



CHITRA REKHA'S FIGHT TO RETURN HOME DURING COVID19

Chitra Rekha Devi is a resident of Siraha's Kalyanpur tole, Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality ward no.1. Her large joint family consists of 15 members including her two sons, husband, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and sister-in-law. As the only literate person in the family, Chitra works as a small wage earner. Her family's financial situation is poor. Other than wage labor, her family doesn't have any other source of income.

Her husband has been living in India for 10 years. Chitra Rekha, herself, and her children have been working in Haryana, India for five years. She says that she goes home once a year and takes a break for few months before returning back to India for work. In Haryana she worked as a manual worker at a farm.

When the Government of India declared a lock-down in India, everyone was terrified. They were not allowed to go to each other's houses. They were only allowed to go out if they were wearing masks. During the lockdown Chitra Rekha slowly ran out of pulses, rice, salt, oil and other food items. Ultimately, she had to borrow money from other people for food. Food items provided as relief by the Indian government lasted them only 15 days. Chitra Rekha and her family had to go hungry for a day or two.

When the lock down was eased, it took them 10 days to get a train ticket to Nepal. As the train dropped them off only till Darbhanga, they took a bus and on the fifth day of their arduous journey they finally reached the border. In coordination with Thadi Police Office at Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality Ward No. 4, Wala Sundarl School was declared as a quarantine center where Chitra Rekha and her family were also kept.

She shares that she suffered a lot while living in quarantine. There wasn't proper toilet facilities for women in quarantine. There were no windows in the bedroom, no fan to combat the Terai heat, and it was very dirty in and around the bedroom areas. It was difficult for women to bathe – a separate place for bathing had not been assigned. There was a shortage of sanitizer and soap. It was difficult to maintain physical distance as it was very crowded.

In time, Chitra Rekha and her family underwent PCR testing. Her husband's report came back and he was tested negative. In case of Chitra Rekha, so far no report or test results have been announced. This has only added to her mental stress.