

VOICING THE VOICELESS: DESPAIR AND HOPES IN MIGRANT WORKERS' SELECTED DIGITAL POEMS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji enam puisi digital yang ditulis oleh para pekerja migran dari Indonesia, India, Filipina, Tiongkok, dan Bangladesh. Dalam puisi digitalnya, para pekerja migran secara terbuka menceritakan pengalaman dan perasaan mereka saat COVID-19 berlangsung. Berdasarkan pengalaman tersebut, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengungkap dampak pandemic terhadap kehidupan para pekerja migran. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian Pustaka dan pengumpulan data melalui dokumentasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Subaltern yang memiliki peranan penting untuk menyoroti permasalahan kompleks yang dihadapi para pekerja migran, menyelidiki relasi kuasa yang digambarkan dalam puisi digital, dan mengungkap fakta bagaimana pekerja migran dapat memberdayakan diri dan mengutarakan pendapat mereka. Kajian ini mengungkap bagaimana para buruh migran menyuarakan permasalahannya melalui pilihan kata, simbol, dan unsur sastra dalam puisi digital mereka. Dalam puisi-puisinya, para buruh migran menggambarkan kegelisahan, kesepian, kesedihan, depresi, dan betapa mereka sangat merindukan keluarga dan rumah mereka. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menyoroti perjuangan para pekerja migran dalam mengatasi situasi kompleks selama pandemi di Singapura. Kesimpulannya, puisi digital sangat penting bagi para pekerja migran untuk mengakomodasi suara mereka, mendorong solidaritas, dan berbagi pengalaman kolektif selama pandemi.

Kata Kunci: Pekerja Migran; Covid-19; Puisi Digital; Sastra Migran.

ABSTRACT

This research scrutinises six digital poems written by migrant workers from Indonesia, India, the Philippines, China, and Bangladesh. In their digital poems, the migrant workers honestly shared their experiences and feelings in times of COVID-19. Based on the problems, this research was conducted to unveil the effect of the pandemic on migrant workers' lives. In conducting this research, the researchers use the library research method and collect the data through documentation. This research employs the Subaltern theory that plays a crucial role in highlighting the complex issues faced by migrant workers, investigating the power relations depicted in the digital poems, and unveiling how the migrant workers can empower themselves and speak their minds. This study unmasks how the migrant workers voiced their problems through the choice of words, symbols, and elements of literature. In their poems, the migrant workers illustrate their anxiety, loneliness, sadness, and depression, and how

they badly miss their families and homes. In addition, this research also highlights the migrant workers' struggle to overcome the complex situation during lockdowns in Singapore. In conclusion, digital poems are essential for migrant workers to accommodate their voices, promote solidarity, and share their collective experiences during the lockdowns.

Key Words: Migrant Workers; COVID-19; Digital Poetry; Migrant Literature.

INTRODUCTION

Singapore is seen as a dream country by migrant workers from various countries like India, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, the Philippines, and other Asian countries. In Singapore, the migrant workers mostly worked in construction sites and domestic sector as house help. It is a fact that many migrant workers are marginalized, exploited, abused, and stereotyped negatively both in their countries and in their destination countries. Sreyneath Poole (2022) states that many migrant workers in Singapore have lived under CCTV surveillance of their employers, forced to work overtime, some were abused by their employers, and do not have free access to public spaces.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers have to stay at work and are restricted to fly back home. As the virus spread rapidly in cramped dormitories, migrant workers face poor living conditions and restricted access to medical treatments (Bloomberg, 2021). With the limited space they have, migrant workers tend to feel more alienated and isolated. As a result, the migrant workers try to share their deepest feelings through poems. Writing poems has been a cathartic activity to release their anxiety, sadness, and suffering especially during lockdowns (Sonia Sarkar, 2019). Based on the problems mentioned above, this research aims to illustrate the effects of the pandemic faced by migrant workers in Singapore and the ways to overcome the predicament during lockdowns as depicted in the selected digital poems.

The Singapore Migrant Worker Poetry Competition has been held annually since 2014. The competition is organized to provide migrant workers with platforms and rooms for expression. In addition, it has become a medium to accommodate migrant workers to share their untold stories. In general, migrant workers are seen as "property, exploited objects, or vulnerable unskilled and uneducated workers by their

employers, migrant workers' agency, and the society" (Tatang Iskarna, 2022, p. 15). They mostly keep their emotions to themselves for they are unable to share them with their families or their employers (Mintarsih, 2019, p. 125). During lockdowns, their sorrows are doubled for they also have to deal and live with uncertainty during the pandemic. As a result, the migrant workers need a channel to share their emotional burden during the pandemic.

This research focuses on six poems written by Shy Len Esposito, Hou Wei, N. Rengarajan, Sugiarti Mustiarjo, M. D. Sharif Uddin, and Warminingsih (2020). The Migrant Worker Poetry Competition has offered an opportunity for them to channel their thoughts, hopes, desires, and even anxiety which are mostly neglected. The six migrant workers try to depict and communicate their experiences of being blocked by four walls during lockdowns. They unveil their complex situation during the COVID-19 pandemic by visualizing the effects of the pandemic, the way they cope with the pandemic, and finally embrace the predicament. On the other hand, the poems also underline that their feelings during the isolation are valid and important and they need to cherish the tender joys of the everyday.

The poems are essential to be analysed because they realistically depict the anxiety, suffering, and complex situations faced by migrant workers. Moreover, the poems were selected because this study focuses on the use of digital platforms as media to publish and share literature works. The selected works are published on an Instagram account and a website so that migrant workers' voices can be heard by many people. Since five of them are accompanied by illustrations, readers will get a better understanding of the messages displayed in the digital poems. Writing poems and posting them on social media is also one of the alternative ways to share and publish literature works in the post-pandemic era. In the case of migrant workers, sharing and writing about their own lives can be used as "a mechanism to endure the unjust working and living conditions" (Nuraini Juliastuti, 2020). Writing poems can also be used "to accommodate people's voices to express their feelings, share their stories, and promote solidarity" (Brameswari, 2021, p. 13).

The issue is essential to be discussed because Indonesia has been sending women's migrant workers since the 1980s. Migrant workers are also called "National

Hero” since they have become a big support for our economic development. On the contrary, many cases show that “migrant workers have been victims of injustice, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse (Iskarna, 2022, p. 14). Moreover, the researchers want to unveil the double suffering of the migrant workers because of the pandemic. The researchers claim that migrant workers should be given more room to express their minds. Therefore, the researchers want to see how the selected digital poems can function as a platform to voice the voiceless. Mendoza (2019) highlights that migrant workers pen their poems “to make a call for international solidarity among migrant workers” (p. 3). The researchers argue that digital poems can also raise readers’ awareness of the lives of migrant workers in Singapore. Moreover, readers are invited to understand and express their empathy toward the suffering of the migrant workers. Based on the problems and issues reviewed above, this study is conducted to see the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the migrant workers’ lives and migrant workers’ struggle to overcome the complex situation during lockdowns in Singapore.

Many scholarly works have discussed the issue of the suffering and problems faced by migrant workers. The previous studies provide some information on the existing research that can be used by the researchers as a stepping stone to develop the analysis. In addition, they need to be discussed for they also illustrate the debate and argument of related topics and fields. The information will also help potential readers to find the relevance of this research with the previous works. Four related previous studies discuss the problems faced by migrant workers. Nevertheless, none of them investigated the selected digital poems from the @globalmigrantfestival Instagram account and thekopi.co website. In general, two studies used digital poems taken from Twitterature and a Facebook page, another study also took poems from the Migrant Worker Poetry Competition, while the other used printed works as the object of the studies.

The first study by Catharina Brameswari (2021) underlines the roles of social media literature among young adults in expressing their feelings and voices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Sherwin Mendoza (2019) conducted research on the expressions of international labour solidarity through poetry penned

by migrant workers. This research sketches their engagement in cultural politics despite government restrictions on political activities in Singapore. Similarly, Adriana Rahajeng Mintarsih (2019) discusses how Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs) in Singapore utilize poems to share their emotional burdens, problems, and anxiety. In line with previous research, Muna Yastuti Madrah and Destary Praptawati (2021) use poetry to explore the negative stereotypes faced by female Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers (MDW) in Singapore, revealing the unequal treatment, marginalization, alienation, and underestimation.

Though the two previous and recent studies use digital poems, they were taken from different types of social media. On the other hand, none of them focus on the migrant workers' condition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to previous studies, the researchers employ Subaltern theory to investigate the effect of the pandemic and the solution to overcome its complex situation. From all previous discussions, none of them took digital poems from an Instagram account that are also accompanied by illustrations. As a result, the recent study still has the gap to undertake research. In addition, the previous studies were used as stepping stones in conducting the recent research.

This research is a library study which used documentation to collect and interpret the data from the selected poems. The objects of the studies are selected poems entitled "Covid-19 Cooking Lesson" by Shy Len Esposito, "Under the Pandemic" by Hou Wei, "Globalisation" by N. Rengarajan, "Look What You've Done (Covid-19)" by Sugiarti Mustiarjo, "The Death of Wishes" by M. D. Sharif Uddin, and "Pandemic" by Warminingsih. The first five poems were taken from @globalmigrantfestival Instagram account while the last was from thekopi.co website. Additionally, the selected poems taken from the @globalmigrantfestival are accompanied by illustrations to highlight and describe the conditions and feelings of the migrant workers during the lockdowns. To support the primary data, the researchers also employed secondary data from journals, online articles, social media platforms, reviews about digital literature, newspapers, blogs, and videos. This research was conducted in four main steps. Firstly, the researchers found the topic, selected online poems written by migrant workers, and then read the works. Next, the

primary data were analysed and the problems were formulated afterward. Thirdly, the researchers tried to find the secondary data, which are relevant to online poems and related to migrant workers, and the theories to answer the formulated questions. Lastly, a deep analysis was conducted by employing the Subaltern theory. In addition, a conclusion was drawn along with some suggestions for future researchers.

Various debates and arguments have been offered to unveil migrant workers' untold emotions or thoughts. This research employs the Subaltern theory from Gayatri Spivak (2005) and Ania Loomba (2005) to see the effects of COVID-19 on migrant workers and their ways of overcoming precarious situations. The theory used in the present study helped the researchers to deconstruct the complex situations and the issues faced by the subaltern and how they could empower themselves to speak up. Since the poems were written by migrant workers, the researchers also provided background information related to their work, duties, problems, and precarious situations. Furthermore, the researchers also examined the form and structure of the poems as a whole to unveil the feelings suppressed by the migrant workers during the lockdowns. The components that are examined such as the intrinsic aspects and the elements of fiction—the characters, speakers, settings, theme, tone, diction, and symbolism.

DISCUSSION

In the Postcolonialism context, the subaltern is described as the Other which is the marginalized and embodies agency of the colonized subject (Spivak, 2005; Loomba, 2005). The term Subaltern was first coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe cultural hegemony” (Spivak, 2005, pp. 475-476). In other words, the subaltern represents the oppressed individuals who are unable to represent themselves. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) add that “subaltern classes may include peasants, workers, and other groups denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power” (p. 198). The migrant workers are perceived as being marginalized due to their lack of legal protection and economic challenges they face in Singapore upon fleeing from economic despair. According to Shireen Keyl (2017), this subaltern classes' shared culture is defined by “a shared space of struggle, of survival, and in-betweenness to

achieve a shared resistance of hope and prosperity in oppressive and often racist societies” (p. 177). In the selected digital poems, the migrant workers use the in-between space to illustrate their struggle in their poems. In addition, the digital poems also provide as a platform for migrant workers to challenge the prevalent narratives and to highlight their struggle (Beh Lih Yi, 2019).

To unmask the issue comprehensively, there are two problems to be discussed in this section: 1) the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the migrant workers’ lives and 2) the migrant workers’ struggle to overcome the complex situation during lockdowns in Singapore. The first section unveils how the COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on the world, reshaping the way we live, work, and interact. The second section underlines the global crisis that has been particularly challenging for migrant workers who find themselves trapped in foreign countries, facing not only the health risks of the virus but also a myriad of social and economic challenges.

1. Migrant Workers’ Life During Lockdowns

Since COVID-19 spread beyond Wuhan, China in early 2020, most governments responded by closing national borders to abroad. The border closures and recession followed led to extensive job losses globally. The migrant workers who are stranded in destination countries without employment when businesses are closed become jobless (Florence Kim, 2021). Furthermore, this condition has had complex and far-reaching effects on nations, their citizens, and migrant workers. Some migrant workers who work in destination countries also get wage losses. Wage losses were also widely reported during the pandemic, as employers sought ways to reduce their spending. In that case, some employees were stood down without pay, the others were reduced their hours and wages, or required to go on leave (Katharine Jones, Sanushka Mudaliar, & Nicola Piper, 2021). For many of these individuals, the dream of a better life in a foreign land has turned into a harrowing experience, marked by uncertainty, discrimination, and inadequate support systems.

Migrant workers are economic shocks because the pandemic is predominantly employed in precarious low-wage sectors and often become the first to experience job losses. The latest ILO labour force survey revealed the contrast between massive

job losses in hard-hit sectors and positive job growth in several higher-skilled services sectors (ILO, 2021). The massive job losses such as accommodation and food service, hospitality, tourism, arts and culture, retail, and construction. While the higher job growth such as information and communication, financial and insurance activities (ILO, 2021). On the poems to be analysed, two writers work in construction and the building sectors and two other writers are foreign domestic workers in Singapore, one of them from the logistics company. This leads to the conclusion that the jobs have a massive potential to decrease.

In this recent study, six selected digital poems are discussed. The voices of migrant workers, often unheard and their stories untold, have found a unique and powerful medium of expression in digital poetry. In a compelling blend of art and activism, six selected digital poems created by migrant workers bring forth their personal narratives, experiences, and struggles. These digital verses transcend borders and language barriers, offering a poignant glimpse into the lives of individuals who have left their homelands in search of better opportunities, and the process, have crafted evocative and resonant stories.

The authors of these digital poems hail from diverse professional backgrounds, each contributing a unique perspective and personal narrative. They represent the construction and building sectors, domestic helpers, and those working in the logistics industry. Each of these sectors has been significantly affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in widespread job losses and economic hardships. As individuals who have experienced the impact of these challenges first-hand, their poetry serves as a powerful medium for conveying their emotions, dreams, and struggles in the face of adversity.

2. Migrant Workers' Struggle

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of migrant workers, and they expressed their emotions in digital poems. Migrant workers tended to use social media platforms more frequently, hence Health Serve also ensured its social media pages were regularly refreshed with content and relevant links to further online information (Lai Gwen Chan & Benjamin Kuan, 2020). Therefore, the poems

provide their personal narrative, shedding light on their struggles, resilience, and the complex ways in which the pandemic has transformed their lives. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the lives of migrant workers is discussed below.

Shy Len Esposito's "Covid-19 Cooking Lesson," exemplifies the emotional toll of the pandemic, portraying the longing for home and family. In her digital poem, she illustrates the limitations on activities during the pandemic that result in the feeling of missing. She is a single mother of three and two foster children who misses her family and home. As she stated in the following quotation,

missing home chatting with my kids.

missing home and my fate.

(Esposito, 2020, slide 6)

The quotation above highlights how the writer of the poem shares her longing to come back home. For her, seeing her children before bed is her remedy and "the antidote of her loneliness" (slide 6). The restrictions on activities imposed by the pandemic have intensified of longing experienced by individuals. The emotions she showed are capturing the impact of separation from her loved ones and the uncertainty that the pandemic has brought. In line with Brameswari (2021), the speakers in the Twitterature works also feel lonely, unmotivated, anxious, and sad because they cannot be with the ones they love.

Nevertheless, amidst the challenges, the pandemic has taught her to embrace the difficult situation. In her digital poem, she endeavours to find solace in new activities to maintain her sanity and create a sense of purpose. With creativity as her guiding force, she embarked on a culinary journey, determined to acquire new culinary skills. She claims that the "quarantine makes her feel like a chef" (slide 4). Cooking has not only become a pastime but also a symbol of her ability to turn adversity into an opportunity for growth and self-discovery. The digital poem illustrates Esposito's ways to overcome the hardship during the pandemic. It can be seen that instead of learning how to cook, she also tries "gardening, taking care of the chickens laying eggs in the garden, feeding guppies in the pond, and playing with the cute poodle dog" (slide 5). Her dedication to these endeavours allowed her to explore

and experiment with various dishes, demonstrating her resilience and adaptability in the face of challenging circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a profound transformation in the lifestyles of migrant workers, particularly in terms of their social interactions and internet access. These changes to mobility due to COVID-19, have changed the relations of social life and technology (G. Goggin & K. V. Zhuang, 2023). Hou Wei (2020) stated that people “could touch without partition” before the pandemic, “yet now a horizontal stroke of social distance lies between us all” (slide 3). Based on the visual of the poem, people’s habits have changed because of the pandemic. The words “partition” and “horizontal stroke” from the quotations illustrate that our habits before and after COVID-19 are different. Since people have to avoid close contact with others, they need to try to adapt to a new life condition. Before COVID-19, people like to eat together face-to-face with their friends or families. However, this has been replaced by seeing our device screen while eating during the quarantine (Wei, 2020, slide 2).

This new reality has significantly impacted their lives, creating a deep sense of disconnection and emphasizing the importance of digital connectivity in the modern world. With the rise of digital connectivity and the use of smartphones, researchers turned their attention in understanding the new lifestyle or new culture of mobile and social media communication in migrant communities and transnational families (Cabalquinto, 2021). The world itself creates a gap, with what we call COVID-19. COVID-19 becomes a gap in human interaction as it is illustrated in the digital poem. Before the pandemic, people used to talk in person, interact in real life, and have direct conversations. However, as people now are gapping by the pandemic, they can only stare at the screen and have a distance to talk.

During the pandemic, the value of life is increasing because people pay more attention to their health. As it is presented in Wei’s digital poem,

*Now with daily numbers of infected
cases, fear unknowns fill my heart as death
remains so far away, yet so extremely close by.
now value life yet so much more.*

Wear masks, wash hands often, head out less.

(Wei, 2020, slide 5).

The quotation above highlights the escalating number of COVID-19 cases that create a sense of uncertainty and paranoia over migrant workers. As the pandemic continues, the fear of infection and the growing toll it takes on public health. In this challenging time, the writer's earnest plea for action, encouraging everyone to wear masks and maintain strict hand hygiene, underscores the shared concern and unease that has become an intrinsic part of our daily lives.

In line with Mintarsih (2019), N. Rengarajan also "shares his emotional burdens, problems, and anxiety" through "Globalisation" (2020). Since the condition is uncertain, the migrant workers who work abroad are experiencing a sense of worry because they have to live far from their parents. Rengarajan (2020) describes how "people are now worried sick about their grandparents though they never used to take a second glance at their parents" (slide 3). The writer observes about the sentiment of health and well-being of family members that have become a concern. The intense longing for family, in this context, signifies the emotional feeling that separation and distance have taken the precious of migrant workers. The feeling of desperation during the COVID-19 pandemic is likened to a dark manifestation of globalization. The poet refers to it as a tragic outcome when "globalisation came, and the globe became a graveyard" (slide 1).

Furthermore, Rengarajan (2020) eloquently articulates the far-reaching repercussions of the pandemic, shaping a collective experience of sorrow and loss on a global scale. The metaphor depicting the globe as a graveyard poignantly encapsulates the sombre reality of the pandemic's impact on lives and communities across the world. The lockdown and isolation have brought solemn effects on the migrant worker who "[has] isolated himself" (slide 2) in his room because the virus seems never to stop spreading.

Man could only create his own kind in a closed lab.

But mankind's enemy multiplies itself out in the open

(Rengarajan, 2020, slide 4).

From the quotation above, the poet chooses the word “enemy” to portray how the coronavirus has disturbed the lives of migrant workers. In addition, the migrant workers even squeeze themselves into a space of “1 metre by 1 metre” (slide 6). This condition makes the migrant workers feel limited because they have to do something to survive in the limited space. As Poole (2022) claims the migrant worker’s movement has been limited, especially during the pandemic when they were relegated to crowded dormitories. This limitation and isolation resulted in an increase in mental health issues among migrant workers which resulted in some committing suicide.

In “Look What You’ve Done (Covid-19)”, Sugiarti Mustiarjo (2020) also underscores the issue of isolation and the associated feelings of being isolated. She opens the poem by describing her experience on Sunday morning.

Sunday morning is not the same anymore

No glamour, nor me amor!

Just four walls

(Mustiarjo, 2020, slide 1)

Four walls and nothing to see

Just the best memories of 2019

(Mustiarjo, 2020, slide 6)

The lines above express a deep sense of sadness and isolation. The phrase “mi amor” from the Spanish language conveys the writer’s yearning for her loved ones. The description of the world is limited and interactions restricted by the “four walls”, as depicted visually, underscores the confinement and solitude that has become a part of daily life. Following Barnet, Burto, and Cain (2008), the setting of “four walls” creates the mood and the atmosphere during lockdowns that becomes the central issue in this digital poem. “Four walls” also symbolises the monotonous and limited space that the only connection to the outside world is through a device.

Additionally, the poem hints at the feeling of being different or alienated as a migrant worker. The writer’s experience as a migrant worker has given them a different perspective and access to the world, which sets them apart from others. This sense of being “different” may contribute to the writer’s feelings of isolation and

longing for a sense of belonging and connection in an unfamiliar environment. The line “begging my feet to warm up its soul” (slide 2) conveys a sense of lethargy and a lack of motivation. The writer’s feet, metaphorically representing their willingness to engage and take action, are struggling to find the energy or inspiration to do so. The rejection of the notion of “wait until it’s over” (slide 2) suggests a desire to resist this feeling of laziness and demotivation. The writer is determined not to succumb to inaction and instead seeks to overcome these feelings and find the strength to keep moving forward, even in the face of challenges or adversity.

Poole (2022) finds that most migrant workers are exploited and their mobilities are restricted by their employers. During the pandemic, their movements have become increasingly limited, and even minor errors could subject them to the threat of termination. In this situation, Mustiarjo portrays her longing for memories before the pandemic and also emphasizes the complex emotion of the migrant worker’s experience.

*I hold memories with my homies dearly
eating bakso under the trees
is our Sundays activity*

(Mustiarjo, 2020, slide 3)

The lines above evoke a strong sense of nostalgia and longing for memories, especially “the best memories of 2019” that the writer cherishes and misses. The reference to eating bakso—a popular Indonesian meatball dish—under the trees and sitting on the grass signifies the warmth, comfort, and togetherness associated with those moments. Living under the “eagle’s eyes [that] watching her tirelessly” (slide 3) creates no problem for her. The grasses are the form of security (slide 3) that underscores the idea that these memories are the source of solace and comfort. These memories represent a period of happiness and closeness with loved ones that has become even more precious in hindsight due to the separation and challenges brought about by the pandemic.

In “The Death of Wishes”, M. D. Sharif Uddin (2020) vividly recalls cherished moments and memories associated with various places he can visit before the pandemic. In accordance with Mustiarjo’s digital poem, Uddin grieves his space

that is being limited by four walls, emphasizing the impact of the pandemic. On the other hand, the poet also beautifully conveys the sense of loss and nostalgia that he experienced. The numerous settings and places mentioned in the poem serve as vivid memories that are deeply associated with personal experiences and emotions. He mentions a lot setting of places, for instance, Orchard's Field and Kallang Park, Mustafa minimart, Fakhruddin resto, the fourth floor of the city square, the streets of the city, Hills of Mariana Bay and Botanic Gardens, the East Coast lagoon, The national library, and the fountain. The places mentioned by the writer are the places that carved good memories for him.

This poem beautifully captures the universal human experience of longing for places and moments that have shaped our lives, even when those places are physically distant or temporarily out of reach. Unfortunately, all of the writer's imagination and memory are limited by four walls. As the writer wrote,

But wishes are lost in the city.

All desires are blocked

By four walls.

(Uddin, 2020, slide 4)

The writer's lament about being limited by four walls speaks to the confinement imposed by circumstances, likely due to the pandemic or other life challenges. These "four walls" symbolize not just physical confinement but also the limitations that prevent the writer from reliving these cherished memories.

The poem vividly conveys the sense of desperation and isolation that many people have experienced during lockdowns and restrictions. Uddin illustrates his desperation by declaring that,

I am a monk

at night

(Uddin, 2020, slide 5)

The comparison of the writer to a monk at night, who typically leads a solitary and contemplative life, emphasizes the seclusion and separation from society that the writer is feeling. The visual imagery in the Instagram feed of being in a bunk bed and facing the truth of being locked in a dormitory further highlights the confinement and

monotony of the situation, similar to a monk's meditation practices. The poem captures the emotional toll of being cut off from the outdoor world and the challenges of facing an extended period of isolation. It reflects the universal feelings of confinement, longing for freedom, and the struggle to find meaning and solace during such times of hardship.

"Pandemic", penned by Warminingsih (2020), captures the emotional and psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on migrant workers. It reflects the shock and disbelief that Covid-19 happened unavoidably. The poet states that she is "battling [an] invisible enemy without a face". In the second stanza, she highlights the fragility of human health and the urgency of finding solutions. Moreover, she points out her frustration and desperation since "there is no medicine or vaccine" (Warminingsih, 2020, line 9). The poem also delves into the monotony and frustration of lockdown measures, with the writer feeling trapped while working from home, unable to refresh her mind and body. The workload is already plenty and she feels "exhausted [that she] can't move a muscle" (line 19). The situation tortures both their physical and mental condition.

The chaotic situation over fake news and rumours underscores the role of misinformation in exacerbating fears and anxieties, particularly among migrant workers. Warminingsih mentions that,

*I saw and heard some selfish acts and crazy antics
Fake news and rumours demeaning migrant workers plight*
(Warminingsih, 2020, lines 21-23)

The quotation above highlights another effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which is the phenomenon of "Panic Buying". Panic buying has re-emerged as a 'new' normal consumer behaviour and has become a coping mechanism for real and perceived dangers associated with COVID-19 (Sonia Billore & Tatiana Anisimova, 2021). The phenomenon of Panic buying almost happened in all countries, in Singapore itself one can see images of stores in Singapore facing a sudden and heavy demand for eggs, toilet paper, and noodles (Cassey Lee, 2021). Panic buying reveals the eerier life in an uncertain environment created by the pandemic. The writer's witnessing of

the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark reminder of the reality she and many others are living through.

The poems above reflect the universal experience that is faced by migrant workers in Singapore and their struggle to find meaning during challenging times. The impact of the pandemic on the lives of the migrant workers is presented in their poignant digital poems. These digital poems are the response and the illustration of the migrant workers' multifaceted condition. The emotions and feelings conveyed by the migrant workers reflect the predicament of facing marginalization and oppression from their employers, the uncertainties arising from the virus, and the wish to reunite their families. The digital poems are the agents used by the migrant workers that serve as personal narratives, unveiling their struggle, shock of the pandemic, and desperation for hope.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, COVID-19 pandemic has a complex shadow on the lives of migrant workers, evoking a wide range of emotions, experiences, and responses. For many, the prevailing sentiment has been one of sorrow, isolation, frustration, and a sense of longing for the life they once knew. The pandemic has brought about loss, both in terms of livelihoods and personal connections, and has left many feeling desperate and suffering the weight of uncertainty. On the other hand, the isolation imposed by lockdowns has often led to boredom and a profound sense of sorrow. The good memories the migrant workers have before the pandemic have deepened their sorrow during lockdowns. Nevertheless, the digital poems that they create have helped them to voice their voiceless feelings and experiences as migrant workers who have previously experienced another complex situation. In essence, these digital poems provide powerful messages to the readers and an intimate glimpse into the lives of migrant workers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The emotion, adaptability, and creativity display the migrant workers' ability and struggle to overcome the hardship. Importantly, the documented struggle and suffering portrayed in these digital poems contribute significantly to a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities faced by migrant workers during these challenging times.

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