

# The Emergence of the Migrant as a Problem Figure in Contemporary Mumbai: Chronicles of Violence and Issues of Justice

Simpreet Singh

## **Introduction**

Mumbai, the city as it is seen and understood today has covered a journey from seven islets to a megalopolis spreading across some two centuries. Today, tall high rise buildings standing next to the flat laid spread out settlements known as slums, points out to the processes of contestations and negotiations that would have been and are being engaged in by the residents of these two or more than two worlds.

The city of Mumbai as we understand today, has taken the shape and nature due to the significant role played by the migrant category, from within the state as well as more importantly from outside the state of Maharashtra. The process of migration was facilitated and encouraged by the colonial rulers and has continued post-independence also. The difference has been the numbers and nature as well as in the idea and understanding around the social category of 'migrant'. The emergence of the idea of 'son of soils' was concomitant with the idea of blaming the 'outsider', the 'migrant' which according to the 'local' were responsible for everything that was wrong in the city; ranging from the over-crowded trains to the rise in crime rate. The 'migrant' has been labeled as 'ill-legal', 'terrorist', 'burden on city's resources' and what not.

The proposed study attempts to map the trajectory of emergence of 'migrant' as a problematic figure in contemporary Mumbai, the actors-forces-reasons behind it and also its political economy in the background of economic transformation of the city from a manufacturing centre to a service centre. For this, in addition to looking into secondary data; it is proposed to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants including political activists, trade unionists, activists of Shiv Sena, 'migrants', academicians etc.

## **Bombay/Mumbai the City:**

Historically, Mumbai has been a city with fairly large trades and population as being one of the first metropolis of the country. “Mumbai is also a city of staggering contrasts. On one hand, a vast majority of its population lives and works in abysmal conditions, densely packed into the city’s teeming “slums,” and making a precarious living in the so-called informal sector. On the other hand, its affluent elites pursue lifestyles of calculated extravagance, fit to rival their counterparts in London or New York” (Kidambi, 2013). There have been shifts and changes in the character of the city particularly in the realm of economic activities, from a port city to a manufacturing center to the present stage of being a hub of financial activities and service sector. This process has been furthered by outlining a trajectory which encompasses transformations in the sectors ranging from physical and social infrastructure, economic growth, governance, housing to strategic planning. Towards achieving these ends, series of interlinked and interlined projects and processes have been undertaken, which include amendments in the rent control act, repeal of Urban Land Ceiling Act, Re-development related policies, undertaking of Mega projects like Bandra Worli sea-link, Metro Rail, MUTP-MUIP, Beautification drives in select areas, iconic towers, Trans harbor sea link project, Network of Elevated rail& Roadways, Introduction of Fleet Taxis, Airport Expansion, Dharavi & other such Slum Redevelopment projects. These shifts and changes have come to signify different meanings for different sections of the society differentially.

In the very recent times, Mumbai has poised to transform itself into an international financial center which in turn would mean attaining the status of a “world class city” for which massive investments in construction and infrastructure for rebuilding, renovating and expansion of central business areas has been undertaken in order to strengthen the space for global city functions. With large amounts of global capital being pumped into the local land and construction market, the impacts have been felt on slum settlements and the understanding around it. One clear shift is the viewing and labeling of slums as ‘encroachments’ and the policy as well as the public debate revolves around this thread only, thus dehumanizing and criminalizing the large number of human beings that live in such settlements. The way certain spaces have been categorized as ‘illegal’, similarly certain populations have also been categorized as ‘unwanted’.

The city has also been witness to a continuous history and trajectory of violence, direct as well as structured. State as well as non-state actors have been engaged into it, under the pretext of governing or that of ruling. Colonial and the post-colonial state always had the sovereign control over use of violence, few of the noteworthy examples are; the use of force by colonial state during the plague riots and the 1942 Naval Mutiny and of the post-colonial state few examples are that of killing of 105 people demanding for formation of modern day Maharashtra, massacre of 10 dalits by the state police at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar in 1997. Violence by non-state actors has mostly been on lines of religion, caste, language and labour mobilization. Few examples of non-state actor violence is the 1893 hindu-muslim riots on the issue of cow protection, death stabbing of CPI leader

Krishna Desai by members of Shiv Sena, killing of 900 people (mostly Muslims) in the 1992-93 riots, violence against migrants from Bihar by members of MNS in 2007.

The city also has been one of the centers of militant left wing trade unionism that played a central role in the life of the city at some point of time; it also has been the birth place of the militant Dalit Panther movement.

### **Economic Trajectory of the City:**

The social and economic character of the city has changed over the decades from the 1930s to 1990s: from a labour intensive orientation it moved to that of capital intensive production, and almost recently to financial services. The watershed event for change in the economic character was the decade of the 1960s when the state of Maharashtra came into being.

According to political scientist Jayant Lele “during the decade of 1960s when the state of Maharashtra came into existence, major changes in the structure of Bombay’s economy occurred. State sponsored private capitalist development begun to emerge (Lele 1995). And also during the period of 1960 and 1965, Bombay “attracted a disproportionate share of industrial capital compared to other the rest of India and there was growth of private industrial capital” (ibid.).

During the period of last four to five decades, the worker’s occupational distribution shows clear shift from manufacturing to trade and commerce (Table 1). The share of workers in Manufacturing sector decreased from 41 per cent in 1961 to just 28 per cent in the year 2001. At the same time the workers share in Trade and Commerce increased from 18 per cent (1961) to 32 per cent (2001).

<b>Table : Trend in the distribution of workers by Industrial in Greater Mumbai, 1961 to 2001</b>					
Industrial Activity	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Agricultural	1.89	1.26	1.38	.84	1.12
Manufacturing Industry	41	42	41	37	28
Construction	2.66	3.05	3.35	4.24	6.41
Trade and Commerce	18	22	21	24	32
Transport and Storage	11	11	10	11	12
Other Services	25	20	22	22	18

(Source: Singh 2010)

These shifts in the economic structure are concomitant with the emergence of the nativism and ‘sons of the soils sentiments’ in the city is my hypothesis, which will be talked about in more detail later. Scholar Banerjee-Guha notes that the city has “seen a gradual but steady shift from manufacturing to trading and services in the economic base of Mumbai” (Banerjee-Guha, 2002). The decline of manufacturing industries, especially the downfall of the textile industry has triggered the emergence of various territory sector activities which are major component of the city’s economy now.

In the recent times, Mumbai has attained the status of financial capital of the country and has attained an economic boom since the liberalization. Since then the city has emerged as a major financial hub in the global chain of financial centers” (Singh, 2012).

In the past, the city owed its prosperity largely to textile mills, manufacturing industries and sea port but the local economy has since diversified to include service sector, real estate, entertainment hub, health care, IT and ITES and most importantly financial services. Over period of time, although the contribution of the primary sector to the city’s economy has remained the same but the contribution of the tertiary sector has increased from 62 per cent to 73 per cent in the short duration of twelve years (Table 2).

Table 2: Contribution of primary, secondary and tertiary sector in net district domestic product from 1993-94 to 2005-06.			
Years	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1993-94	1.25	36.12	62.64
1999-2000	1.87	31.46	66.67
2005-06	0.88	25.30	73.82

*Source: Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai cited Singh, 2010*

There has been a consistent decline in the formal sector employment, which also indicates the decay of manufacturing industries in the city. The total employment in the formal sector that was about 11 lakh in 1971, increased to 12.7 lakh in 1981, but has since declined to 11.8 lakh in 1991 and further to 11.5 lakh in 1998 (Table 3). At the same time the growth of formal sector jobs in the services sector has not been adequate to fill the void created by the decline in manufacturing jobs.

Table 3: Employment in the Formal Sector	
Year	Number (in lakhs)
1971	11
1981	12.7
1991	11.8
1998	11.5

*Source:* Report on Employment Generation in Post Globalization Era in Greater Mumbai, 2006

Economists Joshi and Joshi in their noteworthy study titled *Surplus City and the City* state that over the years “the number of workers outside the organized sector increased both absolutely as well as a proportion of the total labour force” (Joshi and Joshi 1976).

### **The City and the Migrant, Trajectories of Migration:**

It is a well acknowledged fact that since the beginning of the city, its growth- in terms of size and population has been due to the factors of in-migration. Migration has played the most significant role in the changing demographic profile of city (Singh 2007). In the first half of 20th century, Bombay grew mainly on account of movement of people from other parts of the country. According to sociologist Sujata Patel “the economic activities of the city attracted migrants from nearby rural districts and eventually from the whole country. Nineteenth century migrants hailed from the areas today included in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Workers from coastal Konkan strip and the Western Ghats manned the docks and cotton textile mills. Most of business and trading groups came from Gujarat. In the twentieth century, particularly after independence, new waves of migrants arrived from both north and south India” (Patel 1995). There was diversity in the category of migrants when they came to settle in the city, ranging from the language they spoke, part of the country they belonged to and the economic activities they engaged in. . Migrants from Maharashtra

were mainly concentrated in the cotton textile mills while the concentration of workers from Andhra Pradesh was highest in the construction sector. Gujratis dominated the trade and commerce along with Marwaris and Sindhis. Migrants from UP and Bihar dominated the sectors of Taxi and Auto drives, home based industry etc (Joshi and Joshi 1976). Further, “the ethnic and communal diversity of Bombay’s business world was striking: it included merchants belonging to many communities of Gujarat, including the Parsis, the Hindu Vantias and Bhatias, the Muslim Bohras, Khojas and Memons, as well as businessmen from other provinces of India (Sind, Marwar), Baghdadi Jews” (Markovits1995).

Bombay acquired much of its population through in-migration rather than natural growth and majority of the city’s working population consisted of migrants (Joshi and Joshi 1976). Net migration has been an important component of population growth for Greater Bombay since 1901. The city grew by net migration alone till 1931 and even in the decade 1931-41. The migration contributed about 39 per cent of total population growth of Greater Mumbai during last decade of 1991-2001 (Table 4).

Table 4: Population Growth in Greater Mumbai (1901 to 2001) and Percentage share of Natural Growth and Migration.			
Decade	Total Population Growth (in'000)	Percentage share of Natural Increase	Percentage share of Migration
1901-11	221	-58	158
1911-21	231	-72	172
1921-31	18	-322	422
1931-41	402	1	99
1941-51	1194	20	79
1951-61	1158	48	51
1961-71	1818	50	49
1971-81	2274	60	39
1981-91	1682	83	16
1991-2001	2053	61	38

(Source: Singh 2007)

The expansion of the trade in the city attracted migrants group to the city. In addition, the city also attracted distress migration that occurred as a result of famines and floods (Patel 2003). In the year 1961 migrants accounted for 84 percent of the working population and between the period of 1941 and 1971 two thirds of the city's residents had been born outside the city (Patel 2003).

The migration into the city has always been one of the main factors for the city's population growth, a pattern that sustains despite the city shifting its activity from the manufacturing sector to the services sector (Singh 2010). Variations over time in the flow of migration have very broadly followed the city's economic function and nature (Joshi and Joshi 1976).

### **The Emergence of Problematic Migrant and Surplus Appropriation:**

According to anthropologist Jim Masselos the city has always been "ambivalent in its attitude towards migration" as "it needed migrants but not the problems that came with them" (Masselos 1995). He further is of the view that almost from the beginning of the city, it was made to look attractive to the migrants since the city did not had enough people, especially those with the required skills and talents. "Workers were also actively sought out...during the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century the Company(East India Company)scoured the subcontinent for skilled craftsmen and artisans to work..." (ibid). As early as year 1856, the categorization of migrants as 'worthy' and the 'unworthy' poor started with the bringing in of the Act XIII of 1856 by the colonial rulers. At that time they were categorised as 'polluting', 'foreigner', or 'beggars' depending upon the situation and the context.

Another major watershed period during which the category of migrant emerged as the problematic category was the decade of 1960's. In late 50's and early 60's, Bombay was to witness the emergence of 'linguistic regionalism' and struggle for demand of 'samayukta' or united Maharashtra that was based on unification of areas where Marathi speaking population was in majority. The struggle was fought under the banner of Samayukta Maharashtra Kriti Samiti and led by noteworthy communists and socialists like S. A. Dange, S. M. Joshi, Madhu Dandavate, KS Thackeray amongst others. According to communists "battling for Maharashtra meant going to war with the capitalists by other means, such as language and identity" (Prakash 2010). This movement created distance between Marathi speaking and non-speaking residents of the city.

The Samyukta Maharashtra movement mobilized Marathi speakers as a political entity, but it was Thackeray who successfully deployed it as an anti-immigrant, populist force (Prakash 2010). For its emergence and rise, in the later years; Shiv Sena(SS) identified migration from other cultural region

as the main culprit (Lele 1995). Sociologist Sujata Patel writes that after the creation of the state of Maharashtra, the city became firmly integrated within the state and henceforth the regional political elite, speaking the Marathi language, set the agenda for the city. These developments initiated a process of fragmentation of the existing class, community and language identities amongst the elites (Patel 2003).

Sociologist Gerard Heuze is of the opinion that “because the economic situation of many strata of the people (industrial workers, street vendors, students from the popular milieus. Etc) was (is) getting worse, or remaining stagnant that a cultural populist movement like the Shiv Sena could arise and remain for long in a prominent position” (Heuze 1995)

Thus the role par excellence of Shiv Sena in the context of Bombay was to break the solidarity of the working class that was based on the economic factors and replace it with the fragmented solidarity that is based on cultural factors like language or place of birth. In the process, the real beneficiaries were the capitalists of the city. According to sociologist Sujata Patel, Shiv Sena “mobiliz(ed)ing this underclass and incorporate(ed)ing them into a new elite-oriented agenda of globalization” (Patel, 2003). This might also explain the proximity of Bal Thackeray and Shiv Sena with the major industrialists and he referring to big capitalists as *annadatas* (Gangadharan, 1970 cited in Lele 1995). According to Lele, by blaming on the outsiders, SS “managed to deflect attention from the socio-cultural and economic consequences of unchecked capitalist development in industry and of the state assisted distortions of land, housing ...and job markets” (Lele, 1995).

My hypothesis is that the tension that emerges between the migrant and the local population that is also reflected in the form of the sons of the soils movements is not a product of its own or a cultural phenomena rather it is shaped by those who owns the forces of production. And it serves their purpose of fragmenting the solidarity of the working class in respect to struggles that are around issues of labour and space.

The main objective of this research is to explore whether the discourse around the migrant has been, as has been the requirement of the economic functions of the city? Till the time, the main economic function of the city was based on labour extensive systems, they were welcomed but the stage when there was a turn in the economic functions of the city, the same migrant becomes a problematic. In nutshell, the proposed research attempts to map the trajectory of emergence of ‘migrant’ as a problematic figure in contemporary Mumbai, the actors-forces-reasons behind it and also its political economy in the background of economic transformation of the city from a manufacturing centre to a service centre.

For the purpose of this research the method of in-depth interview will be employed. The interviews will be drawn from the diverse field of activist, trade unionist, member of Shiv Sena party, academicians, migrant. Along with the interviews, the secondary literature in the form of published books, articles will be relied upon and also texts of speeches by leaders (of political parties like SS, MNS, CPI, Congress) in this regard

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