

Politics of Migration vs. Security of movement

By Shafqat Munir

Amid growing difficulties of the people moving across borders necessitate looking at the socio-political impacts of migration that breach their fundamental right to security of movement. Compounding and complicating legal migration channels and strict visa regimes lead to illegal migration and organized crimes such as human trafficking.

Migration is a human right and a legal activity. It is not at all negative; it has been made difficult with negative impacts that cause institutionalized exploitation of migrants as a negative impact of globalization. There is widespread abuse and exploitation in all forms of global migration system. Living and working conditions of migrant workers, particularly women, become highly precarious once they are migrated. However, undocumented migration is considered to be an illegal activity that is a cause of concern. It could be checked by expanding labor markets and rationalizing the unnecessary restrictions on security of movement of people, universally accepted right.

All human rights charters and agreements are derived from natural law that gives people the right to move. Whenever these human rights covenants are designed by the United Nations, by European Union or by any other international body, security of people's movement is duly recognized as a key issue. When we talk about the international law or convention, we know that these conventions are not made by democratically elected people as the United Nations is not a forum of democratically elected people, so we have no say in any international agreement, our say is only possible if they are guaranteeing the natural law, which is the law by birth to move freely. So any country has no right to check or restrict the movements of people. The 9/11 incident has changed the security paradigm and has literally created a human rights fiasco viz a viz security concerns. We need to look at whether security really matters or it is just a trick the Americans are playing with the people.

Generally, the movements of people are across both developed and developing and modern societies. The nationals of developed world are enjoying free flow of movement, which is the real spirit of globalization, whereas in south, most of the developing countries restrict the movement of their own people within their regions. The people of South Asia can't easily move across Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Maldives as these countries have strict laws.

If we look at the border security pre and post 9/11, we find that the situation back in 1983, Pakistanis didn't have to get a visa even for Britain, but now they need a visa even if they are in transit in UK for taking a connecting flight. Such restrictions limit people's movement. Security does matter and every country must adopt a security regime that suits it, but this security should not discourage people from moving freely or it should not unduly target people. Countries should develop certain mechanism to check such threats rather insulting the people, a practice prevailing in almost all countries after 9/11. Border security has become too critical and tiresome.

Migration of people from one place to another can take different forms. Varied dimensions are attached to it. Political dimension of migration results into movements of people as refugees/displaced persons and asylum-seekers. Migration and trafficking are

closely interlinked and migration in new millennium has become highly politicized and is a burning issue in both national and international politics.

The 'migration crisis' trumpeted by the North should be analyzed in the light of what Stephen Castles has viewed as: "So-called migration crisis arises because of the vast imbalance between North and South with regard to economic conditions, social well being and human rights". The countries of North over the years have developed a weird perspective about migration, which is part of global politics of migration. Northern perspective is based on concerns of European, Americans and Australians who believe that their countries were being besieged by asylum-seekers and 'illegal' immigrants.

At the same time there is another perspective, which says that the much feared mass influxes from South and East to North and West never happened. From East, people returned to their ancestral homelands after break up of Eastern Europe; other migrants usually came only if they could link up with existing social networks of previous migrants who helped them find work and housing.

Stephen Castles claims that migration has stabilized and declined. According to UN Population Report 2002, 175 million people live outside their homeland, which means that only three percent of the world's population is of migrants. It proves that all the fear and hue and cry is artificial and highly exaggerated by the West. Such small number of people could hardly cause panic. Today's globalized world cannot function properly in the presence of barriers to migration as both migration and globalization are run through a mechanism of free flow of people, technology, information and capital. Technically speaking, trade in services is growing and it comprises 20% of international trade.

In this context, WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is very crucial to be discussed. WTO divides services with a wide range of economic activities into 12 sectors and 55 sub-sectors, which includes business, communication, construction and engineering, distribution, educational, environmental services, health, tourism and travel, recreational, cultural and sports services, transport and other services. The four modes of services transactions under GATS include cross border movements of service products, movement of consumers, and temporary movement of natural persons to provide services and lastly it is the establishment of commercial presence in the country where services are to be provided.

Migration has both positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts of migration are better wages, increase in range of options for migrant workers including women, relatively more empowerment. Where as negative impacts of migration are physical and sexual exploitation of migrant women, low wages and more work as compared to local workers, hazardous working conditions, prone to traffickers, sex industry, no protection and exposure to violence and sexual harassment.

Some countries have illogical state policies on migration for instance immigration policies of different countries such as 'kafil' system in Arab countries and special U.S. migrant workers, women visa mechanism for domestic work, sweetshop labor and bonded labor. Movements of people as refugees/displaced persons contribute largely to immigrant community. These people migrate due to war and refugees' crisis, natural disasters, and drought. Under certain illogical immigration regimes, asylum seekers are not considered most of the times as real victims of persecution. Ninety percent of their applications by the Western countries are rejected. In many cases they are not deported as the countries of origin do not take them back or they have no travel documents or

identity. At times, the right of migration is also abused. The fear is right that the asylum seekers give fake documents just to get resettled. They put burden on the value system of that country. But at the same time these asylum seekers prove to be useful source of cheap labor and help boost Western countries' informal economy.

If the politics of migration continues to hamper the people's security of movement in the name of the so-called security paradigm after 9/11, the world seriously face a human resource crisis that will further widen the power imbalance and gap between the rich and the poor countries. To avoid such a situation, we need to ensure replacing unnecessary restrictions on movement of people with relaxed immigration policies, flexibility in labour movement from South to North as the South is labour intensive and the North is capital/investment intensive.

The 9/11 trauma should not be made a tool to discriminate or exploit any migrant or intending migrants. There is a need to enter into more multilateral and bilateral agreements for import/export of skilled and unskilled labor to avoid illegal migration. Forced migrants/ genuine asylum seekers should not be discriminated. Trafficked victims should be protected as migrants under ILO conventions.

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