



DAILY NEWSPAPER
ANALYSIS
THE HINDU
(22nd October, 2018)



THE HINDU
Daily News Paper

Lip service to labour rights: Issues of Migrant Labours

Why in news:-

- Recent ***exodus of migrant labour from Gujarat*** followed by attacks on migrant labour after an incident in Gujarat, highlights the vulnerability migrants labours.
- It also highlights the policy makers to *review and analysis the existing protection and welfare measures of migrant labour* and need to address the relevant concerns.

Role of Migrant labours:-

- Study shows that states with *relatively developed host more migrants* as they played ***a vital role in greasing the wheels of growth of the State*** by :
 - Providing *cheap labour in SMEs in manufacturing, construction sectors etc.*
 - Providing *relevant skill labour for service sector.*
- ***Economic Survey (2016-17)*** pointed out the *Gujarat is among the States including Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, and West Bengal with highest net in-migration workers.*

Issues with Migrant labours:-

- **Pathetic Condition of Work:** *Segmenting the labour market* and creating a separate labour market for

- migrant workers, who are easy to exploit, has been a common strategy of employers across India.
 - They earn low wages, work very long hours without any overtime benefits, and are almost without any leave or social protection.
 - Lakhs of unskilled and migrant workers live on worksites in makeshift huts (usually made of tin sheets) or on roads, slums and in illegal settlements not served by municipalities.
- **Local workers resentment with migrants workers:** This discontent over the lack of adequate jobs for young people. Whenever the economy is not catering the enough employment, migrant labourers are first to become scapegoat instead the addressing the real issues.
 - This situation became worse when nativist arguments against migrants have been used by political forces in various states, from developed ones such as Maharashtra to smaller one such as Meghalaya to mobilisation of people for political gain.
 - This neither serve the interest of the state concerned nor addresses the issue of job-oriented growth and also gives blow to National Integrity and opposed to Constitutional ethos.
- **Utter Indifference of States to the well being of migrant workers and their rights:** Both working state and home state of migrants labour have other priorities over the rights and welfare of migrant labour.

- For example : The working state (Gujarat) wants normalcy to return so that migrant workers can toil for the prosperity of State, while the Home State (Bihar), which is at its wit's end trying to manage the sudden inflow of returning migrants, wants migration to Gujarat to continue as before.
- The political impulse has been to maintain status quo of the continuation of the situation where migrant workers are exploited.
- **Non implementation of Migrant Labour Laws:** Under the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act** and other labour laws (for unorganised workers), migrant workers in Working state are legally entitled to all their basic labour rights.
 - These include minimum wages, regular wage payment, regular working hours and overtime payment, and decent working and living conditions which include taking care of the health and education of their children.
 - Under the same Act, the governments of the States from where migrant workforce originate are expected to issue licences to contractors who take workers away, register such workers and also monitor their working and living conditions in other States.
- But most State governments remain indifferent to these laws.

Way Ahead:-

- the real solution to this issue would be to **enforce all relevant labour laws for migrant workers** so that segmentation of the labour market becomes weak, and workers (local and migrant) get a fair and equal deal in the labour market.
- And at the same time State and Central governments should take measures to **address the jobless growth situation prevailing in economy.**

THANK YOU

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