

## **Migrant Asias: Refugees, Statelessness & Migrant Labour Regimes**

### **Solidarity for Survival: Cooperative Building as a Method to Overcome Vulnerability**

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According to Karl Marx, the cooperative is one of the transforming forces of the present society based on class antagonism. Marx also said that the cooperative movement could stop the suppression of labour from the capital. He considered the cooperative movement as a transforming force to stop class antagonism.<sup>1</sup>

The proposed paper will critically examine the idea of cooperative building as a solution to help marginal and migrant labouring communities in India. The proposed paper will be based on an intense ethnography of the only sex-workers cooperative in South Asia. The Usha Multipurpose Cooperative and Credit Society (in short, Usha) played a crucial role in helping the community of sex workers all over West Bengal, not only to make their own social identity but to survive from crisis situations, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed paper will critically examine the role of Usha Cooperative as an experiment in the neo-liberal society and try to analyse the transformations in the idea of cooperative building as an element to prevent class antagonism.

One of the significant drawbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has affected the worldwide economy. It affected people, especially the people from the working class. The workers of the so-called “third world” countries, especially workers who worked in informal economic sectors, construction sites and several other professions, had suffered a lot. The world had seen long processions of the unorganized migrant (mostly informal) labours towards their homeland. The recent pandemic opens new ideas about the community relationship, the basic rights of the citizens, especially the right to life, and the changes in the ideas of touch and

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, “The Different Questions”, *The International Courier* No. 6/7, 1867. Available in The Marx-Engles Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1866/08/instructions.htm>. accessed on 23.05.2022 at 14.34 hrs.

untouchability in the “epidemiological model of the society”<sup>2</sup>. Migrant labours and several other workers in different marginal professions became victims of that. The process of victimizing the workers in marginal professions, especially migrant workers (male, female and transgender migrant workers) was not a unique phenomenon during the pandemic. The COVID-19 legitimized the age-old politics of “untouchability” through the idea of “social distancing”. The paper will argue how the idea of the cooperative building can be a solution to fight against the new form of class antagonism in South Asia.

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<sup>2</sup> **Epidemiological Model of Society:** According to Benjamin Bratton, a new trend of biopolitics that emerged during the pandemic. People quickly started learning to look into their society as epidemiology does. That is to shift our sense of subjectivity from a private individual to public transmissibility. People who could afford to maintain social distancing started alienating economically backwards who encountered the pandemic more viciously due to the policy of alienation followed by the upper and upper middle class in the name of social distancing. According to Bratton the epidemiological model is a foundational for a viable post pandemic politics. To know more about it please see, Benjamin Bratton. *The Revenge of the Real: Politics for a Post-Pandemic World*. London, Verso, 2021. P. 33-40.