

Crossian The Contagion Movement: Mimetic Desire and the Scapegoating of Internal Migrants in India

Internal migration in India is becoming increasingly significant due to unprecedented population movement across the country. This paper would like to explore a theoretical reinterpretation of internal labour migration in India by bringing empirical and social factors into a serious engagement with Rene Girard's theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism. Most research on internal migration in India has focused on economic compulsion, demographic transition, or developmental asymmetry. Although their findings are pertinent and necessary, they have not sufficiently addressed the relational, symbolic, and conflictual dimensions that shape migratory decision-making and migrants' struggles. Building on the prevailing complex realities of distress migration, informality, precarity, discrimination, political nativism, and social invisibility in internal migration, this paper places its academic thrust in arguing that internal migration must also be considered as a mimetic social phenomenon.

The paper acknowledges that internal migration in India often begins as a survival strategy in the context of agrarian distress, structural inequality, and socio-economic marginalisation. Still, it gradually becomes aspirational and imitative, oriented towards socially mediated ideals of prosperity, dignity, urban modernity, and recognition. Previous migrants, urban lifestyles, and narratives of success function as models of desire, rendering migration contagious within communities. At the same time, migrants' pursuit of parity with host populations intensifies mimetic rivalry, especially where access to labour, welfare, and civic belonging is perceived as scarce. This rivalry often culminates in scapegoating, whereby migrants are symbolically and politically constructed as threats to employment, social order, and cultural identity. By situating Indian internal migration within a Girardian framework, the paper seeks to present a new perspective on migration, not merely as labour mobility but as a morally charged terrain of desire, exclusion, violence, and contested recognition.