

Migrant Workers are being pushed into Permanent Vulnerability

Providers of cheap labour and scapegoats for all socio-economic ills

Inter-state migration seeking jobs and lively-hoods is a stark reality of our modern-India. According to the 2011 census it is estimated that more than 45.36 crores of inter-state migrants are existing in India. Various surveys pointed-out that inter-state migration has been increasing in considerable numbers for the past two and a half decades. In other words this situation of inter-state migration has been aggravated as a consequence of implementation of neo-liberal economic policies of imperialist globalization. It is becoming obvious that the 'stunning' economic growth claimed by our rulers and ruling-classes to have been achieved during this epoch of globalization in our country would not have come up without the sweat and labour power of the migrant workers. But these migrants' workers are continuously being problematical and being made targets of attacks. The regional politicians can blame them for rising unemployment and crime graphs, the locals can vent their ire against them for being the cause of collapsing civic amenities, the chauvinists can rant against them for not assimilating themselves culturally, and the business and industry class can use them for cheap labour and services. For the middle classes in the cities, they also provide domestic services. It is their vulnerable state lacking any protection that is being exploited by the vested interests in to targets for attacks. That these inter-state migrants are made targets for attacks in every political, economic and social upheaval that has been occurring in our country is a proved fact.

In the past we have seen how the political party '*Sivasena*' made the South Indian migrants as a target for attacks for its political gain of ascendancy in to state power.

We have also witnessed how Sikhs were targeted and attacked in New Delhi and else-where, at the time of assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

We also knew how people of North-East are forced to leave away from Karnataka, due to their diverse culture, from the local culture. Such incidents of attacks have occurred even in the capital of New Delhi against migrants from North-eastern states.

During the period of demonetization it was the migrant-labourers that were badly hit losing their lively-hood and forced to return to their native places empty handed.

Now it is the turn in Gujarat state that has targeted the migrant-workers of Hindi speaking states for violent attacks forcing them to flee from Gujarat state without any rescue. In 2002 unprecedented communal riots tore up the social fabric of Gujarat, killing 1000 people with communal hatred. Now it is the hate wave that is turned against migrant workers.

Before going in to details of the violence in Gujarat against migrant-workers, we shall know what necessitated inter-state migration in our country and the causes behind it.

Despite the tall claims by the rulers, ruling-classes and policy makers that India has been achieving tremendous unprecedented economic growth due to implementation of imperialist globalization policies, it is an undeniable fact that those policies have utterly failed in bringing about well-being and affluence in to the lives of toiling people of the country. On the contrary those policies have brought out distress to the people, particularly in the rural India. Those liberalized economic policies have pushed the agriculture sector in to a deep morass and an intractable state of crises. On the other hand those policies failed totally in generating employment avenues to the requirement. Being the major employment provider, agriculture sector, pushed in to crises, was unable and failed to provide employment to the needed as was able to do previously. Rural distress and poverty is accentuated in this period of imperialist globalization. The consequence is that the distressed rural population was forced to migrate to distant places and other states in search of lively-hood and jobs. Day by day as a consequence of failure of globalization policies, the necessity of inter-state migration has increased considerably; due to increasing poverty, unemployment in rural areas resulting in large scale migration. This condition of distress and extreme poverty rendered these inter-state migrant-workers more vulnerable for exploitation in multiple-ways and targets of attacks of the vested interests. On the other-hand inter-state migration became inevitable in the present day highly skewed development status of states in India. The stark reality remains to be that with agriculture not able to provide a lively hood in rural India, migration is here to stay.

Based on the data since 2011, the economic survey in 2016-17 pointed out that Gujarat is among the states with the highest net in-migration states in our country. In Gujarat migrant-workers make up over one-third of the population and form a big chunk of the industrial work-force. These migrant-

workers have played a vital role in bringing about growth by providing cheap labour in the many small and medium enterprises in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Though the exact number of migrant-workers is not available with the government of Gujarat, according to industry and trade bodies, migrants account for 35% of labour force in Gujarat.

Inter state migrants from Rajasthan, M.P, Maharashtra, Bihar, U.P, Chhattisgarh, Assam, A.P and Karnataka work in various manufacturing units, service providing enterprises and construction sector in Gujarat state.

Most of these workers are gathered through contractors sent to distant places by employers at lowest possible wage rate.

These workers are easy to exploit, as the employers segment the labour market by creating a separate labour market for migrant workers. These migrant workers face pathetic living and working conditions enduring untold sufferings.

They are paid with low wages and made to work very long hours without any overtime benefits. They are made to work almost without any leave or social protection. Though the semi-skilled workers with some education and skills get slightly higher wages and earn some leave they are also exploited in multiple ways. These migrant workers are engaged in dangerous and hard jobs without any safety. More than often these migrant workers are killed or maimed in work-place accidents and suffer with occupational hazards. No compensation is paid to them in cases of accidents or occupational diseases.

Most of the unskilled migrant workers live on worksites in make-shift huts or on roads, slums and in settlements not served by municipalities.

Though there is a so-called Inter-state migrant workmen Act 1979 which is supposed to have given some legal entitlements and rights to migrant-workers such as minimum wages, regular wage payment, regular working hours and over-time payment and decent working and living conditions including taking care of the health and education of children of migrant workers, the law remains to be only on paper but never implemented. Neither the state governments of the states from where the migrant workers originate, nor the state governments that host the migrant workers never bother to implement the act showing utter indifference to the well-being and rights of migrant-workers and the employers are skilled in dodging such laws.

Most of the workers are engaged as temporary and seasonal on a wide range of activities such as agriculture, brick kilns, construction work, salt pans, domestic work and petty services and trades like food and street vending and embroidery works. They are engaged as security guards, drivers, factory workers in ceramic, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automobiles and ancillary units and food-processing units.

In Gujarat's diamond city, Surat a massive migrant population exists. Migrants dominate textiles and allied units, construction and heavy industrial factories in Hazaria. Migrants work in Ahmedabad, in Rajkot the ceramic hub of Morbi, in the chemical and petro chemical hubs of Vadodara and also in the ship-breaking industry at Alang and Sabarkantha.

These migrant-workers who have been instrumental in bringing about growth to Gujarat state are now targeted for attacks of violence over an incident occurred on September 28, when a 14 month old child was allegedly raped by a migrant worker from Bihar. Though this incident of rape sparked off protests and violent attacks against non-Gujarati speaking migrant workers the root cause of this lies else-where.

Like in other states of India, the unemployment problem is rampant even in Gujarat state. As the state failed in generation of employment, the jobless particularly the unemployed youth are discontent against the gloomy conditions. They developed resentment against migrant-workers as if they are the cause for their joblessness; instead of the governments that are responsible for not creating the jobs needed.

The ruling class political parties have been skillfully using the discontent of unemployed youth diverting their attention from the root-cause with nativist arguments against migrant-workers with the slogans such as jobs to 'sons of the soil' etc and stoking hate against 'outsiders'.

The same has happened even in Gujarat now.

The BJP government of Gujarat which failed to provide employment had skillfully adopted the strategy of diverting the attention of discontent of unemployed youth against migrants.

Just 3 days before the alleged rape incident, the chief minister of Gujarat with a view to catch the votes of discontent unemployed youth in the elections of 2019 had grandly announced that the state would enact a law to make it mandatory to provide 80% jobs to locals and to reserve 25% hires for

residents from the location of the companies. Thus basically the unemployed are incited with hate against the migrant workers in the state by the ruling party BJP in governmental power in Gujarat state.

Then it is the Congress party leader Alpesh Thakor who fanned the hatred and violence against migrant workers using the alleged incident of rape, through the kshatria Thakor sena led by him. Thus both the ruling parties B.J.P and Congress, used the incident of rape to gain their mean political benefits instead of developing amity between people. Instead of diffusing the violence of hatred against migrant workers both those ruling parties started the game of pointing finger at each other and blaming each other. The violence spread to 7 districts of north-Gujarat, and made the migrant workers flee, fearing violent attacks on them amidst unabated incident of targeting migrants. As with other such incidents of violence against migrant workers in other states and cities, the crisis in Gujarat too will be "settled." The settlement will not, however, make the living and working conditions of the migrant workers any better. Rather the poor migrant workers face even more precarious work and living conditions than their local counterparts.

In our semi-feudal and semi colonial inequitable system of exploitation ruled by anti-people ruling classes, peace and well being of people proves to be a mirage. Neither the pretensions of a parliamentary democracy nor of a notion of integrated one Indian nation protect and provide safety to working people and particularly to those who were forced to migrate to other states searching for a living. Thus they are vulnerable targets for attacks.

This phenomenon of hate against migrant workers is not limited to our country India alone. With the intensification of imperialist globalization, migrants (immigrants) are being made targets of attacks by locals throughout the world. We have witnessed such brutal attacks against migrants in Europe, U.S.A and elsewhere by locals with the connivance of their ruling governments.

Racism, tribalism, provincialism of hatred against migrant-workers is rampantly increasing throughout the world intensifying attacks on migrants. Far-right groups and reactionary political parties are gaining more and more ground around the world. This is a bitter consequence of imperialist globalization to the detriment of the very human-kind of the world.

The working-class throughout the world and particularly the working class in India shall understand the reactionary developments perilous to the human kind and shall make all possible efforts and struggles to call the bluff of imperialist-capitalism and expose its failure, inability and futility in bringing about well-being and affluence and peace to the people of the world.

The unemployed youth shall be made to understand the root cause of unemployment viz. the inequitable system of exploitation and rouse them to fight against that system towards the objective of establishing a socialist system of no unemployment, no inequality, no hatred and no exploitation.
