

Migrant Asias: Refugees, Statelessness & Migrant Labour Regimes

Solidarity for Survival: Cooperative Building as a Solution to Overcome Vulnerability

Rajat Kanti Sur

This article will critically examine the idea of cooperative building as a solution to help marginal and migrant labouring communities in India. The research on the role of cooperatives will be based on studies on different cooperatives in West Bengal.

Firstly, I will examine the labour cooperatives built in the late 1970s and 80s with the old Marxist idea of cooperative as a “transforming force to stop class antagonism”¹. The argument of this section will be based on an ethnographic study of three traditional cooperatives (the cooperative at KMDA, The Satyajug Industrial Cooperative and the New Howrah Hosiery Labours’ Cooperative) to understand the effectiveness of protecting the challenges faced by the migrant labours.

The emergence of the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative and Credit Society (in short, Usha), the only sex-workers cooperative in South Asia will be my second focus to understand the central question of my argument on the viability of the cooperative model for the migrants, especially the migrant workers involved in risky professions. The paper will try to understand the effectiveness of the model of cooperative-building for the migrant workers (e.g., migrant labours, domestic workers or sex workers etc.) through an ethnographic study on the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative and Credit Society.

This article plans to include opinions from the economists, labour leaders, leaders of cooperative movements and ordinary migrant labours associated with different cooperative-building initiatives and try to study their reactions about whether they would think that the cooperative-building would be one of the essential activities to organize migrant workers in the post-liberalized world.

Cooperative-building may help to strengthen community relationships. The success of different labour cooperatives, including 'Usha', is based on a strong sense of community/class among its

¹ 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.

members. The recent pandemic affects the community relationship, the basic rights of the citizens, especially the right to life, and the changes in the ideas of touch and untouchability in the “epidemiological model of the society”². The article will focus on the role of some solidarity initiatives that helped the migrant workers during the pandemic and analyze their views regarding cooperative-building as a possible solution to overcome the crisis faced by the migrant workers during the pandemic.

² **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.