

Fire Cracker Industry of Sivakasi

Tamil Nadu's fireworks industry at Sivakasi is a famous fire cracker industry in our country. To say that it thrives by sacrificing the lives of its workers cannot be an exaggeration. Thousands of workers work in this industry and most of them are women workers hailing from poverty-stricken families.

These labourers are made to work very hard for 12 hours a day without sufficient breaks. The working conditions in these units violate basic human rights. They are paid meagerly wages. Child labour persists in the industry. These untrained labourers are made to handle chemicals without required safety measure. The norms of safety governing this hazardous industry are grossly violated. Limit on workers to be deployed at the place is violated crowding in each shed, which is being converted in to a factory where inflammable chemicals too are stored all over.

With in a month (February-2021) three accidents have occurred in this industry at Sivakasi killing workers and seriously injuring many workers. Most of the victims are women workers. In the latest accident at fire-works unit 20 workers were killed and 28 workers are hospitalized at the last count. In the past decade at least 145 accidents have been reported in the fireworks units in Sivakasi killing many workers.

An unending series of accidents are occurring in fire work industry of Sivakasi which became a perpetual death-trap to the workers with unsafe conditions, drawing the attention of the worker's plight.

When ever an accident is reported in the media, the administration enacts the same farce of expressing surprise, announcing some compensation to the victims, constituting and enquiry in to the causes of accidents etc. and pacifies the outrage expressed against the accident and the deaths of workers. Subsequently nothing happens and a new accident occurs as usual. The apathies of the administration and the governments (state and central) towards the deaths of workers caused duty violation of safety regulations and norms is epoch making. No stern action is being taken against the culprit-industry owners who cause these accidents of killing workers by gross violations of safety norms. Only sort time actions are being taken by the administration like registration of cases, arrests, identification of causes, token inspections, issuance of warnings and safety advises etc. No definite action to arrest the accidents by making the owners of the unit accountable and responsible for the workers killing is being taken.

The causes for these accidents are well documented. Unlicensed units have mushroomed in and outside Sivakasi mostly to escape scrutiny till explosions occur. These units are flourishing across the region. Sub-lending of these units is done for

safety compromise. The fire cracker factories are owned by one person, taken on lease by a second and the workers are engaged by a third person in most of these cases.

Besides violations of safety norms and regulations, the untrained workers are under the piece-rate system are induced to produce more units per day which also in the cause for accidents. Workers fatigued in doing work in their hurry to work may trigger explosions.

For the past several decades the same old models of production is continued in these units, without utilising the new technology, and production models that provide better safety to workers. The owners minimise to the possible extent the expenditure in safety of workers in their avarice of gaining more profits even at the cost of the lives of the workers. Lack of regular safety inspections at factories, sustained crack-down and stringent penal action are the causes for these unending series of workers killings in these accidents. The workers movement shall fight against these man-made killings of workers and strive to protect and rescue the workers leading the lives of dangerous uncertainty in the fire-cracker industry.