

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 20-3-2002

BEREFT OF EMPLOYMENT DAILY WAGE LABOURERS ON THE VERGE OF STARVATION.

This month, it is uncertain how many days they will be able to get wages. But who cares ?

There isn't a reserve of food in their stomachs and in such a situation, those elements creating communal tension in the past few weeks force the common human being to stay indoors and without employment. Since the past 22 Days, a targeted attack on the minority community in the name of a revenge for the Godhra massacre has continued unabated. The homes of thousands of people of minority community have been razed to the ground, and the government has proven to be unsuccessful at putting a stop to such events. Sources of livelihood have been destroyed. All these incidents have happened in the presence of the police forces and sometimes they have received the blessings of police as well. This frightening situation is giving shape to another equally grim situation.

In the past 5 years 10 lakhs people have lost employment in Gujarat. No new employment has been generated to rectify this. The government, public and private sector have instead touted the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) as answer.

Due to the new economic policy of the government, the situation of the common person is worsening day by day. Like vegetable vendors, groups of daily wage labourers move around in areas like Old Padra Road, Nyay Mandir, Railway station underbridge now they have begun to overflow to other, newer areas of the city. In Baroda city, earlier there used to be 3-5 casual labour markets but now these have now increased to 20. These labour markets are not very different from the slave markets of the 14th century. The only difference is that now they are there of their so-called "own free will" to sell their labour. Today, in order to fill their stomachs, daily wage workers have to work for more than 10-16 hours. For example 4,000 - 10,000 people have to stand in labour markets for hours each day in Baroda to get employed. Earlier it was believed that these people are migrants from Panchmahal or Chota Udepur, but now in such labour markets one will find new categories of people those who earlier had secure jobs, people who worked in industries that have now closed down, or those who have been retrenched in the name of "Voluntary Retirement Scheme" have now had to join the ranks of daily wage labourers. Some of these workers are such that they use to get Rs. 2,500 - 3,000/- per month as permanent employees in industries. Now, in the casual labour market they get Rs.35 - 65/- as daily wages. Since the size of this casual labour market is increasing, the wages have shown a downward trend.

The number of rickshaws that are run on rents has also increased. The number of those who are earning a living in such a manner 50% of them are workers of closed mills of Gujarat. Amongst the new rickshaw drivers, there are of course those who are unable to get other jobs, but also those who have lost their regular jobs or have been retrenched in the name of voluntary retirement. Those who can afford to rent out their rickshaws have bought cars themselves, so that those who drive the rickshaws and those who sit in rickshaws are from about the same economic strata this has made the economic condition of rickshaw

drivers more precarious. Around 70% of rickshaws are not able to go on road since last 22 days. These days one can only get a job for few months and now in very small number as security guards: for this job, a worker gets Rs. 1,000 - 1,500/- for a 12 hours shift. Labour laws are given a complete go by in such jobs.

Given such a situation, the communal riots that started after barbarian attack at Godhra on the Sabramti Express and continue till today have made the condition of the common human being even more precarious.

There are people who under normal circumstances also are not able to make ends meet with great difficulty and among them 70% are people who are on the verge of starvation. These people rely on the informal/unorganised sector for their employment. This section of the population has been imprisoned in their houses since the past 22 days and are unable to go out to seek employment. These people are not those who work in schools, banks or in the organised sector, where if people do not show up at work due to curfew, they are still able to get their salaries or wages. These are people who, if they do not go to work on a particular day, are unable to cook food in the evening. On the one hand, these people have been pushed on the brink of starvation and on the other hand, they are being terrorised by the fear of communal attacks. Not only have the nights become like the day for them, it is the day which has become as dark as the night. Children are scared to go to school and their guardians are afraid to take them there. In so many areas, children are unable to sleep at night they ask repeatedly, when will all this stop?

We appeal to all those who have become victims of this extremely serious situation to raise their voice against the violence supported by the State and Government. There are handful of people, who want to instigate the violence, are conducting meetings and spreading rumours and thus poisoning the relations between the two communities. We appeal to people to boycott such people and resist them if they can. The common people should realise that the “real crated or imagine differences” between the community should be resolved by dialogue and not by mob violence which affects their lives and livelihood. Because of the prevailing circumstances, the condition of the common person has become worse and the real issues facing them have been sidelined. For this everyone needs to unite and prepare themselves for a long battle against communal forces and exploitation.

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