



AND WE CLAPPED?

News, Views, and Perspectives on Governance in Post-Pandemic India

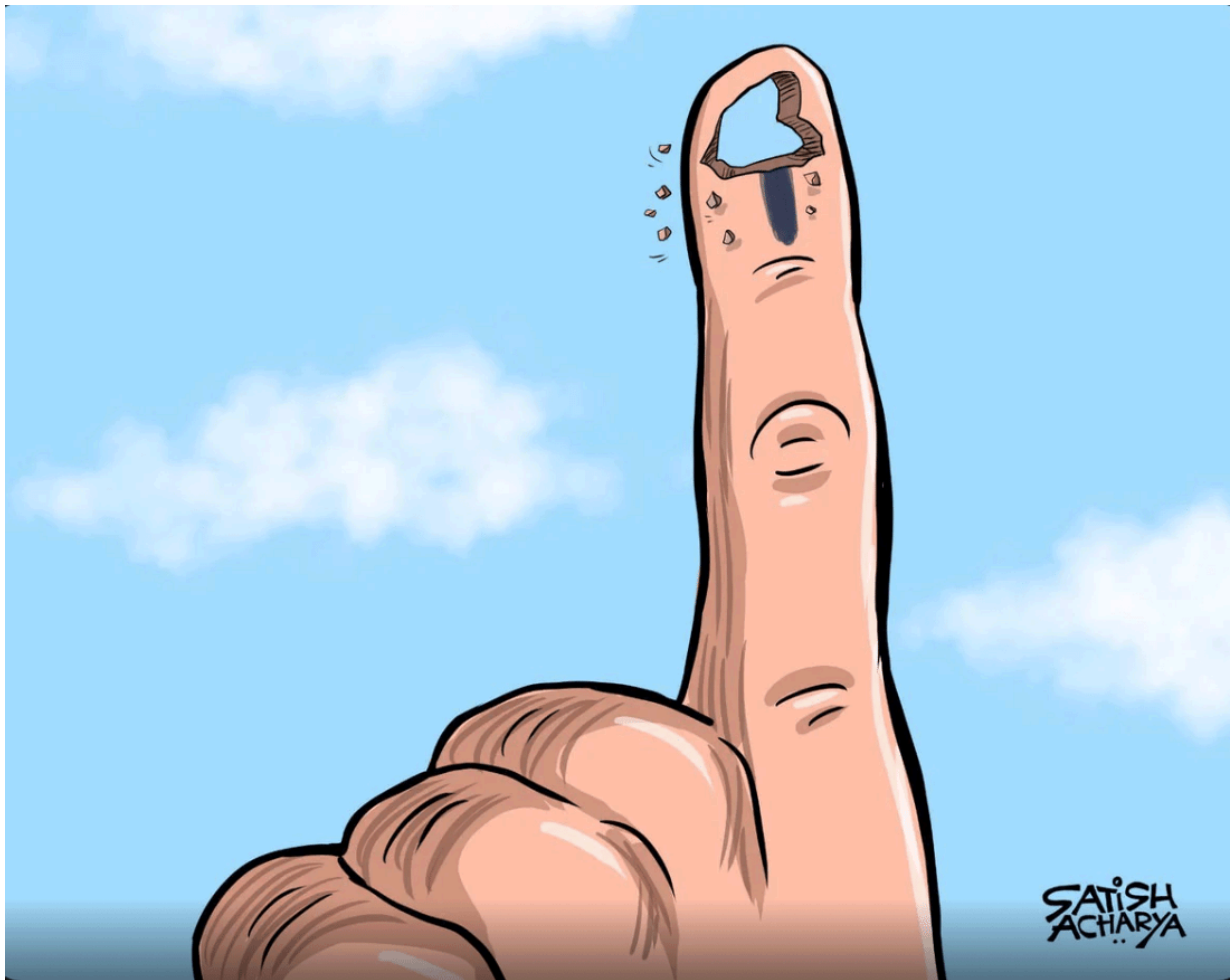
A DECENNIAL BREAK

The 2021 census, notified in 2019, was postponed in March 2020 by the government, citing Covid-19. This was a first. Because up until then, India's census had been conducted every 10 years since the first synchronous census in 1881. The 2021 census broke that sequence. The next census was only formally notified in June 2025, for 2027.

The result was a pandemic fought using a decade-old census and no comprehensive population data. The issue here isn't old data. Between 2011 and 2021, the country changed. The pandemic changed it further. Specifically, migration, employment, livelihood, and death, etc. The country was being planned for and administered with a population count from almost a decade ago.

The case of migrant workers, for instance: during the lockdown, over 1.06 crore migrant workers were reported by the Ministry of Labour and Employment to have returned to their home states. Yet, when the Parliament was asked about migrant workers who died during the lockdown, the government said that it did not maintain separate data on migrant workers who died.

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COUNTED?

From the state having no idea of who migrants are to 32 crore migrants registered in E shram, what does it mean to be counted?

In 2020, the sudden imposition of a lockdown as a mechanism to "control" the pandemic left millions of migrant and informal workers with no employment and no access to basic pay, housing, water, or food. That was when the state's failure to protect its citizens and ensure their access to basic rights was put in the spotlight. The criticism that followed, from across the nation and the world, was really a reiteration of what workers, unions, and labour activists had been arguing for years: the state did not have a comprehensive national database of its own unorganised and migrant workforce. In June 2021 judgment, the Supreme Court noted that the Ministry of Labour and Employment had been directed as early as 21 August 2018 to develop exactly this kind of registration system. By 2021, three years later, it still hadn't been done.

E-Shram portal was launched on 26 August 2021. As per the Centre's own definition, it is "a comprehensive National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW) including platform workers, migrant workers etc. The e-Shram portal registers the unorganised workers, including gig and platform workers and provides them a Universal Account Number (UAN) on a self-declaration basis" (PIB, 2026). In October 2024, the Ministry of Labour and Employment

relaunched it as a One-Stop-Solution, meant to give unorganised workers access to various social security schemes through the same portal.

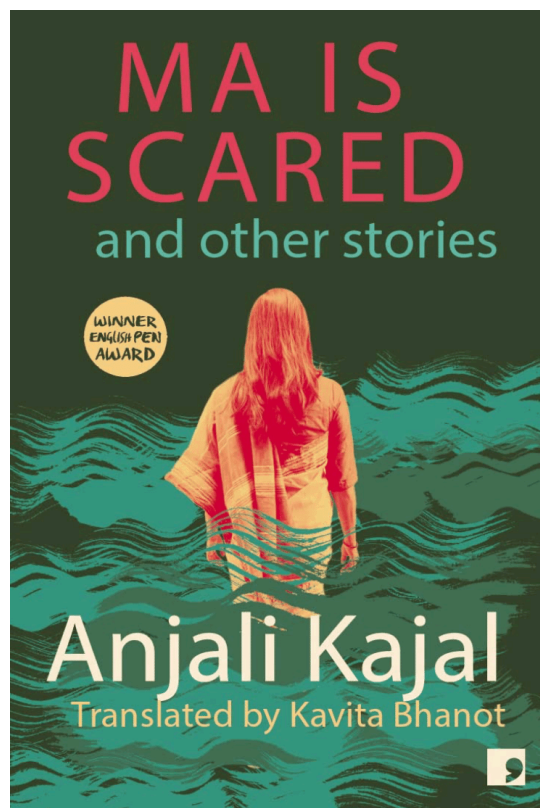
It has been five years since e-Shram launched. According to centre data, as of 14 July 2026, over 31.78 crore unorganised workers have been registered on the portal.

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This Issue's Read:

[Ma Is Scared And Other Stories By Anjali Kajal](#)



Anjali Kinjal's debut collection contains ten stories that follow the everyday lives of women's across generations, in North India, looking in depth at the working of caste, marginalisation during the Pandemic, patriarchy and abuse, and weaving together stories about family dynamics, love, resilience and fights against discrimination.

Text credit: Caravan, 2024

Why This Work Needs Your Support

PC-PIC continues this work because the answer to the question of who India is being governed for cannot emerge from television studios. It must emerge from public testimony. Over the last four years, these collective processes have helped organise and document public hearings among forest peoples, Adivasi communities, fishworkers, hawkers, ragpickers, sanitation workers, informal labourers, displaced communities, and urban working classes across India. These testimonies are not charity archives. They are political memory.

This work needs support because official history often erases the voices of those who suffer the most. Independent people's documentation, public hearings, field investigations, legal follow-up, political education and citizen outreach require resources. Supporting this work means supporting the right of ordinary people to speak, remember, question and organise.

And if India deserves citizens, not obedient beneficiaries, then this work must be sustained.



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