

Title: Red, Green, and Blue: Migrant Labor in the Face of Climate Change in Maharashtra

Country: India

Sponsoring College: Bennington College

Team Member: Ahwar Sultan, UWC Mahindra College '18, Bennington College '22

Project Dates: 15th June 2022—15th August 2022

Context and Need

The Indian state of Maharashtra, home to the coastal metropolis Mumbai, is a drought prone area. A contract based agricultural policy (which the recent farmers' protest in India managed to get repealed last year) is already in place through Maharashtra state legislation. Moreover, Maharashtra has one of the highest numbers of migrant workers in India, most of them in Mumbai. The plight of these migrant workers in formal and informal jobs was highlighted during the first wave of the pandemic. On the other hand, Mumbai as a city itself is always expanding and re/developing (relying heavily on the informal/contract labor of migrants), while at the same time it tries to reckon with increasing risks posed by climate change.

The city stands to face increasing frequency and intensity of cyclones, while agrarian Maharashtra faces rising uncertainty of rainfall. In the face of these ongoing and upcoming environmental risks and challenges in both the city and the countryside, and the precarity and insecurity of workers therein (who often tend to be of marginalized castes), a vocabulary of change that unites the environmental and the labor question is urgently required. For instance, from the recent Mumbai Climate Action Plan, the labor question has been markedly absent.

As opposed to a simple absence of war, following Johann Galtung, we take up a positive notion of peace: the presence of lasting and resilient structures of harmony. Therefore, this project targets structures of violence, and works toward their erosion. In the case of labor and environment, violence is immanent to the economic and legal structures that allow the exploitation of labor and degradation of the environment. In an environmentalist reading of Galtung, no society that relies on extralegally underpaid and unsafe labor, which is at the same time vulnerable to climate change, is a peaceful society. Drawing inspiration from labor-centric environmental politics of Green New Deals and organizations such as Blue Green Alliance in the US, this project aims to develop the discursive tools to push for structural change, for peace in the positive sense.

Goals

- Creating a repository of data and knowledge for grassroots workers' movements to pursue reforms in state policies and collective bargaining
- To develop networks of activists and channels for Maharashtra workers to utilize the force of environmental legislation and push for recognition of "migrant labor" in legislation
- To articulate the concepts, problems, and legislation on labor and environment for grassroots organizing and making it available for worker movements across urban and rural Maharashtra, across relevant sectors

Activities

- Sample survey and ethnography of sugarcane farmers and farmworkers in Parbhani and Marathwada region of rural Maharashtra
- Sample survey and ethnography of precarious workers (across waste, sanitation, and construction) in Mumbai
- Meetings and workshops with local leaders on the possibilities of uniting environment and labor movements
- Letter writing advocacy aimed at the state government for labor and environment legislation
- Writing and making available a report/summary of ethnographic survey results for further advocacy efforts.
- Organizing a conference to present findings and inviting discussion and other insights from leaders and activists in this field.

Timeline

Time period	Activity	Description
15 th June— 1 st July	Survey and Ethnography (Mumbai)	Semi-structured interviews and participant observation with workers in environmentally significant labors of the city (solid waste and storm water drain) and developing and dispatching a sample survey (minimum aim 200 responses)
1 st July— 15 th July	Survey and Ethnography (Marathwada)	Semi-structured interviews and participant observation with farmworkers and peasants involved in substance and commercial farming and developing and dispatching a sample survey (minimum aim 200 responses)
15 st July— 1 st August	Processing findings and follow ups	Processing qualitative and quantitative data in context of legislations, policies, on environment, climate, labor, and agriculture. Following up on discrepancies/convergences in both cases.
1 st August— 11 th August	Presentation, discussion, and action	Meetings with workers and leaders of both areas. Presenting findings and inferring points of action and reform in state policy. Writing letters to relevant ministries and policy makers in collaboration with NGOs/trade unions. Scheduling follow ups.
12 th August— 14 th August	Conference	Host a conference in Mumbai with leaders and researchers of migrant labor in the city and agriculture in the countryside

Expected Outcomes

- Data and report on the intersection of environment and labor in Maharashtra (family histories of workers, surveys, etc.) as a deliverable.
- Beyond the project timeline, we expect formation of labor-environment coalitions and networks of “green collar” workers, activists, and leaders: from waste work to farm work.
- We also expect that the reports produced and the advocacy letters sent to the government in the course of this project will be followed up on by the collaborating organizations once the project ends. The organizations can use the work of this project to continue pressuring and articulating demands to the state.

COVID Considerations

In consideration of the ongoing pandemic, all the charges for safety equipment for in-person operations or events (masks, gloves, sanitizers, signage for events, etc.) have been taken into consideration in the budget. In the case that COVID does not allow me to travel internationally back to India (not a very high probability), my collaborative groups are open to switching to a remote advocacy and writing campaign. I am also open to other variations in consultation with the review committee at Bennington.

Team

Ahwar Sultan was born to Bihari parents in Uttar Pradesh and was raised in Rajasthan until going to United World College in rural Maharashtra. He has built a connection with and interned at Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh, a trade union of sanitation workers in Mumbai. This union does not only focus on collective bargaining, but also has been moving courts and mobilizing for demonstrations to secure basic securities for sanitation workers of the city. The workers, staff, and leaders of this union (along with its agrarian affiliates) have agreed to and are enthused about providing resources, access, and guidance to this project. They stand to give the most to and gain the most from this project.

Name: Ahwar Sultan

Note: all funds in US dollars.

Project Name: Red, Green, and Blue: Migrant Labor in the Face of Climate Change in Maharashtra

School: Bennington College

TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:
\$ -

Projects for Peace grant:	\$	10,000.00
Additional Funding, if any:		
Total funding available:	\$	10,000.00

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:
\$ 10,000.00

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
2000	1500	100	300	100	2000	500	1400	1000	200
			300						
			300						
			300						
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
\$ 2,000.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 200.00

Total Student Expenses: \$ 4,900.00

Total Project Expenses: \$ 5,100.00



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Ref. No.

Date :

24th January 2022

To the Reviewing Committee of Davis Projects for Peace Grant,

I, Milind Ranade, on behalf of our allied trade unions and NGOs, pledge our support to Ahwar Sultan's project "Red, Green, and Blue: Migrant Labor in the Face of Climate Change." This support will take the form of making our connections, contacts, insights, investment, and access available for the goals of this project. Indeed, he developed this project in consultation and collaboration with our personnel. We look forward to working with Ahwar, and are enthusiastic about the tools and knowledge this project will bring about to promote positive social change.

Sincerely,

Milind Ranade

General Secretary

Kachara Vahtuk Shramik Sangh

(Garbage Transportation Workers' Union)