

Distress of Indian Workers Abroad: The Callous Apathy of Indian Government

People of India are being kept in the dark by our rulers and successive governments, by conducting the pompous “Pravasi Bharatiya Divas” with much fanfare every year, with regards the reality of the distressed condition of the Indian workers working in various countries abroad. By show casing some white collared elite technical professional employees working in USA, our rulers make us to believe that, all is well with the workers working abroad as if and they are revelling is offence.

Neither such exhibitionist festivals nor Sushma Swaraj’s well publicised rhetoric about the so-called Indian government’s efforts in protecting the interests of the workers abroad cannot belie the reality that the Indian workers abroad are being callously ignored.

The incident of 39 Indian workers kept in Mone jail, whose existence or non-existence cannot be traced even after 3 year speaks volumes about the apathy and indifference of our government towards the distress of Indian workers abroad, and exposes the hypocrisy of our rulers.

The governments, which have been gloating over the safe position of balance of payments accounts situation, are hiding in fact are being saved by the remittances of the workers abroad from the precarious state of balance of payments. Especially it is the home remittances of unskilled and semi-skilled workers but not of the elite employees, that has been saving the situation of balance of payments, these remittances amount to almost 3.2 percent of our GDP. But instead of protecting the interests of those workers working abroad, our rulers and successive governments chose to ignore them. They only pamper the elite employees in U.S.A and West Europe who actually emigrated there cutting their connections. On the contrary the unskilled and semi-skilled workers toiling abroad do not emigrate to either countries but go on short-term contracts for specific jobs and return home when contract expires.

There are seven million Indian illiterate unskilled and semi-skilled workers in West Asia, Singapore who are at the mercy of middlemen and agents.

Incident of 3,000 Indian workers at Dubai that had agitated few years back against their inhuman living and working conditions, who were forced to abandon their just demands and the incident of 300 labourers who were punished by the Singapore government for protesting the death of a co-worker run over by a bus amply explain us the plight and distressed conditions of Indian workers abroad, lacking any governmental support or effort to ameliorate their living conditions with an attitude of callous indifference.

While 70% of Indian workers abroad are in Gulf countries the others live in other Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia, Europe and U.S. Around 3 crores of Indian workers are living abroad.

Those who work in Gulf countries are constantly being subjected to ruthless exploitation and harassments without any recourse. Recent economic crisis in gulf countries owing to the dwindling of oil prices and the decision of Gulf countries to increase non-oil revenues and employ more of their own nationals than foreigners has aggravated further the distress of Indian workers in gulf countries. Particularly the distress of Indian workers in Qatar after the other Arab nations have cut their connections with it is very grave. Due to this development the construction sector in Qatar is badly affected. Around 200,000 foreign workers in this

sector are severely hit. Around 6.5 lakhs of Indian workers are in Qatar who have been annually remitting 27 crores rupees to home. Now these workers are left jobless and most of them are not paid with wages, for the work done by them previously. Around 3 lakh foreign workers had already left in Qatar. Most of the Indian workers are stranded in Qatar. The workers worked under Qatar employers in Saudi with Qatar temporary visas are stranded in Saudi without any work or food as illegal, undocumented workers. Most of these workers are forced to choose to remain in the Saudi jails rather than coming to India as they are shown no alternative for livelihood, and they are highly indebted at home, for finding jobs in Saudi.

Neither the Central government nor the concerned state governments have sincerely attempted to attend and resolve the problems of these suffering Indian workers in distress. Rather than making empty show-piece propaganda to make believe the people of India, who have been asking the governments to save those distressed workers.

In Italy around 30,000 Indians are working in plantations as pickers etc. They are forced to work 13 hrs a day. Most of them are working in the plantations in the southern region to city of Rome. They are paid with paltry wages and ruthlessly exploited. They are working as unregistered workers even after working for more than a decade. Most of them are illiterate, and do not know the local language. The documents like their visa and others are confiscated by the 'labour agents' due to whom these workers are suffering untold hard-ships. They are leading pitiable conditions of despair without any hope. Their distress is looked upon as problem of individuals but not as a social problem to be addressed.

Our rulers and governments are deaf and blind to their plight. Had our Indian rulers and governments created proper conditions for the livelihood these workers in our country itself, they would have no need to go abroad to work as orphaned labourer or slaves abroad.

But our rulers and governments who are immersed in the game of parliamentary power find no necessity or time to care for these workers abroad and their interests.

The workers movement in India shall take up the cause of the Indian workers as a part of its tasks, and fight to protect the interests of these Indian workers abroad in distressed living and working conditions.
