradesh at the earliest," said the NFF.

Their stress on this demand is high as they now know that the migrant fish workers who were stranded in Gujarat have reached home in Andhra Pradesh. As the Ministry of Home Affairs has slowly allowed the migrants to return home, fishworkers from other states have begun to demand that they be sent back to their native villages.

However they too will face an uncertain financial future once they get back home. Some may have meagre savings, but most will not be able to resume work as in a month or so the seasonal Monsoon bans on fishing will come into effect along the coastline. This is when the real challenge begins.

"Registered fishworkers have a savings and relief scheme which the state govt provides funds during the monsoon ban period," said Anil T varghese Delhi forum, Secretariat of National Fishworkers Forum. It is not known if this fund will be extended to all fishworkers, including migrant fish workers, all of whom have been severely impacted by the Covid19 national lockdown.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's next address is expected on Saturday May 2 at 10 AM, as the May 3 deadline of the lockdown nears.

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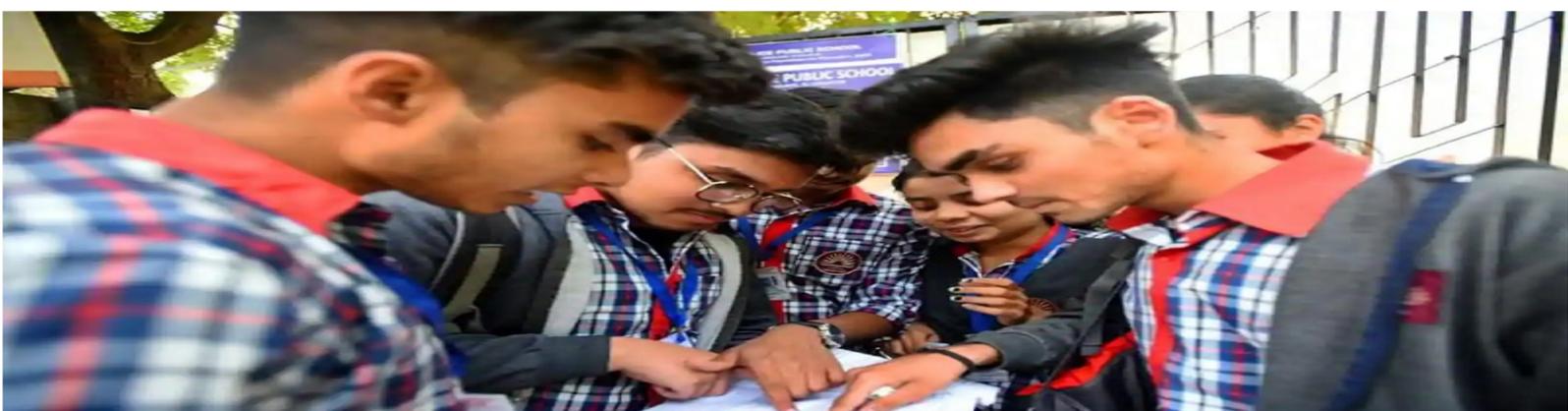
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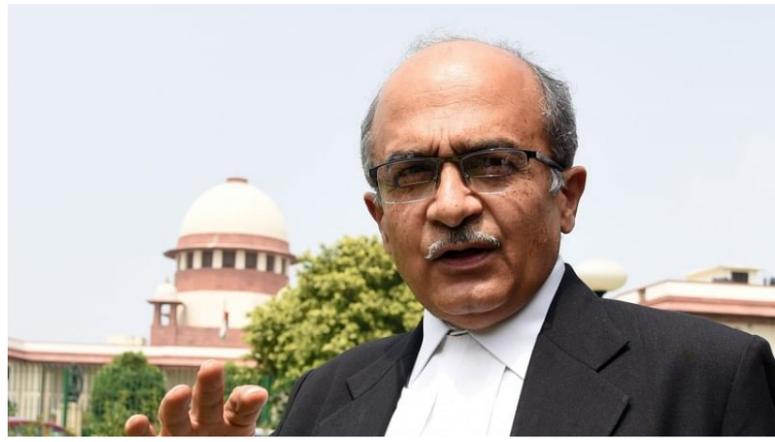
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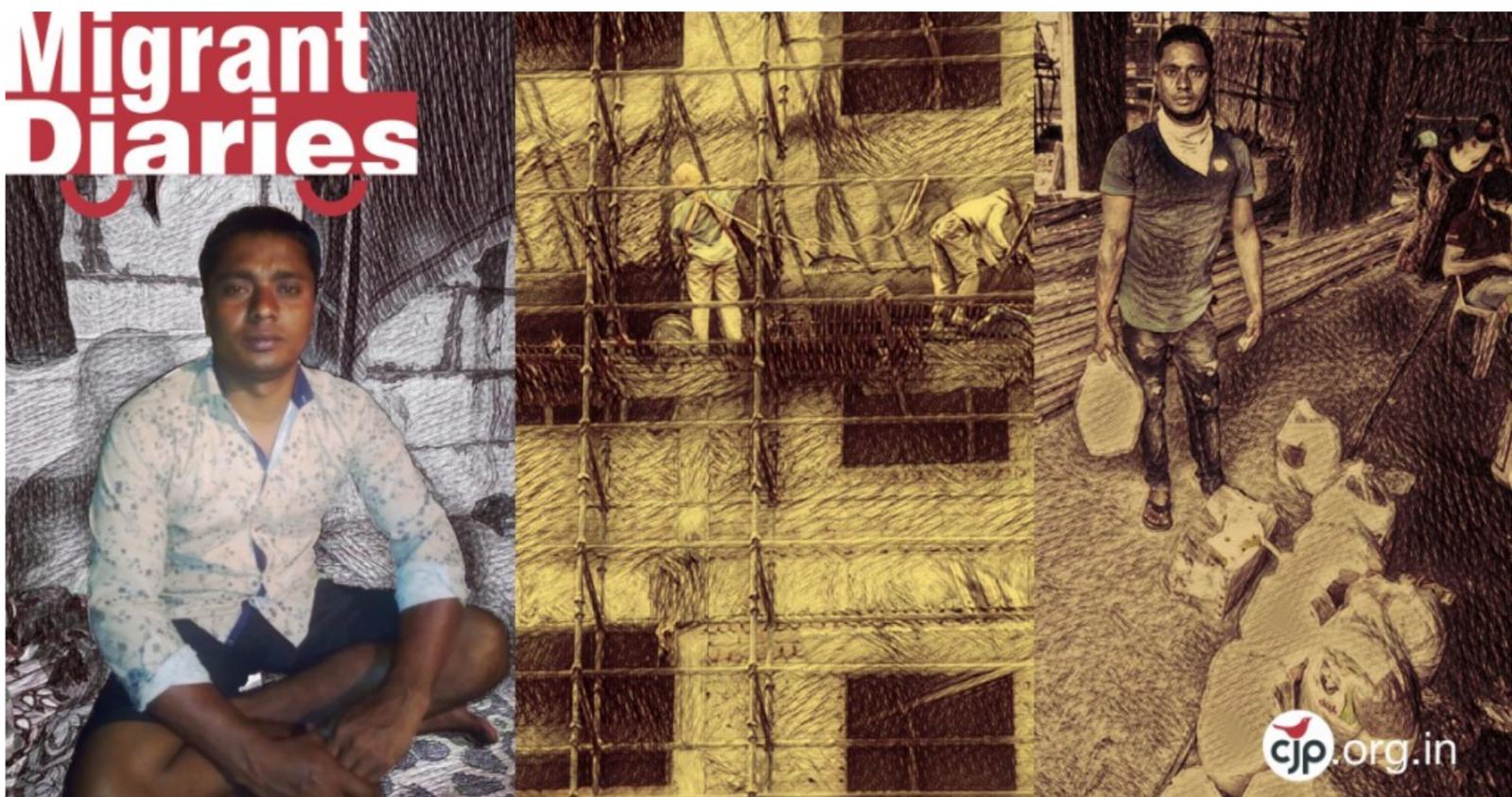
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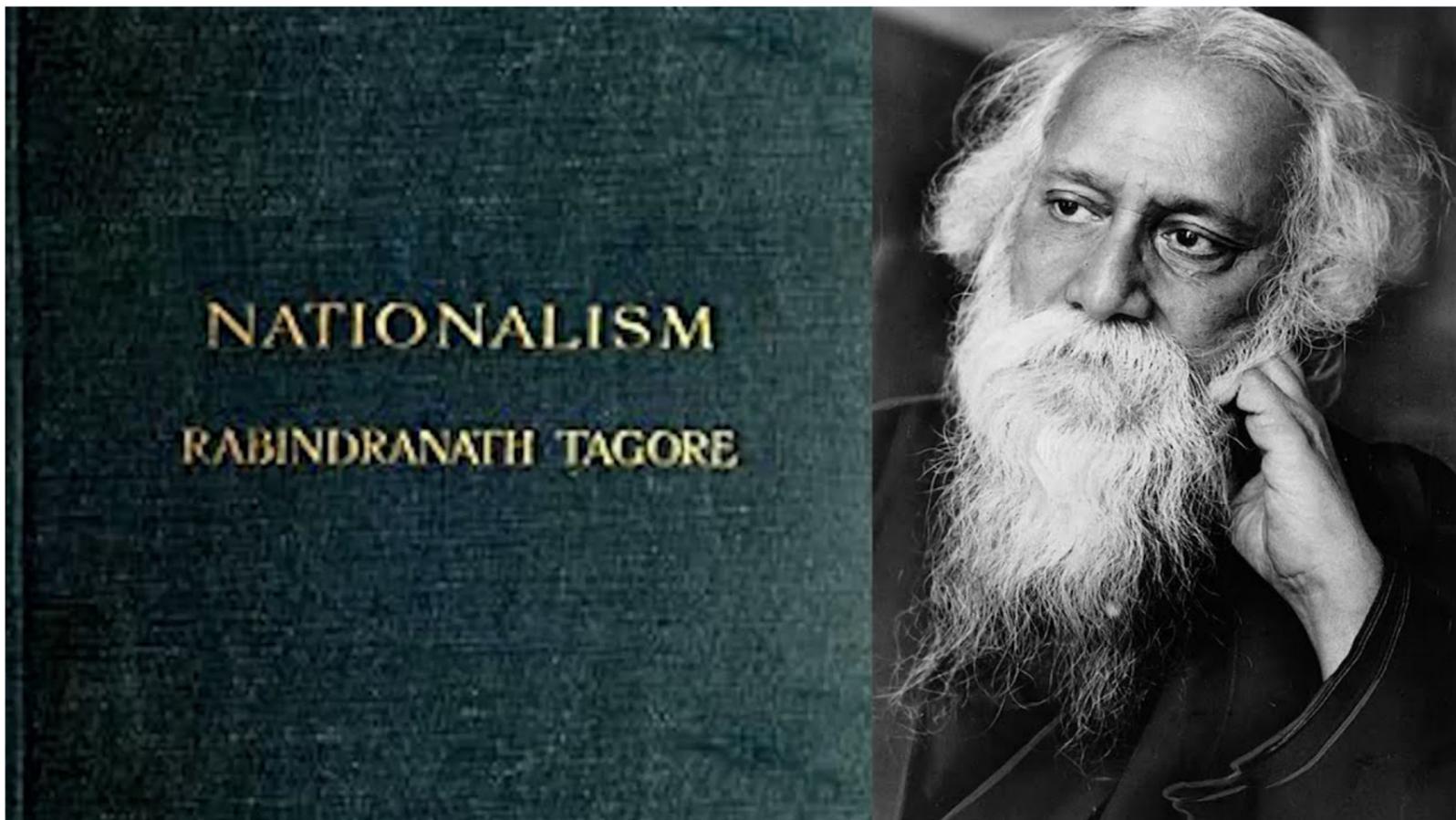
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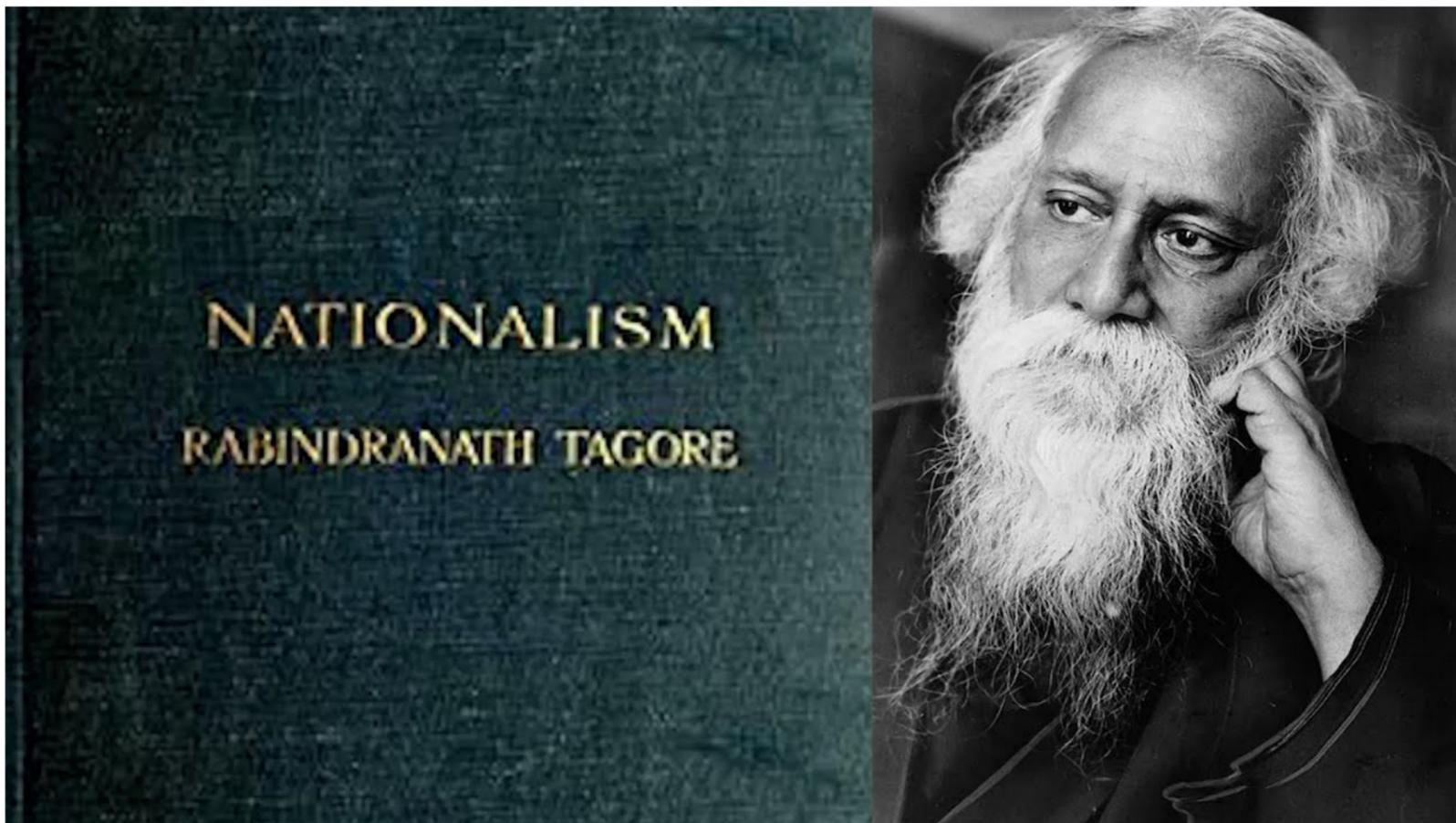


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