



Exclusionary state

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The plight of inter-State migrants is not very different from that of refugees who lack citizenship rights.

In India, you do not have to be excluded from the National Register of Citizens to experience a sense of loss of territory, identity, belongingness and livelihood. You could just as easily feel that way if you were a rural-to-urban migrant worker facing dislocation and “uprootedness” — a state of constant threat and anxiety with no sense of control over your spatial and temporal existence. This is akin to the experience of refugees who lack citizenship rights.

The 2011 Census pegs the total number of internal migrants in the country, including those who have moved within and across States, at a staggering 139 million.

Why?

- A large chunk of migrant labourers’ shelter and work are deemed “illegal” within Indian cities.
- Sometimes these labourers are exploited, required to work below subsistence levels, and reside in subhuman conditions, which is then perceived as encroachment.
- The state’s role is proactive in allowing the absorption of cheap labour into cities, to serve the bulging demand of the urban middle class but The state often consciously and systematically derecognizes them, and conveniently brackets them as “illegal”.
- Illegality, in turn, results in labels such as “criminals” that must be dealt with by the state again, to protect its “full” citizens, and to exclude the migrants further from the fruits of this “full” citizenship instead of providing migrant workers with proper documents, secure jobs, housing and provisioning of other public utilities.

Policy issues

- Considering the Smart Cities Mission of 2015 that proposed investment allocations of Rs.2,039 billion to convert 99 Indian cities into smart cities, a mere 8% of the intended projects have been completed so far in the past three years, according to the recent report released by Housing and Land Rights Network.
- Interestingly, many smart city proposals identify slums as a “threat” to the city in their “SWOT” (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis while totally failing to account for migrant labour in the schemes resulting in forced evictions.
- The national obsession with bringing order to international boundaries could also be applied within nation states, cities and neighbourhoods.

The state’s role in ensuring equality, basic dignity, livelihood and providing minimum social security to its people must be upheld before all other priorities.



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