

MIGRATION



Introduction

A short paragraph on how the children of Loka came to engage with the question of migration, and how the perspective has evolved as a result of the lockdown.

A few concluding sentences of what is in this issue and the thread that connects all those thoughts, pictures and articles – begin with Dinesh’s discussion of borders and the different kinds that that divide society today. Then go on to migrant stories that the children have written about, and how these different borders are crossed through them. This is followed by similar stories written in the middle of the lockdown – how it impacted migrants in different cities and brought them back home. Students reflect on all these stories and graphically represent their observations and thoughts, finally concluding with a conversation with Paul.

Border of Poverty

BY DINESH

During my slow walk I became aware about the border between rich and poor. When I was taking a slow walk then I saw some educated people in the village filling in the government forms about COVID-19 for village people to receive money from the government. Then I saw for this people were in line and one by one filling a form and it was only meant for poor people but some rich people were also coming and they were giving some money to the man who was responsible for the forms and he filled theirs first and very carefully and poor people were left behind. And this type of situation is everywhere in Bihar and even in all of India. So, by observing this situation I thought I should write about it.

Border of Poverty – An Imaginary Border

Do you know what is the meaning of border of poverty? It means that poor people face lots of difficulties while crossing it. It is more hard to cross than any other border. Do you know, the border of poverty is very painful. Everywhere when poor people try to do something the border of poverty comes in their way. For example, a poor man wants to get a job and earn money and he wants to live a happy life with his family. For this he works very hard and somehow he studies a lot and when the time comes for the job then his job is taken away by the rich man and his money. Do you know how the job is taken away from him by rich people? I am giving an example I have seen with my own eyes in real. When poor people try to get a job at the government office, the officer asks for money. When poor people are unable to give the officer anything then rich people will come and give him advance money and in the spite of poor people being able and qualified, rich people get the job and poor people's dreams are driven away from their hands and their whole life poor people cry. Everywhere corrupt people are present who do anything for money. In all fields poor people are helpless on front of rich people. That's why poor people are unable to cross the border of poverty.

Bridging the Border

We can make poor and rich people equal by caring for each other and thinking of everyone as our own family. If we will think that we all are one family then we will realise each other's pain. This way there will not be rich and poor, everybody will be the same and all will be connected and help each other. As we know changes start from one and then spread everywhere. First of all we should be aware of these borders ourselves so that we cannot be divided from each other. Then by seeing our example more people will understand easily and follow the path towards a world with equal chances.

THIS IS THE BORDER OF POVERTY AND THE WHOLE LIFE OF POOR PEOPLE IS CRACKED LIKE THIS BORDER



Stories of Human Migration

A short paragraph contextualising these conversations and how the students went about recording these stories.

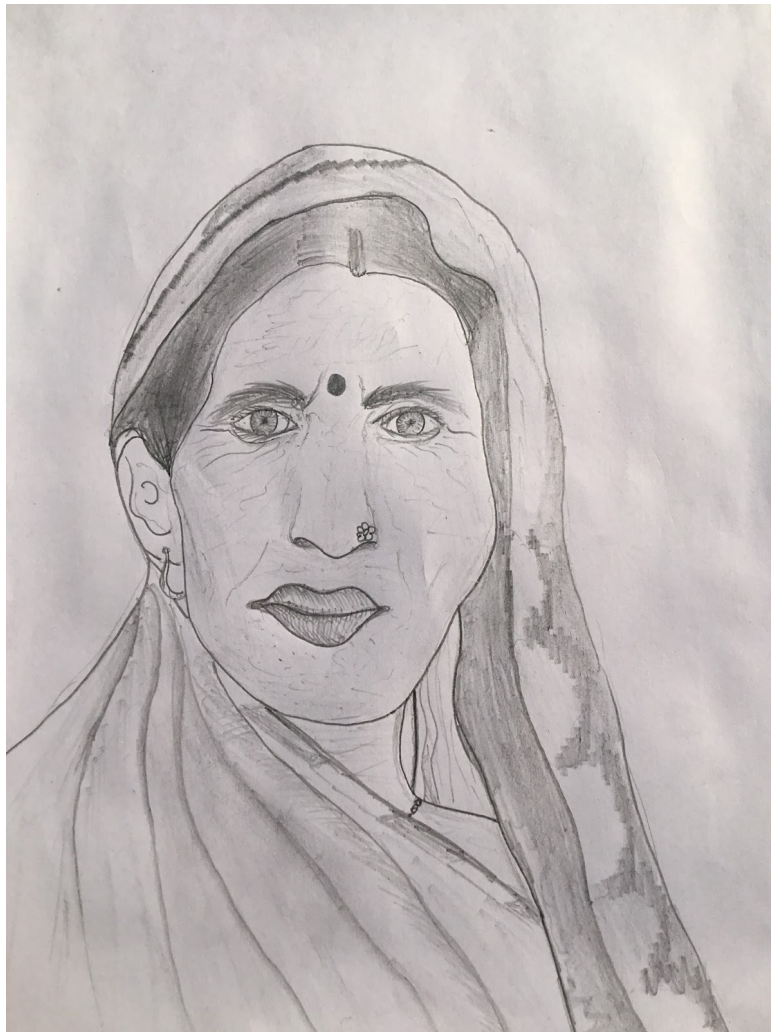
Lines on the face; determination in the eyes

By Sanatan

I would like to share my mother's migration story. I chose my mother because when I know more deeply about my parent's migration and experience on a small scale and which is near to me, then it may help me understand the experience of world migration which is also related to me.

In 2011 my parents migrated from one village to another village. The distance between those two villages was 20 km. In the first beautiful village my parents got married and after some time they had 3 daughters and 2 sons. Then they migrated from there to the other village, that is where I now live and study. We migrated because of some financial problems and family members told my parents to live somewhere else because they were costing the family too much money. Then my parents migrated from there. When my parents first moved into the new village, they experienced many challenges. People used to fight with my parents and hit them with bamboo sticks. They told them that you have to not to live here. Also, when there were land disputes

people thought my family was weak because of having less money and coming from another place and being in the village without support. My parents faced these problems bravely. Especially my mother who was once upon a time being harassed a lot. She faced all problems because she wanted to survive with her children. She is a different kind of lady. She works very hard. Just one look at her eyes and the many lines on her face tells the story of her life.



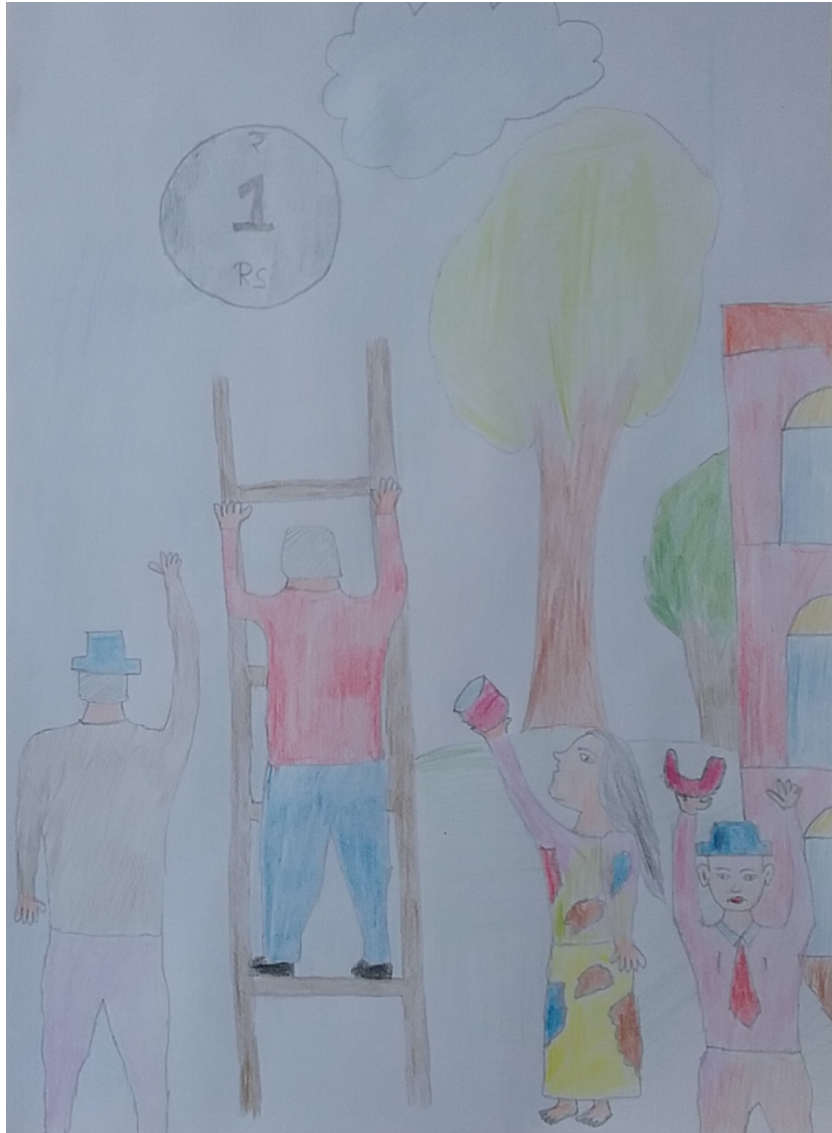
Drawing of my mother is made by my friend Sudhir.

Our Own Stories of Migration

By Yashpal

My father has a transport company and because of that I speak to many truck drivers. One of the drivers once shared his migration story to me. He is now driving a truck in Gujarat. He has been there before, and he said this place is quite dangerous. When he entered the salt factories, they took his driving licence. Knowing that without driving licence, he cannot work. Employees are only allowed to go home once a year at Holi. For any other reason they do not get permission. One time some people tried to escape at night. They were beaten severely, and their bodies put in salt to decompose fast. The reason he keeps on migrating there anyway is to earn more money and this is helpful for his family. In my village more people are working very far from home. One old man who is close to me told his story by mobile phone. His age is nearby 58. He migrated from Bihar to Gujarat. He has two daughters. I choose to interview this man because he is quite old to migrate so far from his family, but he is working for his daughters' education and marriage. He chooses to go very far. I noticed one thing about this man, and it makes me wonder. He

speaks Hindi and uses Hindi words that I do not understand. I asked why he chose to migrate in old age. Then he replied "I am that kind of man when I think something is important then I will move for that thing. Now money is very important because of marriage and education." He has no sons and his daughters want to study. For their study he requires money and after studying they will get married. All fathers want to find a good family for their daughters. He also wants a good family for his daughters. But good families demand more money and in Bihar people will not get job easily and lack of money problem is there that's why he chose to migrate. He continued: "And one more problem is there that when I live nearby my village then I want to go home for rest and spend time with my family and it is difficult. When I live far from home, I feel very bad but money is that thing it makes us helpless and it creates conditions like that. When I go outside for work, I feel scared because when I will not do work in proper way and when I make any mistake this thing make scared because head of work will give punishment. And I think maybe he will fire me. Then it is difficult for me and I fear that I will never fulfil my daughters' dream." Thanks to this old man's earnings his family is now in good condition.



I made one drawing about this

One thing I realised after writing this story and also because a conversation in class about being rich and poor is that I wonder what the difference between rich and poor is. Both rich and poor are running behind money, then what is the difference between them? Then I Chose to make this drawing.

Bleeding Heart

By Dinesh

The migration story I would like to share is of Shanti Devi. She is 33 years old and works in a brick factory just outside my village and far away from her own home and family. I chose to zoom into her life and migration story because generally people do not focus and explain about common people who struggle a lot in their life. Many people in this world only give information about famous and rich people. That's why I thought I should share the story of a common person who struggles a lot in our society.

When I approached Shanti Devi, she was wearing very simple clothes and sitting under a tree. I could see sadness on her face but a mind that wants to help. I asked her that if she wouldn't mind me asking a few questions. Then she nicely said yes, you can ask. My first question was that from where you have come and why? She replied she was from Ramanujganj in the Surguja district of Chhattisgarh and she came here to work in a brick factory. She makes the bricks and carries them to the oven where the bricks are put in fire. It is traditional work within her family. I asked why she migrated from her area; instead of working here she could have also worked

there. Then Shanti said that she did not come here from her own desire but that she was helpless. One day her husband went out of the house after a fight and he married another lady. He drove his first wife and her little son away from the house, and now she is living alone with him. Then I asked her why she did not complain at the police station? She replied that she is uneducated and unable to complain anywhere. While talking, her small child came. Then I asked, about his studies. She said that now he is not studying because he is small. Now he is learning how to make bricks. When he grows up, he will be admitted in a government school to study so he will not have to face the same difficulties. Then, at the end, I asked if she remembers her house sometimes. She said that she misses her house so much. When she was there, she used to work in the paddy fields and live happily with her husband and child. Now she is missing this life and her family very much.

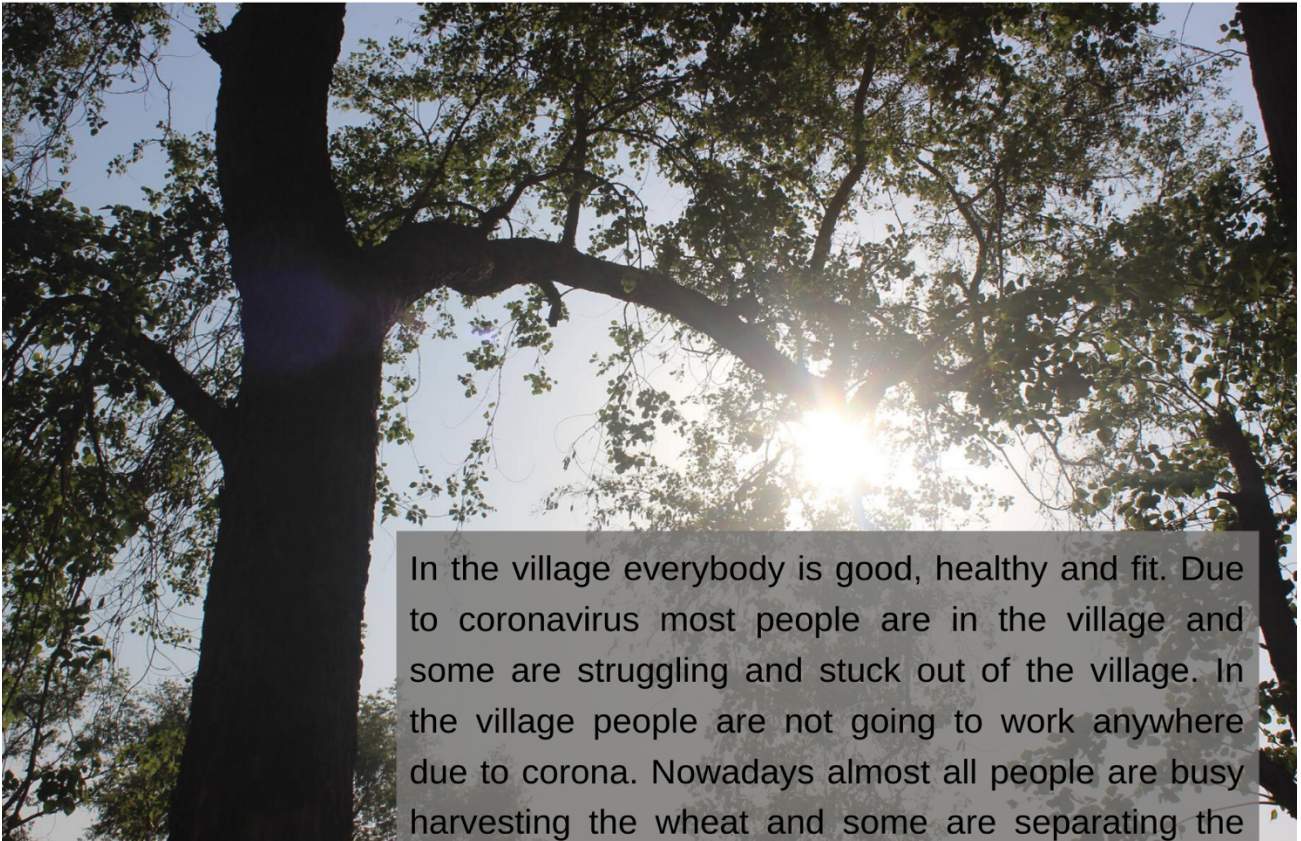
After hearing her story, I became very upset. I consoled her and thanked her for the conversation.

Composition and
photography by
Dinesh



Stories from the Lockdown

As the lockdown forced many residents of Manikpur to return back to their village, others were left stranded in cities with no work. The children of Loka share how the recent lockdown has affected these lives.



In the village everybody is good, healthy and fit. Due to coronavirus most people are in the village and some are struggling and stuck out of the village. In the village people are not going to work anywhere due to corona. Nowadays almost all people are busy harvesting the wheat and some are separating the wheat from the chaff. Many farmers are growing vegetables and working hard as vegetables have become costly because of corona. In village the ladies are happy because they are getting money from government. And government is also giving money to farmers because in this year farmers lentils and gram were lost due to rain.

Lockdown Update by Shankar

In village many animals started to die like in last month all puppies died in the village. And in last week two buffaloes and one cow died.

Due to children not being able to play cricket match outside the village they are playing in a small field on the bank of the Punpun River.

An Interview with my Brother by Dinesh

I interviewed my own elder brother Dileep Kumar who migrated from his village and went to work in Noida city, Delhi. He went there and got a job in a mobile phone company. He started work happily, but after ten days his company closed due to COVID-19 and he became jobless. Due to lockdown he now is unable to work or travel anywhere. He has been stuck in Delhi for months. Whatever food and money he took with him from the village, all is finished. And while living there, the head of the company asks for the room rent every day but my brother and the group he is staying with have no money left so they are unable to pay him. The government has arranged for migrants to travel back to their own states and homes but all facilities the government is supposed to provide are not functioning. My brother tried them all and after trying all options he and his friends are still far away from their family.

When I asked my brother "do you remember your own family?" He felt very emotional and tears came in his eyes. He said "my eyes are only waiting for seeing you, my whole family and my small village which is near the Pun-Pun river."



On the photo you can see the bed where my brother and his group sleep. He stays there with my maternal uncle and with some other friends who are from different villages in Bihar. And any work they do it together, like making food, washing cloths etc. If any types of problem comes in their way then they solve it together by helping each other. I learn from them that in worst condition we should live together and help each other instead of leaving anybody alone.

After hearing his voice I also became emotional. Then I realised this is the not story of only my brother but there are many people facing difficulties same like my brother, what will happen to them? How they are living? Lots of questions came to my mind. Then I said to my brother: "Take care of yourself and your group and thank you very much for your interview." After saying thank you for your interview to my brother I realised that my brother said "you are most welcome" through the tears in his eyes.

Reflections

Visualisations of migrations by the children of Loka.

<< INSERT IMAGES AND DESCRIPTIONS SHARED BY THE CHILDREN >>

Dialogue

A conversation between the students of Loka and Pulitzer awarded journalist and National Geographic Fellow, Paul Salopek

A New World: On Village Scale

A Conversation with Journalist Paul Salopek

In the seventh year of walking from Ethiopia to Patagonia for his [Out of Eden Walk](#), Paul Salopek passed Loka's school in rural Bihar. His visit to this remote village along the Punpun river marked the beginning of a new friendship and an ongoing conversation between Loka's students and the Pulitzer awarded journalist and National Geographic Fellow. Through Paul, Loka's senior students started to participate in [Out of Eden Learn](#), an online platform for cultural exchange connected to his walk, that was thoughtfully designed by Project Zero (Harvard). Recently students who participate in this programme had an online conversation with Paul, now in Northern Myanmar, about human migration, the lockdown and the world after the pandemic.

Sanatan: What thoughts come in your mind when you think about human migration?

Paul: The Out of Eden Walk is designed around human migration. All day my thoughts are about human migration. For

me, as a writer and also as a scientist, migration is one of the fundamental definitions of being human. And in many ways, I think it is our natural state because before the invention of agriculture our ancestors moved all the time, which was only relatively recently in the story of human evolution. Evolutionary biologists and paleo anthropologists tell us that maybe more than 90% of our history humans have been on the move, on foot. And so, when I think of migration, I think of life. Migration is life for me. This migratory urge, this restlessness if you will, is deep in our bones and it is our natural state. Since we started planting seeds in the ground about 11 thousand years ago, we have become anchored to those seeds. In a sense we have also planted ourselves in place. And it is such a new phenomenon, even though around your village and in your communities it may seem like something that has been going on since the dawn of time, the truth is it hasn't. It is very recent human behaviour and we are still adapting to not moving. I would like to think our minds or our souls are still moving even in our dreams and that we wake up in a bit of a surprise to find we are still in the same place. But I think in a strange way we have forgotten the importance of movement. A lot of issues have come up in our communities. People sometimes feel a bit down, and it's normal, to feel like you're not connected to your community or to the world or you're frustrated. You might be angry sometimes for reasons you do not

understand. My theory is that some of these negatives might be connected to the fact that we don't move around so much.

Suman: Did you learn any new things during lockdown?

Paul: I have. You are students at Loka. I am a student too and have been using this time to learn as much as I can about China. Reading books and reading articles. Talking to experts on China. I have had kind of a China history and culture class using the internet, whenever it works. So, I am very much in learning mode. And I have also been learning about my current community in Northern Burma, way up north near the Chinese borders. I can see the Himalayas from my window. And if you walk about 9 days north across the mountain frontiers you reach Tibet. It is a really interesting part of the world, a tropical rainforest, very warm. We are well into the monsoon. It is very green and rainy like it is in Bihar during the monsoon, but the difference is that here, when the clouds draw away like a curtain, you can see snow-capped peaks. It is very beautiful. Actually, as terrible as the lockdown is for many people, I have been trying to make the most of it. How about you? What have you been doing during lockdown?

Yashpal (from Sasaram): During lockdown first, I learned how to take care of a calf and I was involved in cooking and I learned how to make a bamboo hut.

Paul: Great, these are practical skills and very good to know. Well, I'd say that is time put to good use. Very well done. I also walked through Sasaram on the way to your school and very much liked the town.

Ankit: How do you think the world will look like after the lockdown, after this situation?

Paul: That's a good question, it is one we are all asking. My thinking is that anybody who can tell you that or claims can tell you what it will look like is probably wrong. The last time something like this happened to the world was more than 100 years ago, during the Spanish flu in 1918, and this event changed the world in very complicated ways. And most probably the current pandemic is going to change things in even more profound ways simply because we are much more connected to each other than we were a hundred years ago. Recently I wrote an article where I talked to experts, about what they thought what was going to happen. They gave me their best estimates and their best guesses but it's really unpredictable. I think the

process that is allowing us to communicate right now across thousands of kilometres, this idea of a global community, is never going to go away. Once you cross that threshold, once I get to talk to my friends at Loka, I don't want to give that up because it's a beautiful thing. The world will not become less connected. But it may become connected in different ways.

Some pretty smart people that I talked to - I will just share what they told me and I don't know if it's right or wrong- said there will be big political and economic changes and that the pandemic, this corona virus disease, has revealed strengths and weaknesses in societies that you couldn't see clearly before and it has made them very clear now. Several of these experts have come to the conclusion over the last few months that based on what has been exposed in the news around the world about how different parts of the world are coping with this vast problem, it suggests a direction the world might be heading into. They say it is going to be a century where the centre of gravity for innovation, economic development, geopolitical power is moving into Asia even more than it already is. As a reporter I have covered big crises, countries that have been falling apart and countries that are trying to pull themselves back together. Crisis are terrible because they cause a lot of pain and suffering, but they also create possibilities for positive change. As awful as this is, and I

know you and your parents might be suffering very severe repercussions economically in terms of access to jobs and the markets for your food products, but it will possibly accelerate good things too. And you are going to be the ones who make these good things happen. It is up to your generation. So keep studying, keep learning, look around you all the time. The difficulties in life, the bottle necks in life, is where we grow. I don't know if it has been that way with you, but with me; it is all fine and good when everything is nice and rosy, and everything is a level plane or going a little bit downhill. But when you are on a steep uphill in your life that is when you are really forced to use your muscles. Your psychic and your emotional muscles and that's where you really grow. So use this time. Study, learn and help everybody innovate a new kind of world that is post-pandemic. A more fair and just world that gives equal opportunities to everybody.

Dinesh: In India, many people are migrating from the cities and moving back to the villages. Many people now realise that we should move to the village because we can do something there and sustain our own livelihoods.

Paul: That is interesting. I have been reading about that big migration, back to villages, in India. Do you think the authorities are doing a good job controlling this disease?

Dinesh: It is good in some cases, but not in all cases. The lockdown is for everybody. And due to this lockdown, those people who are totally dependent on daily work and buying food are now unable to work and it has a worse effect on these people.

Paul: That sounds very much like the situation here in Myanmar. The people here are also farmers, their main crop is rice. I know that you grow rice around Loka as well. If they can't get out and do their work, then they go hungry. But the feeling is very much the same here in Burma as it is in India. At least the people in the villages can go out and work, because if you farm you are not in close contact with somebody, you maintain that distance. It is the poor people in the cities, and I am sure it is the same in India, that are most severely affected.

Do you students think that the pandemic effect will change the way people will migrate in the future or now?

Devwart: I think those who during lockdown walked lots of kilometres without food to reach back to their villages, will not migrate back to the cities. Now they have seen the situation of cities and have lived in very bad conditions. In the village they can work and live a better life.

Dinesh: And I think now everybody will try to develop their own communities in their local surroundings. If they will not migrate to another place, then they will have to do some work to earn their livelihoods so they will create their work in their own surroundings also in rural areas. So instead of going elsewhere for work, people will stay in their villages and improve life there.

Paul: That would be a nice outcome, wouldn't it? That would be one of these futures that's positive. And students, even things like wages could be affected. I am thinking back to the histories of these pandemics back in the middle ages. At that time in Europe there was a very different kind of pandemic with much worse consequences where many more people died back in those old days than they have now. It fundamentally changed things like the economies because then suddenly when your world is disrupted and you try to rebuild it, it can't be the same. You can't pay people the same. You can't pay them nothing. So, it started the beginning of a small middle class because people

demanded better pay. They did not want to go back to the same jobs in the cities that paid nothing, in fact they were more like slaves. So these pandemics have very unknown outcomes. This one in Europe 700 years ago essentially broke the back of feudalism and helped inaugurate a new age called the enlightenment. It is very complicated; it's economics, it's politics, its society, even religion comes into it. And so, who knows, your questions are really important ones to ask. I certainly don't know what is going to happen, I don't know if anybody does. I guess my most important thought to leave you with is not to be afraid and to remember that with all of this trouble comes the chance for new beginnings. If you are paying attention, if you are alert, you can help shape those. And that is a really exciting time to be alive. Much better than if we were kind of going along and nothing was happening, and the old system was still sitting on top of our heads and we were carrying it. So, here is an opportunity that nature has thrown our way. Along with the tragedy comes something possibly positive. It would be an interesting project, to use the village as a mental laboratory; do a thought experiment. You could assign different groups of students certain themes: economy, culture, technology, education, health, what have you, and try to re-imagine what the village could look like with the changes that are happening now and the big ones that you already pointed out are people are

coming back to the village bringing their energy, bringing their muscles, bringing their hearts back and also their experience in the city, which is very valuable. Because they are bringing back ideas too. How would the village look in 10 years? You could design a new village with your school being the real centre of this community of change.

Dinesh: Sir, we want to say that thank you very much. We learned many things from you.

Paul: Well, it goes both ways.

Dinesh: We are very lucky that you are with us.

Paul: Likewise. This is like an ongoing conversation, right. So we can keep on talking for as long as you wish. And, you know, I'll be moving slowly into China and we can then talk about comparing what I am seeing in rural China with what is going on around your homes. So, let's keep these up, these are walking classrooms; a walking academy. And we are all learners and we are all teachers. I wish you all the best. It has been great seeing you. I am sorry the connection was a little unstable on my end. But it was good to hear you and good questions.

