



Mr. Piyush Rastogi

Founder and Executive director RSP Infrastructure

Interviewer: Trisha Amalnerkar

IX Sem | RVCA

The Construction industry in the face of the pandemic

RSP United Infra constructions are a real estate and construction company based in Bangalore. The following interview is with the Executive Director of the company, Mr. Piyush Rastogi.

Good evening sir! Thank you for taking the time out to be here today. Our college, RV college of Architecture produces its own newsletter called KALPA biannually and the topic we're covering this semester is a topic that you have first hand knowledge of which is why I thought we could perhaps have a discussion on this topic this evening.

The topic of our newsletter is migration, due to various factors, however since you work in the construction industry we will limit our discussion to the effects migration has on the construction industry, more specifically, the pandemic that hit us in March 2020.

When the first wave hit us, we were all under prepared. How did you as a director of RSP enterprises handle the situation?

We were quite shocked by how the situation worsened. We did have enough accommodation on site for all hundred of our workers, that wasn't much of an issue. What created problems was the uncertainty and fear in all our minds, us as well as the migrant workers.

I'm assuming once lockdown was declared, project work on site reached a standstill. How did the workers react?

The workers understood that the disease was fatal and that the situation was quite bad. While their accommodation was provided for by us, the food was taken care of by the company. Of course, this was not food that they were really used to, but they tried to make do with what was received.

A large population of the workers in Bangalore are migrant workers from other parts of the country. Did they not try to return to their hometowns?

None of the workers anticipated transport being shut down as well. A few of them who could manage their own transportation via trucks or lorries did try to get out. All their relatives would call them concerned on a daily basis asking them to come home whichever way possible.

What precautions were taken on site, in the pandemic times to make sure that the workers of the project were safe?

Our company ensured that we followed strict protocol when it came to ensuring safety of the workers. Our primary motive was to make sure that our site did not become a hotspot for covid cases and hence put the health of the remaining workers as well as ourselves at risk.

The security guard was made to conduct daily temperature checks of each worker on site on a daily basis. We also ensured that we cordoned off a certain number of rooms for isolation, in the event of someone showing symptoms. No worker was allowed to leave the premises for whatsoever reason since all the essentials were brought to them. We even had an ambulance on site as stand by for emergencies.

How well received were your efforts by the staff? Was there any sort of resistance to the restrictions imposed on them?

There was no resistance as such, mainly a lot of fear. When people are in fear, they do tend to obey rules if they feel like it will help them. But as I had mentioned earlier, the kind of food they received was not the kind they were used to which they were unhappy with. But apart from those who tried to run back to their hometowns, those who were left on site with us did follow our protocol.

Once the second wave of covid hit us, around April, how was the situation at site as compared to the previous wave?

This time round, everyone knew what they were getting into. A couple of days before lockdown, rumours had already begun to float. This time more than fifty percent of our workers left our site and went back to their hometowns. We were left with very few workers on our site, but in a way lesser people to look after too. Ultimately it all comes down to this, if one of them falls ill, it is our responsibility, and if they feel that they are safer in their respective homes, we are nobody to stop them from going back.

What percentage of the labourers on site, are women migrants?

Our company does not employ any women workers. Since we have accommodation on site as well, it can be deemed unsafe for quite a few women. Further, most women migrants bring along their children to site as well which can be quite dangerous. Hence, most big companies try to avoid hiring women labourers, they are generally employed for smaller scale projects.

In the case of our workers, the women are situated back in their hometowns, with the rest of the family, none of them are in the same city.

What percentage of these migrants are first generation migrants?

Around twenty years ago practices such as construction was an occupation that was passed down from generation to generation. Such families were very skilled at what they did too. Now, it is no longer the same. With the introduction of technology, such a prefabricated systems, one no longer needs to be extremely skill. Construction has become a skill that is fairly easy to pick up. A huge portion of the labourers on site are first generation migrants, mostly

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from states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Orissa and Rajasthan.

Lastly, what do you think was the biggest challenge you have faced during the course of the pandemic as a director of a company that is in the business of construction?

Our main concern, as well as aim throughout has been to make sure that none of our workers on site contracted the virus. And in the unfortunate event that they did, we had to make sure they received medical aid at the earliest and did not spread the virus on site. To ensure health safety of our workers, security personnel as well as myself and my colleagues has been our biggest challenge.