



CONTENTS

02 Editorial

02 Letters to the Editors

Tribute

03 Samita Sen, *Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1953-2006)*

05 D. K. Lahiri-Choudhury, *A Tribute to Raj Chandavarkar: Brief Encounters*

06 Parimal Ghosh, *Remembering Raj*

Articles

07 Anna Christie Villarba-Torres, *Colonial Labour Politics and Creative Resistance in the Fiction of Sinai C. Hamada*

10 Chenntouf Tayeb, *Moroccan Immigration in Algeria (1850-1956): Triple Identity*

15 Abhishek Basu, *Train Singers: What is the Use?*

19 Radica Mahase, *Female Indentured Labourers in Trinidad- A New Perspective*

23 Nitin Sinha, *Forms of Workers' Protest Amidst Dilemmas of Contesting Mobilisations: The Jamalpur Strike of 1919 and 1928*

29 Idongesit Eshiet, *Urbanisation, Gender and the Informal Labour Sector in Africa*

34 Nitin Varma, *Chargola Exodus and Collective Action in the Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam*

Special Feature

38 The Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (PILER)

39 Zeenat Hisam, *Collective Care Arrangements in Informal Labour Market: A Case Study of Road Transport Workers in Pakistan*

Contemporary South

46 Samira Junaid, *Prostitutes Vs. Sex Workers*

49 Jishnu Dasgupta, *Virtual Labour Issues*

51 Paromita Das Gupta, *Empowering Women across South Asia*

Across the South

53 Kashshaf Ghani, *Labour Legislations across South Countries*

55 Jishnu Dasgupta, *Snippets from the World of Labour*

57 Bidisha Dhar, *Labour History Research: A Reflection of Changing Times*

Editorial

With this issue, we embark on a new journey. It is not as if all that is old stands abandoned, but a lot will change, as we choose carefully from the familiar. These are changes aimed at bringing closer the 'we' of the editorial team and the rest of the 'we', i.e., our readers. From a Magazine (in .pdf) we become a website. This, we expect, will give us more scope to interact with readers and readers with each other. While maintaining our strong links with the Sephis (and its website), this move will allow us to hear more than we say.

The new site will host a lot of the sections of the old e-magazine. This quarterly issue- and yes, we will publish quarterly rather than every four months- will be without some of the sections you might have become familiar with. The section on Across the South, which carried the news of events across the global South, will be on the website directly and updated every month or so. Thus, conference reports and the like will be more immediate and pertinent. Even more so, the case of the Announcements: More frequent postings on the website will cater to rapidly approaching deadlines for applications.

Along with this, there will also be a message board, which will enable the magazine community to be more informed of the events, views and opinions in the South. Often, with our limited resources, we are unable to do justice to the variety of this vast milieu. The message board, called South Debates with your enthusiasm and edited within certain norms, as must be maintained for the sake of propriety, will, we hope, provide a space for a freer exchange.

This issue, like the previous January number, is also a special issue. This one, as we announced in the last two issues, is a Labour History Special. The sad demise of Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has prompted us, along with so many others, to pay tribute to this premier labour historian. The very first piece following this is the tribute on part of the editorial board to him. There are also tributes from others who knew him and his work intimately.

Apart from this, as any tribute to a scholar should (we believe) consist of pieces that reflect scholarly engagement with the scholar's interests, here is a selection from what we have received in response to our special call for papers. Anna Christie Villarba-Torres deals with the literary representations of Labour resistance in colonial Phillipines, while Chentouf Tayeb discusses the problems of identity of immigrant Moroccan workers. Abhishek Basu has talked of the activities outside the formal pale of both art and economics, of those who earn their bread by singing in trains. The issue of gender and labour come out in Radica Mahase's piece where she throws new light on the issues of female indentured labourers in the Caribbean. The unique issues thrown up by gender also get attention in Idongesit Eshiet's article that deals with a wide range of issues connected with urbanisation and the informal sector. The creative use of form that can constitute any history of the labour movement are dealt with by Nitin Sinha in the specific context of the Jamalpur labour strike.

Unfortunately, the limited space even in our new format did not allow us to accommodate the vast scope covered in the article written by Nitin Varma. As such, we are able to put before you only a part of the piece, the rest of which we hope to bring out soon.

Continuing with our efforts to highlight regional research centres, this time we feature the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research. Alongside this, we have an article by Seenat Hisham, a member of the PILER team.

Among contemporary issues, we deal with various issues that are current in the South about labour and its 'problems'. Samira Junaid deals with this in context of the struggle of distinguishing between the prostitutes and sex-workers and the concomitant question of the rights to be accorded to them. Kashshaf Ghani looks into various forms of labour exploitation and related legislations across the South countries. Jishnu Dasgupta's piece talks of the unique problem of a virtual sector, the so-called IT sector and what the debate around the question of unionising rights in this sector means.

In keeping with this being a special feature, we carry our last report, on the conference on a new comparative approach towards a global labour history.

Letters to the Editors

Charity Angya's article on the feminisation of poverty in Nigeria in your latest edition of the e-magazine makes an interesting reading because it explains the general trend of the situation in the South. Emphasis must, however, be made that alleviating or eradicating poverty among women is intricately difficult. Suggesting that poor women should be made central to planning and implementation in interventionist programmes is not enough when majority of them lack the basic education that will enable them to fully comprehend, appreciate and participate in such programmes.

Zakariyau Sadiq Sambo.
Bayero University, Nigeria.

Thank you for your erudite comments. We also share the concern of making women and the other victims of oppression of all sorts a more equal part of development. In fact, it is a primary goal of SEPHIS to highlight such issues. All such problematisations are therefore more than welcome, as they are necessary. -eds.

The 'Across the South' section of the previous issue of the e-magazine made for interesting reading. It covered a wide range of issues. Sucharita Ray's exploration of Southern exchanges in various times made was very interesting to look at. The obituaries of two creative minds of South Asia were a reminder of cultural heritages in this era of globalisation. By bringing before us (again) Tagore's letter rejecting his Knighthood, we were also presented with a stinging answer to colonialism that still has resonance in today's neo-colonial times.

Iqbal Amin
Teota, Bangladesh

Thank you so much for your kind comments. We hope you would continue to find our issues engaging. And, given your comment on Ray's piece, we also hope that Chenntouf Tayeb's article on exchanges in what he calls the first era of globalisation would interest you. -eds.

Tribute

Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1953-2006)

Samita Sen
Director, School of Women's Studies
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Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1953-2006), Reader in the History and Politics of South Asia and Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies at Cambridge since 2001, died of a sudden heart attack on 23 April 2006 at the Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital in Lebanon, New Hampshire, USA. He was fifty-two years old.

Chandavarkar's doctoral work, which became a major enterprise and a landmark book, was on the formation of the working classes in cotton textile industry in colonial Bombay. His major contribution was to widen the ambit of the study of the working classes to include such questions as urbanisation, the nexus between the city and the countryside, and the evolution of industrial capitalism. He went on to examine the fundamental importance of labour in colonial policy and its pivotal role in shaping society and politics in modern India. It was the 'political construction' of class that attracted his acute and energetic attention.

His long engagement with questions of industrialisation and labour attracted research students working on a wide range of issues in South Asian social history and politics. Chandavarkar directed a great deal of his energy towards his research students, who numbered nearly a score. He was relentlessly demanding of his students, often forcing students to develop their ideas and move away from the beaten track. His students are now working in India, the United Kingdom, Israel, Japan, the United States and Canada, having worked on such diverse subjects as politics in Kerala, matriliney in Malabar, communalism, urban mass politics in north India, child and women labour, and on industrial working classes in southern, northern and eastern Indian cities. There were also studies on the making of regional identity in Orissa and the politics of Tamil Muslims. A study of the concerns of the urban middle class in Gujarat during the colonial period was followed by a study of communalism in contemporary Ahmedabad. Through his students, Chandavarkar stimulated scholarship in wide and eclectic fields, embracing the most diverse aspects of South Asian history.

Raj grew up in Bombay but finished his schooling in the UK prior to reading arts in the University of Cambridge. Inspired by Gareth Stedman Jones, his undergraduate supervisor, he chose to work on labour. He was supervised by Dr. Anil Seal, his mentor and a major intellectual influence on his work. Raj was elected fellow at Trinity in 1979.

Raj lived and worked in Cambridge almost all his adult life. Nevertheless, he had a strong connection with India—through his family and within the academy but also in the trade unions and in the NGOs, especially in Bombay. He returned frequently to India for research, for conferences and in relation to his work for the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust. For Indian historians, especially labour historians, he was *our* man in Cambridge. In his quiet way, he had a significant presence within the global community of South Asian historians. Raj will be missed in a variety of ways.

He retained his Indian citizenship, despite the trouble this gave him when travelling in Europe and North America. Some of his most hilarious anecdotes were about the impact of his beard on immigration officers in various countries.

He began to publish from his doctoral dissertation in the early 1980s. Raj's writings showed a new way of writing working class history, reaching beyond the industrial workplace and trade unions into wider social connections with the city, the neighbourhoods and the countryside from where the workers came.

The Origins of Industrial Capitalism (1994) took long in coming but quickly won admiration among academics and activists. Raj's book is in the best traditions of analytical social history, grounded firmly in empirical research. There is hardly any explicit theoretical discussion in this 500+ pages book. Yet the book reflected an engagement with the shifts and nuances of developments in labour history across the world. Indian labour historians were still in conversation with E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963) in the 1980s. Raj drew on and engaged with the very substantial international scholarship on labour history in the 1970s and 80s, which emerged in critical engagement with the radical social/political movements. These dismantled many of the orthodoxies of 'working class' as understood within the then Marxist establishment. The contesting claims of gender, race, and ethnicity irredeemably altered the construction of monolithic classes locked only in mutual contradiction. In the UK, Feminist scholarship was perhaps the most significant, and 'class versus sex' a raging debate that drew in many shades of labour historians. These insights shaped Raj's work. He took nothing for granted, did not give in to the orthodoxy either of 'class' or of 'culture' and 'community'. He is at his fascinating best showing how historical processes made and unmade unities, of working classes, but also of capitalists. His meticulous historical examinations unpacked given categories and questioned conventional commonsense. As a result, he has eluded categorisation; he seems to belong to no particular 'school' of history.

Origins was followed in 1998 by *Imperial Power and Popular Politics*. This was a set of diverse essays on industrial capitalism, workers' politics, the police in Mumbai, the plague, colonial discourse and the nature of the colonial state. Some of these essays were as rich empirically as *Origins*, while others were thought-provoking interpretive pieces.

In both these books, he argued against treating the 'west' as a norm and India as an exception, which was to him a form of Orientalism. Rules, he argued, that required such 'gigantic exceptions to sustain themselves' needed re-examination (p. 1: *Origins*). Thus, we had to revise our notion of capitalism to understand the ways in which it worked in India. This was the beginning of a wider disagreement with the school of Subaltern Studies, of which he wrote periodically. He was particularly disturbed that the study of the material world was being swept away for a 'bleaker landscape of deconstruction and textual exegesis'. The focus on the intellectual foundations of colonialism was at the cost of investigating the history of Indian society and the struggles of the subaltern classes, he argued. He wrote in his inimitable prose, 'scholars, rather like colonial ideologues, have increasingly assumed the mantle of representing the native' (p. 21: *Imperial Power*). These concerns animated some of his recent writings.

Tribute

Raj was a labour historian but his research went beyond most previous studies of labour, which had often attempted to identify some enduring 'essence' of the working-class. Chandavarkar viewed workers as 'classes', as heterogeneous and changing. He also questioned views that interpreted political developments in relation to 'class consciousness' in a unilinear trajectory. Chandavarkar argued persuasively that workers' political affiliations and identities, including those of class, were dynamic and shifting, and were constantly being constructed in changing political contexts.

Chandavarkar's most important recent work is his introduction (2004) to *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Millworkers of Girangaon*, Neera Adarkar and Meena Menon's oral history of the Girangaon neighbourhood in Mumbai. Raj's long essay on the history of the working class in the city from the 1880s to the 1980s maps the shifts in working class politics, from the height of trade union and Communist activity to the Samyukta Maharashtra and Shiv Sena movements to the Great Strike of 1982.

Raj was working on a number of manuscripts at the time of his death, including a Modern Asian Studies special issue on labour history he was editing and essays on the decline of the jobbers and on colonialism and democracy.

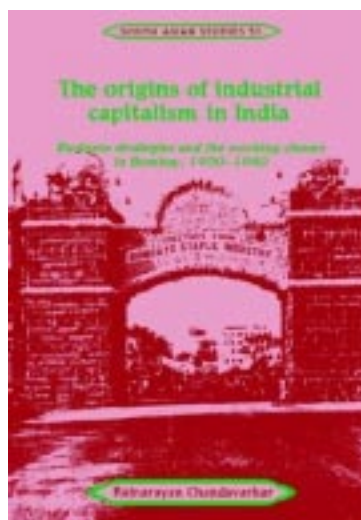
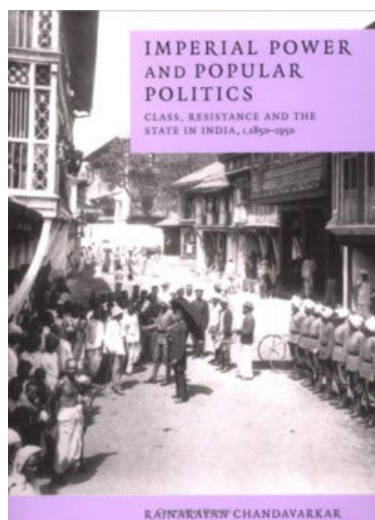
Recent publications:

The Origins of Industrial Capitalism: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

"The Making of the Indian Working Class; 'E.P. Thompson and Indian History', *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1997 (no. 43).

Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and The State in India, c. 1850-1950, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

"From Neighbourhood to Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Left in Bombay's Girangaon in the Twentieth Century", introductory essay from Meena Menon and Neera Adarkar, *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Mill Workers of Girangaon: An Oral History*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2004.



A Tribute to Raj Chandavarkar: Brief Encounters

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Dr. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar was kind to attend the usually unattended post-graduate seminar on work-in-progress, unattendance at which is, perhaps, common everywhere. I was presenting, at the end of my first year, a paper on the telegraph strike of 1907-8 in 'India' (the quotation marks signify India before 1947, and includes Britain's 'formal and informal empire'), and what its international 'assonances' might have been at the start of the last century. In that meagre group of gracious questioners, towards the end, Raj asked about the empirical evidence I had of international dimensions of a South Asian strike, comprehensive enough though it might have been in South Asia. I had no empirical answer: Just 'circumstantial evidence' and also the fact that local problems paralyse information webs.

The US telegraph strike was almost finishing and Indian owned newspapers, along with European owned ones, flashed its course daily; they were happening almost together.¹ The Indian telegraph strike stretching from Rangoon to Peshawar occurred in the same year, in overlapping months. Echoing today, signalers were marrying across the boards of contesting empires. For nation-states this was problematic: Revolutionary and amatory correspondence across borders. The telegraph strike in British India, which ranged from Rangoon to Madras, Peshawar to Calcutta, presented me several problems, and not the least, Dr Chandavarkar's question, (in private of course) was about the point of these 'assonances'. I wish I could find out from Raj what was, in his view, the point of my thesis on the strike; he, I think, never read it in its published form.²

Yet, he had the answers, in his works. The horizontal and vertical linkages exhibited during the telegraph strike demonstrated the possibility of many 'hats': Of multiple contextual and racial identities, and affiliations. A lot of historians continue to look at labour in banarasi saris and similar 'traditions', often a neo-colonial exercise and concept of preserving the colonised from themselves.

There were two problems that I addressed, after that stimulating discussion— if we have no evidence so far except official allegations and autobiographical recordings of unauthorised messaging, then it will be impossible to prove until further archival provenance, exchanges of messages between, say Irish, Welsh, Eurasian, Australian, Jamaican or Indian, and their prioritisation. For example, there is the story of a Madras signaler being very offended because his Welsh friend preferred to finish his private conversation with his Irish counterpart first.

The shadow counter-web is difficult to document, and perhaps unnecessary. My point about assonance was about echoes: Of course, sometimes distorted between countries. For example, the telegraph messenger boys on strike in the US had little iconic significance for Calcutta or India; yet the strikes were almost coterminous. Enough circumstantial evidence exists of a worldwide telegraph web beyond the control of the various nation-states involved.

Exploding the notion of localisation, of ideology and practice, and relieving myself of the weight of empirical evidence necessary to link apparently disparate occurrences, I found myself supplementing the first reasoning about a web beyond a web or an alternate web with a second repudiation: If you look at backward forms of labour organisation and industry then you will find a lack of working class consciousness and varieties of localised consciousness. Tea, jute, *bidi* (like *zari* workers or *madhubani* T- Shirts); in fact, innumerable 'exploded', that is, extroverted commercial 'banana' crops and proto-industries, demanded domestically and internationally, and dependent on market prices beyond the producer's control proliferate and cannot be the locus of revolutionary consciousness. To find the peasant behind the soldier is not original. The soldier was more than just a peasant.³

That's where Raj proved most valuable to me. I believe he argued that working class consciousness came into being at particular points in time in relation to the nation-state dynamic. Thus, working-class consciousness was not a matter of birth or process, but of contingency. One could be born a miner's son but be the toast of the *avante garde*; true class comprehension, such as his, exceeded the other, more static comprehension. Eurasians, Europeans, Mussalmans and Hindus, Parsis, Totos and Boros transcend continuities to become revolutionary as long as they are not subject to growing bananas or believing that just because they grew up in a village, was the son of a miner, had a simple mother, was the sister of a goon, brother of a sister who made *bidis*, that they continue to be working class. Correspondingly, the state, at times, forces individuals or communities to become heralds of proletarian consciousness: But this can never be a birth-right. I believe Dr. Raj Chandavarkar, through his patient and humorous questionings, taught me how to understand this process and change, and how working-class consciousness can never be a shadow of the feudal notion of birth but one of becoming and being there (*dassein*), and then, perhaps, moving on.

¹ "India's First Virtual Community and the Telegraph General Strike of 1908", *International Review of Social History*, Special Supplement XI, in A. Blok and G. Downey (Eds.), *Uncovering Labour in Information Revolutions*, 48, 2003, pp 45-71.

² "Representation and Sedition in the Telegraph General Strike of 1908" in C. Bates (Ed), *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006.

³ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, C. 1850-1950*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998. There are many other works that one might mention, not the least, his article on the plague in a book edited by Terrance Rangers and P. Slack on medical history.

Tribute

Remembering Raj

Parimal Ghosh
Professor
Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies
University of Calcutta

I knew Raj Chandavarkar from way back in 1986. I was on a UGC funded visit to the India Office Library and had gone on a day trip to Cambridge for a brief look at the Centre for South Asian Studies Collection. Towards the end of that brilliant summer day I sat in the Graduate Centre's bar enjoying a cool beer, when I walked Raj. Even in those days he had that laid back style. As far as I can remember he was in his shirtsleeves. To be perfectly honest you would not know from the look on his face, and I did not, that in 1980 he had published his pioneering study on working class neighbourhood in the mill districts of Bombay, and looked like some student of the university. From what I gathered, he had come to know from my good friend Hari Vasudevan that I would be in Cambridge for a short visit and therefore had made it his business to look me up.

And that was one feature of his he retained right through his life. In a very small way I am a fellow practitioner of his craft, and had always admired his total control over his subject. His mastery of the details could not ever be faulted, his arrangement of his data into a comprehensible whole quite amazing. But to me more than all that what counted was his endearing care for fellow human beings. In the early 1990s I was back in Cambridge on a Smuts Visiting Fellowship. I have some difficulty in moving around, and for that reason, to begin with at least, did not have too many friends to keep me company. That was the time when Raj stepped in. I can recall many an evening when my doorbell would ring, and there would be Raj and Jennifer in their car. "Have you eaten yet?"— Raj would enquire. Since I had but recently arrived from home the habit of having one's dinner at 6 in the evening had not caught on. So the answer was invariably in the negative. "Come with us for a bite," he would say. And then after a leisurely evening in some nice place or another he would take me to his home. By that time Jennifer would want to rest, but Raj and I would continue to chat in his sitting room.

On one of those evenings I asked him to make a detour so that I could withdraw some cash from an ATM. Raj quickly caught on and asked— "How do you manage at other times?" "Take a cab," I said. He kept quiet. And the next day he rang me in the afternoon and said, "Look, there is this motorised wheelchair lying idle in our hostel for the handicapped. These people have agreed to lend it for free for the duration of your stay." And that was fantastic, as magical an offer as it could ever be. That made all the difference. Cambridge opened up for me. The never-ending corridors of the University library scared me no more. The magic of the books was revealed to me. For the first time, indeed, in my life, I was free. I could go wherever I wished to whenever I wished to. The darned thing could go for seventeen miles once fully charged, they said!

There were other afternoons when Raj would call me just for the heck of it. "What are you up to?" "Have you been too busy of late, we haven't seen you for sometime, you know?" Just showing he cared, I knew. He didn't have to do it, but he did.

I ran into a bright young man, a red-hot Trotskyite really, in Dundee. "You should be in Cambridge, you know," I said to him. "No, man!" he replied. "Its class, you must understand, they won't look at me." He was so confident. Son of an industrial worker, his mother, a wonderful lady whom I came to revere, was a boxmaker, and his dream was to be an "organic intellectual", *a la* Gramsci. After I returned to Cambridge I spoke to Raj. He seemed to have heard of my friend before. "Its so difficult, we don't have that many scholarships." The first thing to do was to get him over for a seminar at the Centre for South Asian Studies. But there again the question was money. They paid for your train fare to Cambridge and also for a night's stay if you are invited to give a talk at the Centre. But Dundee was too far away. "You should have a word with Gordon," Raj said. But Gordon Johnson said no different. But then surprise, surprise! One afternoon came another phone call. It was Raj— "Have you got his address?"

The rest is history, as they say. My friend came, gave a brilliant seminar, and after a long session in a pub with Raj, everything followed.

I have sometimes wondered what made Raj do what he did. He was no bleeding heart Marxist, and most certainly he was not too impressed— either way— by my friend's social background. I think I now know. Raj just felt the young man's academic ideas were interesting, and it was worth Cambridge's money to give him an opening. He cared, professionally, as a first rate scholar, and once he was convinced of his case, he did what was necessary.

Raj Chandavarkar is no more. I did not know, and I understand, neither did most of his other friends, that he nursed a fatal flaw in his big heart. There are better people than me to judge his scholarship. For me it is enough to recall that in many ways he was one of the pioneers of modern Indian labour studies. But more than that I grieve the loss of a true friend. He was somebody to whom I could look up to for advice, guidance, help.

Today the world is a lonelier place for his friends.



Articles

Colonial Labour Politics and Creative Resistance in the Fiction Of Sinai C. Hamada



Anna Christie Villarba-Torres

Anna Christie Villarba-Torres is an Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Baguio, Baguio City, Philippines. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Philippine Studies of UP Diliman. She is one of the recipients of the 2006-2007 research grant from The Sumitomo Foundation of Japan for her study on "Literature as History: Hybridity, Memory and Counter-Memory in the short Fiction of Sinai C. Hamada". She has presented the study at the Association for Cultural studies Crossroads Conference at the Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey in July 2006. Prof. Torres teaches Communication, Literature and Literary Theory courses in both English and Filipino

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the subject of literature as history by focusing on colonial labour politics in the English short fiction of the Filipino Ibaloi writer Sinai C. Hamada (1912-1991). At the outset, I emphasise that the true history of labour politics is not tied to the centre where forces converged to conform to and/or counter Western colonisation. I focus on the contributions of those in the peripheries like the Igorots of the Philippine Cordillera, whose simple labour practices revealed resistance against Spanish colonial rule. I will direct my attention to a story by Hamada, an Ibaloi of Benguet whose fiction is steeped in the oral tradition, i.e. the heard narrative that he acquired from his mother and maternal grandmother. I will likewise rely on James C. Scott's notion of "infrapolitics," a "weapon created by a subordinate group that represents a critique of power that is spoken or carried out behind the back of the dominant group."¹ This notion is premised on the paradigm that to some degree, structures of domination can be demonstrated to operate in comparable ways. They will, according to Scott, elicit reactions and patterns of resistance that are broadly comparable as well. Resistance in this context is a covert act of opposing an alien force like colonialism. Hamada's stories are characterised by what Scott refers to as 'everyday forms of resistance' waged by a marginalised group like the Igorots at a specific point in history.

Colonial Domination, Igorot 'Infrapolitics'

This paper explores the subject of literature as history using selected short fiction of the Ibaloi writer Sinai C. Hamada (1912-1991). I will focus on the contributions of those in the peripheries like the Igorots of the Philippine Cordillera, north Luzon, who likewise had significant contributions in the long and complex colonial history of the Philippines.

Oral history utilises broad and in-depth explorations of various sources or methods of research like personal documents and oral traditions. Many historians suggest that oral history is one of the major sources of methodology for research in this particular field.² Therefore, local literatures, especially those that possess strikingly different ethnic hues and influences could serve as a treasure trove of important data and methodology in the arena of local history.

I will direct my attention to a short story by Sinai C. Hamada, namely "The Punishment of Kutnon," and I will focus on the historical and cultural aspects of Igorot resistance in the Cordillera against Spanish colonial labour relations.

More specifically, I will rely heavily on James C. Scott's notion of "hidden transcripts" or "infrapolitics," a "weapon" created by a subordinate group that represents a critique of

power that is spoken and/or carried out behind the back of the dominant group.³ This notion is premised on the paradigm that to some degree, structures of domination can be demonstrated to operate in comparable ways. They will, according to Scott, elicit reactions and patterns of resistance that are broadly comparable as well. Thus, slaves and serfs ordinarily dare not contest the terms of their subordination openly. Behind the scenes however, they are likely to "create and defend a social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be voiced".⁴ It is clear that the public transcript of power is the direct interaction that occurs between the ruling power and the ruled, marginalised peoples like the Igorots included.

It should be noted that resistance in the context of this study is not associated with an organised underground movement or group fighting against the machinations of an occupying power. Rather, resistance here is taken to mean a covert act of opposing or withstanding an alien force such as colonialism. But the opposition as gleaned from Hamada's story is not steeped in lowland traditions, as will be clarified later. Instead it is characterised by what Scott calls "everyday forms of resistance"⁵ with a distinct characteristic of the native

mountain dweller.

Sinai C. Hamada and the 'Heard Narrative'

Sinai C. Hamada was a Baguio-born Filipino-Japanese *mestizo* (or hybrid) who wrote poetry, essays and short fiction but is most notable as a short story writer. Sinai was born to Ryukichi Hamada, a Japanese mechanical foreman of Heald Lumber Company, Baguio City who died in an accident when Sinai was a mere infant and Josefa, an illiterate Ibaloi woman who belonged to the *baknang* (elite) Cariño clan of Benguet. Sinai was educated in Baguio City public schools and the University of the Philippines (U.P.) where he finished studies in law and journalism. He went on to become the first lawyer of Baguio City and founded two local weekly tabloids, the *Baguio Midland Courier* (which is in circulation till today) and the *Cordillera Post*.⁶



¹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, p. xii.

² Ma. Nela Florendo, *Igorot Participation in the Revolution*, in *Kumperensiya '93*, n.p., n.d., p. 92.

³ James C. Scott, *Domination*, p. xii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵ J. C. Scott, "From *Weapons of the Weak*", in Stephen Duncombe (ed.), *Cultural Resistance Reader*, Verso, London, 2002, p. 90.

⁶ Anna Christie, *Fas-ang: Cross-cultural Elements in the Literature of Sinai C. Hamada*, M.A. Thesis, Ateneo de Manila University, March 1989, pp. 28-32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

Articles

His earliest exposure to literature took the form of narratives from folktales to community events told to him by his mother and maternal grandmother. This storytelling provided him with a convention, which he used in his early fables and short stories. These initial writing projects are marked by a strong sense of place.⁷ As a whole however, his stories do not seem to fall neatly under any category. Although they are narratives, he refers to them more as "personal essays than short stories".⁸ Trained and inspired by his American high school teachers, he published his first short story, "Whose Home" in his senior year. This story was later included in the anthology of best short stories for 1930 compiled by the noted Filipino writer in English Jose Garcia Villa.⁹

At the time of his death Sinai was working on his autobiographical novel tentatively entitled "O Benguet Land." This unfinished project follows the *bildungsroman* motif based on his experiences in his mountain home. Sinai passed away in September 1991 in Baguio City after a lingering heart ailment. He was seventy-seven.

Fiction and Reality: Drawing the Line in "The Punishment of Kutnon"

Literature and history—fiction and reality, falsehood and truth: Prominent Peruvian literary figure Mario Vargas Llosa points to the often inextricable intermingling of these elements in modern Latin American fiction. The tradition from which this kind of literature sprang, he explains, started in the chronicles of conquest and discovery where the reader is exposed to a world totally reconstructed and subverted by fantasy.¹⁰

These chronicles, which he calls "novels disguised as historical texts corrupted by fiction" manifest one basic problem—two cultures, one Western and modern, the other aboriginal and archaic, are separated because of the exploitation and discrimination that the former exercises over the latter. This is what makes Latin American countries as well as other colonised countries like the Philippines "more fiction than reality".¹¹ However, as we shall see in the case of Hamada, his fiction may be read as history that runs counter to imagined history of the bearers of

Empire and their colonised subjects from the lowlands. It should be clarified that the Spanish masters emphasised the Igorots' difference from the lowland Filipinos they were breeding to constitute the colonial society and they bequeathed this concept to the Americans who in turn, capitalised on this difference.¹² The American colonial eye would later see the Igorot as the pure tribe that would be conveniently thrust in the grand scheme of manifest destiny. The hinterlands of the Cordillera would be the backdrop of a grand-scale mission to civilise and educate the Igorot.

"The Punishment of Kutnon" is one of Hamada's little known stories. It was published in the literary supplement section of the *Philippine Journal of Education* in September 1934. The story is based on a heard narrative rather than the Western notion of fiction as assemblages of themes, characters and other elements. This detail is significant because it emphasises the social dimension of creative writing, underscoring an inextricable link between literature and history.



The Spanish crown displayed a special interest in the mines of the Cordillera mountains as a potential source of wealth. This was due to the high cost in maintaining a colony so far removed from the Iberian metropolis and the pressing need to reduce the annual subsidy, by which the Treasury of Nueva España sustained the Manila government.¹³ When the Spaniards learned about the highlanders' habits of extracting only enough gold to sustain small-scale trade and carefully concealing their mine sites, their desire for gold was intensified.¹⁴ This historical detail is validated in Hamada's heard narrative. The story takes place in the town of La Trinidad, Benguet. It should be noted that even before the advent of the Spanish colonisers, La Trinidad was already a flourishing community surrounded by

forested hills and irrigated fields of taro, sweet potatoes and sugarcane.¹⁵ The Igorots of Benguet, like those of Bontoc and Ifugao engaged in swidden farming or the slash and burn method for root crops. The edges of the swidden were planted with beans and sometimes other vegetables.¹⁶

Kutnon, a native farmer finds himself trapped within an alien judicial system that finds fault with his "playfulness" with women and metes out a punishment of public flogging for the offence. Prominent Cordillera scholar William Henry Scott points to a number of complaints filed by Filipinos against Spanish officials in connection with public flogging. The complainants opposed the almost institutionalised form of punishment that the colonisers imposed on the subject particularly because it was inflicted by fellow Filipinos.¹⁷

In the case of Kutnon, no trial takes place. Although Kutnon emphasises that he did the native girl Saria no wrong, the Spanish official puts much weight on Kutnon's previous "wrongdoings" with other women. No further proof is required and the flogging is set. But the wily Kutnon has something up his sleeve. Just before the flogging, he whisks out a gold nugget and instantly, the tide changes. The *alcalde*, "with his covetous eyes still fixed on the gleaming lump of gold",¹⁸ pardons him on the spot and invites him to dinner. After partaking of the royal feast and sipping the royal wine, the real motive of the official surfaces—to find out the exact location of the gold. His gentle wheedling, later replaced by grave threats are to no avail. Kutnon does not divulge the location of the mine. His great respect for tradition prevails. He fears the ire of his ancestors' spirits more than the whip-lashing Spanish authorities. Kutnon embodies the Igorot natives who, despite the threat of brute strength of the colonisers never revealed the secret of the gold mines.

This striking detail likewise reveals another facet of labour politics under Spanish colonialism. The Igorots were tied to the traditional agricultural calendar, which included religious rituals. So when the swiddens lay fallow, mining was

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.* 30.

¹⁰ Mario Vargas Llosa, "Fiction and Reality", in John King (ed.), *On Modern Latin American Fiction*, Hill and Wang, USA, 1989, p. 5.

¹¹ Mario Vargas Llosa, "Fiction and Reality", p. 15.

¹² William Henry Scott, *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain*, New Day Publishers, Queson City, 1982, p. x.

¹³ Robert Reed, *The Origins of Baguio as a Colonial Hill Station and Regional Capital*, Foreword by Paul Wheatley, Center for Southern and Southeast Asian Studies, Berkeley, 1976, pp. 461-464.

¹⁴ Felix M. Keesing, *The Ethnohistory of Northern Luzon*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1962, pp. 13-14.

¹⁵ Reed, *The Origins of Baguio*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ W. H. Scott, *History on the Cordillera*, Baguio Printing and Publishing Co. Inc., Baguio City, 1975, pp. 31-32.

¹⁷ W. H. Scott, "Cracks", pp. 158, 160.

¹⁸ Sinai C. Hamada, "The Punishment of Kutnon", *Philippine Journal of Education*, 1934, p. 286.

Articles

an alternative means of livelihood. Traditionally, gold miners practiced both lode and placer mining, which entailed following a lode or vein of gold by tunnelling in after it, or by washing the gravel and sediment out of river waters.¹⁹

The story is more than a tale of a scheming womaniser who gets to eat at the royal table and later earns fifty lashes. It may be seen as a historical reference to Igorot resistance against an oppressive colonial system. It cannot be denied that one finds in the character of Kutnon a unique sensitivity to and a firm grasp of his colonial society. He is able to prove that although marginalised groups like the Igorots were forced to yield to colonial rule to protect their hidden transcripts (their gold mines), they can sometimes reveal these directly to the face of the group that wields power. To some extent, both groups are stage players because they play different roles inside and outside their spheres. Going back to the story, those aligned with Kutnon like Dikman, his neighbour, and even Kutnon's unnamed wife know the value of role-playing and pretending when in contact with the colonial masters. This is their public transcript. They have to appear docile and subservient because they know that there is no escaping the wrath of the masters. Dikman affirms this, "even if you [Kutnon] run away, they will get you just the same".²⁰ So when the arrogant Kutnon was brought to the tribunal, they knew for certain that he would get more than he bargained for.

But as has been previously established, Kutnon was different. He objected in both word and deed. First, he showed that he did not fear the dagger looks or the fiery curses of the Spanish official (the public transcripts

of the ruling class to emphasise authority). Second, he brought out the gold nugget, the ultimate hidden transcript of the powerless group. It is clear to this group that the colonisers desired their gold so they remained silent about it. But Kutnon brings out the gold nugget before their very eyes, not because he wishes to turn traitor against his group but to brandish some amount of power, though short-lived. And when he becomes part of the hidden transcript of the masters (the fine dinner and the grandeur of the mayor's residence), he makes a complete turnaround. First he feigns ignorance. Then he pretends to be lost in deep thought. And finally, he denies any knowledge of the location of the mine. He opts to be whipped than disclose the well-guarded and greatly revered hidden transcript of the powerless group:

"Ah, it were far better that you tortured me that I should invite the eternal curse of my ancestors: for greater tortures would be it."²¹

Foregrounding the Peripheries

The history of a colonised nation must be rewritten from the perspective of those on the margins. Literature offers an alternative route in the quest for new methods and sources in this regard. One may turn to the sources or influences of creative works like the heard tradition subscribed to by Hamada. As the story shows, the culture of Cordillera, particularly the Ibaloi farmer/miner's resistance to colonial rule is no myth. Although this resistance lacks the organisation and broad scope of his lowland counterparts, one significant aspect remains. From these narratives, we glean a history that is almost instinctively opposed to

deceitful and oppressive power relations. Kutnon may have been driven by personal motives (protecting his ancestral domain and preventing the wrath of his ancestors) in confronting Spanish rule. But he faced up to the powerful enemy, no matter what the consequence. This solo act represents a form of "individual self-help"²² that cannot be taken lightly. In fact, these everyday forms of resistance are ordinary weapons of powerless groups²³ like the Igorots who confront, though not directly, those in power. This therefore dispels the belief that in Spanish colonial society, powerless groups simply wallowed in their passivity.

It should be remembered that the space between the public and hidden transcripts is an arena of continuous and repeated struggle of the powerless against the powerful. And because the colonisers were almost invincible, their wishes prevailed. But in the repeated resistance to this power, the door of opportunity for ordinary confrontation is left ajar, if only momentarily. In analysing the hidden transcripts of both groups, one may follow the social science track that may yield contradictions and possibilities apart from the usual fact of inequitable distribution and determination of wealth, power and social class.²⁴ One may also turn to the literatures of peoples from the sidelines as these may serve as testimonies to colonial dominion and the "guerilla-style campaigns of attrition"²⁵ of the marginalised. In the end, as Scott succinctly puts it: *The nature of the acts themselves and the self-interested muteness of the antagonists thus conspire to create a kind of complicitous silence that all but expunges everyday forms of resistance from the Historical record.*²⁶



¹⁹ W. H. Scott, *History*, p. 35.

²⁰ Hamada, "The Punishment", p. 286.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

²² J. C. Scott, *Domination*, p. 90.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁴ J. C. Scott, "From *Weapons of the Weak*", p. 15.

²⁵ J. C. Scott, *Domination*, p. 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Articles

Moroccan Immigration in Algeria (1850-1956): Triple Identity*



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Abstract

Moroccan immigration in Algeria during the colonial rule, participated by various European communities, played a crucial part in the colonial economy. This article traces the origins of this immigration together with the various concerns, like identity formation of the immigrant workers who were subject to the hardships associated with such movements.

This analysis of the migratory movements in Algeria during the colonial period (1830-1962) concerns the emigrants of European origin exclusively (French especially but also Germans, Italians, Maltese and Spanish). The other migratory movements are ignored in spite of the role they played in the colonial economy. The Moroccan emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a case in point.¹ The traditional emigration started from the eighteenth century and lasted up to the first half of the nineteenth century, the merchants and the pilgrims, who used to leave Morocco, remained in Algeria before reaching Cairo in Egypt, and Mecca in the Arabian peninsula. Several accounts of travellers have been written by merchants and by monks which are partly devoted to the crossing by commercial caravans of Algeria.

The commercial exchanges between Morocco and Algeria were particularly intense between Tlemcen (Algeria) and Fez (Morocco) and it was not uncommon that a Fassi merchant settled in Tlemcen or vice versa. In a more specific way, the Bey Mohammed el Kébir, when he became Master of Oran, previously occupied by the Spanish, brought tradesmen and craftsmen from Fez in order to revive economic activities.²

The French colonisation of Algeria, transformed, in the second half of the nineteenth century this emigration pattern. It became an emigration of manpower, which started at the end of the nineteenth century and its volume increased considerably up to the 1950s. Today, a large Moroccan Community still exists in West Algeria. Its identity is very strong.

In the current state of research, Moroccan immigration raises three questions. Its origins go back to the middle of the nineteenth century and to the absence of a free manpower disposed to exert in the colonial exploitations. Between 1850 and 1956, it was composed mostly of seasonal and illegal workers but also

included some permanent residents, many of whom worked in agriculture. The identity, which was ascribed to them by the administration retains three images; that of the immigrant, of the worker and of the foreigner.

At the origins of immigration

The agricultural, commercial and industrial colonisation of Algeria started in about 1847-1850 after the end of the resistance to the military occupation animated by Emir Abd Al Kader. It came up against the problem of manpower shortage, which was necessary for the operation of colonial exploitation. Temporary solutions were found in the recourse to military and penitentiary manpower and with the drudgeries to which the population was subjected. However, the recourse to the emigration quickly became a crucial requirement for the further exploitation of land and labour.

An already available working force was virtually nonexistent at the time of Algeria's colonisation, especially in an economic sense. It was the same in agriculture and in urban activities. In agriculture, the labour force was mobilised primarily, within the framework of the private family property (*melk*). In exceptional circumstances, it utilised *khamessat*. The grounds held by the *Beylick* (State) were cultivated by *azels* or drudgeries. Warnier estimates the surface of the ground *melk* (private familial property), in 1830, to be 3,000,000 ha which means twenty one percent of the Tell. The Senatus consult commissions classified, in 1870, 2,800,000 hectares as *melk* grounds on the 6,900,000 ha recorded. In this second estimate, the *melk* grounds accounted for 40.5 per cent of the grounds belonging to the tribes, which would be *senatus-consulted*.

The exploitation of the *melk* grounds seldom appealed to a labour force external to the family or it intervened within the framework of the *touiza* (mutual aid) under benefit of reciprocity.

The existence of the *khammessat*

could be linked to the scarcity of the cultivable grounds and/or to the dimensions of the property. The shortage of cultivable grounds, within the tribe, might have pushed some of its members to enter into the service of others who were better provided. For Warnier, "an Arab becomes *khammès*, only if he does not find vacant ground in a tribe". Moreover, *khammès* were very few in the areas where there existed a strong occupation of the ground existed. In these areas, the dimensions of the property did not require any arms other than those of the owner.

The number of *khammès* is difficult to determine for the beginning of the nineteenth century. In light of the testimonies of some rare witnesses, after 1830, one can admit, that the one-fifth of the householders consisted of *khammès*.³ The *khammessat* is generally concluded for duration of one agricultural season. The owner provides the ground, the instruments, the animals of work and the seeds. The *khammès* has, for his part, to carry out the work of tilling, sowing, weeding and the harvesting. In exchange of his work, he receives the fifth of the harvest; in fact, his quota varied according to the area and grounds'. If the *khammès* received advances or loans from the owner, he must restore them at the time of harvest.

On the grounds *Beylick* (or State) work is provided by the *azels* and the drudgeries. The *azels* are difficult to evaluate, but around Constantine, those of the Bey Ahmed, used to embrace 150,000 ha taken on the best grounds of the area.⁴ The *azels* cultivated these grounds; they had to discharge *hokor*, taxes instituted by the Bey Ahmed and proper to his *Beylick* in addition to his part of the harvest, which was allocated in a contractual way to the Bey. Theoretically, the *azel* is given on a purely precarious basis and can be revoked. In practice, the *azels* are never expelled from the grounds that they

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¹ On the contrary, an Algerian community exists in Morocco and in other countries; see JJ Rager, *Les Musulmans algériens en France et dans les pays islamiques*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1950; A. Raymond, "Tunisiens et Maghrébins au Caire au XVIIIe siècle", *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 2e et 3e tri 19; P. Beaudoin, *Algériens et Tunisiens dans l'empire ottoman de 1848 à 1914*, CRNRS, Paris, 1979.

² Chenntouf Tayeb, "Les tentatives économiques du Bey Mohammed el Kébir à la fin du XVIIIe siècle en Algérie", *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 1981, pp. 117-118.

³ A. Nouschi, *Enquête sur le niveau de vie des populations rurales constantinoises de la conquête jusqu'en 1919*, PUF, Tunis, 1961.

⁴ A. Nouschi, *ibid.*

Articles

cultivate. *Beylick* can also cultivate the grounds thanks to drudgeries (*touiza*), which he imposes on the close tribes.

Cities offer other forms of work mobilisation. Next to townsmen of origin (*hadar*) live in Algiers and in the big cities, recent or foreign townsmen (*berrani*) grouped under the direction of a syndic (*amin*) responsible to the *Beylick*. The French sources regroup them under the denomination of the "floating population". The insecurity of the first years of the colonisation and, some attacks committed by the strangers in the city pushes the General Governor to enact, in 1838, a decree regrouping *berranis* in six corporations: *Kabailles*, *Biskris*, *Mozabites*, *Mzitas*, *Laghouates* and *Negroes*. The urban professions were mostly composed of foreigners who had come to the cities. In Constantine, in 1837, one can note the names of about twenty such professions,⁵ under the authority of an *amin*, himself placed under the authority of a Caïd al blad or Caïd el dar (the mayor of the city). To supervise *berranis*, the *Beylick* created, of all pieces, corporations of which the *arif* (or *amin*) was charged to police incidents of fraudulence. In Constantine and Tlemcen, a real mutual aid existed.

Berranis all specialised in certain professions. The *Mozabiteses* had the monopoly of the public mills and bakeries; the *Biskris* were porters or public bath managers. Every profession was the speciality of an ethnic group thus, there emerged a coincidence of specialisation in work and ethnic division. In reality, a hierarchy existed between corporations and within the professions. Some corporations were more renowned than others. Large artisanal enterprises counted up to about twenty workers but they were rare. In Constantine, the leather industry was divided into three groups: The 33 tanneries accounted for 150 persons, 75 saddleries 210, 167 shoemaking concerns 480. The average is therefore 5 persons by tannery, 3 by tack and about the same number by shoemaking.⁶ In the corporation, a strict ritualism imposed some severe rules for the recruitment, the advancement and the organisation of work. The artisanal shop knew a hierarchy

that distinguished between the apprentice (*met'Allem*), the fellow (*sanà*) and the master (*me 'Allem*).

The shortage in free workers has been solved in a first stage by the military, penitentiary manpower and drudgeries. The importance of the military manpower is difficult to evaluate but all witnesses do recognise its role, especially at the beginnings of the agricultural colonisation. For a long time, the army put a part of its resources in manpower in the service of the colonists. "If most of the Generals", writes L. de Beaudicour, "that followed each other appeared little disposed to lend the colonists the service of indigenous manpower, it was not the same thus with the military manpower. Let's give back here justice to our military chiefs; they were suitable with a kindness that makes honour to them about this distraction, in the interest of colonists, of men placed under their orders, even though sometimes, the military service might have been embarrassed with".⁷ The arguments of military colonisation by Bugeaud are less aimed than the intervening of the troop on plots of colonisation. "During the years 1874-1875, the military detachments deployed in the harvest of the colonists of the plain were so numerous that highlanders, disheartened with this competition, ceased to go down from their *douar* to reap in the *Chélif*".⁸

The recourse to penitentiary manpower and their chores constituted the most direct form of mobilisation of local labour. Both are used to contribute and to palliate the inavailability of the manpower. The penitentiary population is put in the colonists' services until the end of the nineteenth century, where it developed with the adoption and the strict application of the code of the *Indigénate*, which specified 41 infringements in 1880 and 21 in 1890. The regime of punishment specified included penalty of 15 francs and five days of jail by offence, with the possibility of converting sentences of jail and penalties into benefits of work. Besides, the administration had the option of renting penal manpower to colonists. Benefits of work under the form of drudgeries were destined to be used for the achievement of works considered to be of general interest. "Worse than the regular

taxes", assured General de Bourjolly, "were requirements of all instants that our unceasing activity in peace, our needs for the provision of our posts and our colonies during the war, were imposed continually under the name of drudgeries to the Arabian tribes".⁹

In 1868 all Moslems were submitted to drudgeries. The *touiza*, originally a form of mutual aid, was transformed into an imposed work. Its use was perpetuated and, in 1899 forest offences were fulfilled in *touiza*.¹⁰ During the crisis of years 1887-1888 in the Constantinois, the requisite workers provided not 1,600,000 days of work as convened but 2,660,894 in 1888 and 3,038,444 in 1889. Not less than 66,900 persons were requisitioned for up to five weeks. On the other hand, this manpower received no remuneration for the year 1887-1888. This happened only during the campaign of 1888-1889 at the rate of 0.40 franc per day, under the form of coupons payable by the municipal receipts.¹¹

The Moroccan Immigration

The agricultural investigation of 1868 led by the Commission Le Hon discovered that without the Moroccan workers, agriculture would be impossible.¹² Archives, in which there are censuses of the population, permit us to quantify the migratory movements, to determine their origins and networks of traffic, the geographical implantation and finally the professional activity of immigrants. The evolution of the migratory flux is complicated by the seasonal character of immigration and the exceptional openings of big sites of public works and construction. The first statistical indications of the Moroccans date back to 1851 because of the decree of 3 September 1850 which organised corporations. In the city of Oran, one counted 374 colliers or manual labours. The development of the city and the harbour of Oran attracted a large number of immigrants, among whom were 3,637 Moroccans in 1881. Their number rose to 10,000 in 1898.¹³

The first census of the population did not classify Moroccans apart. They were regrouped with Tunisians who were not numerous in the district of Oran. The census of 1886 counted 17,445 Moroccans in all of Algeria, 14,374 of which were in Oran.¹⁴

⁵ E. Lecuyer, "Pages d'artisanat nord-africain" in *Les métiers constantinois à l'époque des Beys*, IBLA, 1950.

⁶ A. Nouschi, "Constantine à la veille de la conquête française" *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 1955, p. 382.

⁷ *La colonisation de l'Algérie, ses éléments*, Paris, 1856, p. 51.

⁸ X. Yacono, *La colonisation des plaines du Chélif*, 2 Volumes, Alger, 1955, Vol 2, p. 313.

⁹ Cité in Ch. A. Julien, "Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine", *Conquête et colonisation*, Paris, 1964, p. 227.

¹⁰ J. Van Vollenhoven, *Essai sur le fellah algérien*, Alger, 1903, p. 249.

¹¹ Ch. R. Ageron, op cité, t2, p. 846.

¹² For a long time, the number of non-French population was greater than that of the French colonists; the census of 1896 found 346,870 of French origin and 237,138 foreigners. This number comprises: 157,560 Spanish, 35,539 Italians and 12,815 Anglo-Malteese. All foreigners are and for a long time excluded from the access to the property, the concessions were reserved for the French colonists. They provided necessary manpower for the latter. The facilities concerning the naturalisation and the transformation of the concession system dried up that source of manpower at the end of the nineteenth century.

¹³ *Enquête agricole*, Alger, Oran, Constantine, Paris 1870, 2 vol pp. 471 & 930.

¹⁴ R. Lespès, "La population d'Oran de 1831 à nos jours", BSGO, Sept-Dec 1935, t 56, pp. 231-258.

Articles

Between 1886 and 1901, this number rose to 14,676 in 1891 and 23,872 in 1901 in the whole of Algeria. Their number rose to 21,372 in the district of Oran in 1880 in that of Algiers and 620 in that of Constantine.¹⁵ The census of 1911¹⁶ recorded the presence of 19,442 Moroccans against only 113 Tunisians. At the same time, the district of Oran had 93,360 Spanish, 3,158 Italians, 168 Anglo-Maltese and 5,379 other immigrants. The total strength of foreigners was 102,065.¹⁷ The census of 1921 recorded 23,246 Moroccans¹⁸ and in 1936, their number rose to 36,178 against 152 Tunisians and there were 541 Muslims from other countries.¹⁹

The period after World War II is marked in three ways— by the influx of seasonal workers, that of illegal immigrants and the formation of a steady community of Moroccan workers in the district of Oran. In 1946, 40,000 cards were distributed for seasonal workers because of the good agricultural harvest. In 1947, only 25,000 cards were distributed because the harvest that was announced was worse than expected. In 1948, 35,000 cards were delivered and none for the year 1949.²⁰ In 1954, a contingent of 20,000 seasonal workers was allowed to stay in Algeria: 11,500 cards were awarded to the Moroccan authorities, the remaining ones to farming township mayors to regularise seasonal workers who were already there.²¹

The illegal immigration has, for its part, a double origin. Some Moroccan workers crossed the borders illegally, whereas the seasonal workers did not return back to Morocco when their cards expired. Arms of the state like the police proceeded to commit regular repressions. Illegally crossing the border greatly increased after the Second World War. Indeed Moroccans considered Algeria to be "a natural

opportunity for them and that it is not necessary to have an identity document or a passport to come to the district of Oran".²² Some came accompanied by their families. In 1948, the number of illegal workers was estimated at 50,000²³ whereas Arsenal estimates it to be 60,000.²⁴ In 1949, Moroccans in all squares with the legislation about strangers were about 10,000 of which 6 to 7,000 were from the Spanish Morocco whereas those in irregular situation, ancient seasonal workers, were four or five times more numerous.²⁵ In 1954, the greater and greater importance of "the number of Moroccan workers who did not return to Morocco... and settled in the district" was indicated again.²⁶

The General Governor of Algeria prescribed, in 1954, a systematic research of Moroccans so that those found to be in an irregular position would have to submit themselves to courthouses²⁷ in order to be expelled. Between 3 and 21 June 1954, 776 French protected Moroccans and 147 Spanish protected ones were driven back. In the first ten days of June 1954, 200 Moroccans working in railroad sites were also driven back.²⁸ For the administration, it was an important matter to wreck the plans of permanent installation attempts of seasonal workers. They could no longer obtain any resident card and "must return to Morocco imperatively at the end of the agricultural work".²⁹ From January 1 to 15 June 1955, the assessment of police checking lead to 1,311 workers in irregular residence, 775 clandestine entrances and 358 cases of infringement to a decree of extrusion.³⁰

The permanent settlements of the Moroccan workers in the district of Oran were accorded to those who arrived with a passport and an authorisation of work and residence in Algeria. They formed a small number

of which were soldiers and civil servants especially. It was also a fact that some seasonal workers at the end of the agricultural season were authorised to reside. Before the Second World War, most of the seasonal workers returned to Morocco after the end of their work. Their non-return was noted in 1949 because "they took the habit to remain in Algeria, moving from one region to another".³¹ They tried by all means to get engaged and become "sedentary or semi-sedentary residents".³² In reality, the settlement (sedentarisation) goes back to between the two wars. In 1936, 36,178 Moroccans were counted in Oran. This number includes 23,770 men and 12,408 women. The masculine children, born in Algeria, of less than ten years represent 48.50 per cent, those aged of ten to seventy years were 33.11 percent. Female children, aged less than ten years, represent 55.65 percent, those aged of ten to seventy years were 15.45 percent; others were not declared.³³ In 1950, in the small commune of Ain Kial, more than one thousand Moroccan families that had emigrated several years before installed.³⁴ In 1954, the administration allowed three Moroccan categories to get a resident card and stay permanently. The first ones were to possess a passport, and a visa for an indeterminate duration. The second one, concerned those who were born in Algeria or came as infants with their parents. Exceptionally, workers who effective installation for several years was justified, had familial links and had not solicited, until then their regulation could do it.³⁵

The circuit of the immigrants (seasonal workers, illegal ones, residents) was almost the same during the whole period. They came mostly from those parts of Morocco that were under the Spanish protectorate; the

¹⁵ *Statistique générale de l'Algérie, 1888-1889-1890*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Statistique générale de l'Algérie, 1900*, pp. 34-36.

¹⁷ *Statistique générale de l'Algérie, 1912*.

¹⁸ Ed. Dechaud, "La population de l'Oranie, Recensement de 1911", *Bull de la soc et de géo d'Oran*, 1913, t 33, pp. 349-382.

¹⁹ *Tableau général des communes. Dénombrement de la population. Situation au 6 mars 1921- Alger*, imp Pfister, 1922.

²⁰ *Recensement de 1936. Statistique générale de la population algérienne : t1 Département d'Oran*, 1938.

²¹ *Archives de la Wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Comité consultatif de l'office départemental du travail, séance du 23 février, 1950.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Archives de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.*

²⁴ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du commissaire divisionnaire, chef de la police des renseignements généraux au Préfet, 9 June 1948.*

²⁵ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85 Comité consultatif de l'office départemental du travail d'Oran, séance du 28 April 1948.*

²⁶ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H92. Correspondance du Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Préfet d'Oran, 22 September 1949.*

²⁷ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran, 3H85. Correspondance Gouverneur général de l'Algérie au Préfet, 14 January 1954.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85 Correspondance du Préfet au Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, 30 June 1954.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Archives de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance Préfet au Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, 3 Juillet 1955.*

³² *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H92. Correspondance Directeur de l'office départemental du travail. Préfet d'Oran, 22 septembre 1949.*

³³ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3h 85. Correspondance Directeur de l'office départemental du travail- Préfet d'Oran, 6 juillet 1949.*

³⁴ *Statistique de la population algérienne. Recensement de 1936, t1 : Département d'Oran, 1938, pp 1-3.*

³⁵ *Arch de la wilaya d'Oran . 3H85 Correspondance du maire de Ain Kial au chef de section de l'office départemental du travail de Ain Témouchent, 10 May 1950.*

Articles

zone that was a French protectorate also participated but to a lesser degree. In 1952, for example, the original Moroccans of the *Rif* who got an authorisation of work were as numerous as 3501 whereas, only 503 came from the French zone.³⁶ The *Rif* was a poor mountainous region of the northeast of Morocco. Other regions were also suppliers of immigrants. It was mainly around the region of *Oujda*, *Erfoud*, and also *Fès* and *Tafilalet*.³⁷

In principle, the candidate for immigration must possess a passport provided with a visa or seasonal worker card. This latter was instituted in 1946 by the consultative committee of the work departmental office of Oran. Cards were distributed between beneficiary commune mayors who were charged with distribute them to the Moroccan workers who presented themselves for this. The procedure was modified in 1949 either because mayors did not operate the distribution of the cards or these cards had not been taken by the seasonal workers who perhaps had not been informed about them. In the new procedure, the card was distributed in *Oujda* by the civil controller before the crossing of the border. It included the civil state of the immigrant and a photograph. The Prefecture of Oran was more liberal with those coming originally from that part of Morocco which was a French protectorate than with those who came from the Spanish zone. The latter were obliged, in 1950, to possess a passport to come to Algeria.

In Algeria, workers joined the same colonist within the same firm. Owners appealed, in certain cases, to recruiters who became responsible for the team of workers of which they were chiefs and for which they received special remunerations. Employers advanced money to workers they brought, provided with a passport and a permit of movement. The important Algerian operators in wine growing regions offered the same conditions as the European agriculturists and respected the regulations regarding the minimum salary. On the other hand, *fellahs* (small and medium owners) were more rebellious against the law. They fed and dressed the immigrant while considering him, at the same time, as a *khammès* (partner) and an employed. The wages they paid were function of fashions of

remuneration (for the task, for a part of fruit, with or without food, etc...) and of the nature of the work and the season. Shepherds and guardians were less well paid and wages increased during crops.³⁸

The geographical and professional distribution of immigrants was relatively steady. Moroccan immigration was mostly agricultural seasonal worker immigration. This double characteristic has been slightly modified by the end of the period with the formation of a Moroccan immigrant community.

The geographical limit of their presence was determined, in the East, by the plains of *Chélif* that were, at the same time, the administrative limits of the district of Oran. In 1955, the arrival of a strong contingent of workers was noted in the region after the harvest. They tried to exert the culture of rice (*Saint Aimé*, *Taghia*, *Hamadéna*, *Inkerman*). They were forced by the administration to abandon rice fields and to leave the plains of *Chélif*.³⁹

Within this framework, the implantation of the workers corresponded to cereal growing agriculture and to the viticulture. Large public works created some momentary concentrations. In 1900, the number of Moroccans rose to 21,372; they were distributed in the following manner. The district of Oran comes first with 7,197 individuals of whom 1,342 and 1.209 lived in the municipalities of Oran and Ain Temouchent. The district of Tlemcen came second with 5,246 individuals of which 1,629 in the municipality of Beni-saf, 1,225 in that of Tlemcen, 810 in that of Remchi and 729 in that of Lamoricière. The district of Sidi Bel Abbes counted 3,445 Moroccans of which 541 were in the municipality of the Telagh, 445 in that of Mekerra and 376 in that of Ténira. In the district of Mascara there were 2,277 immigrants of which 640 in the municipality of Mascara, 497 in that of Saïda and 334 in that of Frenda. The district of Mostaganem had the least numbers with 716 immigrants of whom 155 and 128 were in the municipality of Tiaret and Relizane respectively.⁴⁰ In 1949, the geographical distribution was almost the same. The Moroccan workers got settled and preferred to do so in the west, in the district of Tlemcen, which has borders with Morocco and along the coastline of the district in the municipality of Oran.

Elsewhere, they rejoined wine growing, market gardening and cereal growing regions as in the districts of Sidi bel Abbès and Mascara.⁴¹ Their presence in the big cities was weak. In 1911, of a total of 19,442 Moroccans, 3,227 lived in the city of Oran, 639 in Sidi bel Abbès, 452 in Mascara, 384 in Tlemcens and 56 in Mostaganem.⁴²

They worked in agriculture where a small minority could reach the qualified jobs. Out of agriculture, they were recruited in the industry of stones, souls of fire and in the sites of terracing and construction.⁴³ In 1952, authorisations of work were delivered for the fishing, the agriculture and forests (2,250), the building and the public works (999), the extraction of various ores and construction materials (158) and food industries (137).⁴⁴ In agriculture, they were clearers (lifters of palm-trees), gardeners (salaried employee or sharecroppers) and gardeners of harvest in the district of Tiaret. In that of Mostaganem, they were valued for the guarding, harvests and threshing as well as the receding of grapevines. In the district of Tlemcen where they were only harvesters and some time grape pickers, they were currently employed in grapevine receding, sprinklers, ploughmen, market gardeners, diggers in orchards, cutters of tree and grapevine; finally, guardians of harvest and herd.

The agricultural villages of Pont de Isser, Les Abdellys, Lavayssière, Montagnac and Descartes, in 1949 did not employ anyone but Moroccans. They were tractor drivers, sulphurers, sulfaters, receders and cutters of trees and grapevines.⁴⁵ In the region of Ain Témouchent, one thousand of Moroccan seasonal workers were present in 1955. There were huge attempts to put up such detriments in the path of their enterprise. In Ain Témouchent, the Bertrand and Farugia enterprises were at the head of five sites of fifty workers each, Rubio Antoine directed a site of 50 workers. It was the same thing for Garcia Manual near the firm Cahuzac (Laferrière). In the commune of Rio Salado, Pèrès brothers and Davos Emile were at the head of several sites in the surroundings of Ain el Arba. In the commune of Ain Kial, Carmona Antoine was the boss of two sites of about 80 workers. Several attempts at beatings did not succeed because of lack of weapons.⁴⁶ It is

³⁶ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Circulaire du Préfet d'Oran, 24 May 1954.

³⁷ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran, 3H85. Correspondance Directeur départemental du travail au Préfet D'Oran, 6 March 1953.

³⁸ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H86. Correspondance au Commissaire divisionnaire, chef de police des renseignements généraux, 18 June, 1955.

³⁹ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Note sur la question des salaires en Oranie, 25 July 1955.

⁴⁰ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance Préfet d'Oran au Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, 5 November 1955.

⁴¹ Statistique générale de l'Algérie, 1900

⁴² Arch de la wilaya d'Oran . 3H85 Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

⁴³ Ed. Dechaud, "La population".

⁴⁴ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. Correspondance du Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Préfet, 22 September 1949.

⁴⁵ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Cartes distribuées aux travailleurs marocains en 1952.

⁴⁶ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Directeur de l'office départemental du travail Directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

Articles

necessary to note, finally, the contraband activities. In the immediate post-war period, the rarity of raw materials and the control of foodstuffs were at the origin of a vast clandestine trade network whose epicentre was, in 1949, the district of Tlemcen. The recruitment as a worker became a means to delivering contraband in both directions.⁴⁷

The Identity: Immigrant, Worker, and Foreigner

From the Rif to Oran or Sidi bel Abbès, in a permanent immigration process, the Moroccan workers covered the complete trajectory of migrants. Have they constructed one/several identities? Or have these ones been assigned to them by the local society? The administrative archives are not always relevant to answer easily these questions. The available data can nevertheless be used to engage with the model produced by A. Appadurai.⁴⁸ He re-examines, in a critical manner, the notions of locality, of primordialism and territoriality in the light of globalisation. It would de-territorialise groups and individuals, it would constitute diasporas of migrants that would build, each, its own identity. It is not quite so in the first stage of globalisation. The Moroccan workers in the district of Oran are mainly seasonal workers who return, theoretically to Morocco after the agricultural campaign. They are four or five times more numerous than the permanent ones. These last ones themselves would come alone to Algeria or, when they do, they take a conjoint to their home country. They also used to travel frequently into Morocco. The geographical proximity facilitated goings and returns. The Moroccan workers do not seem to have constructed a formal auto-identity in the country of reception. They were mostly illiterate, which limited seriously the access to and the use of the writing. Local society did not allow them an equal right to a place in the sun. They have been absent in literature and in the movies, both French or Algerian. The absence of all association proper to Moroccan workers facilitated neither the construction nor the

institutionalisation of a possible identity. The diffused identity rather puts forward the garment (*djellaba*), music (of the *Rif*) and the cocking.

On the other hand, the administration, in particular police and manpower services elaborated one/some images of the Moroccan. The first census in the nineteenth century separated immigrants of European origins and the Moslem immigrants while regrouping in the last category Moroccans and Tunisians. The Moroccans imprint appeared however very early. For the administration, they represented "a worrying stream" and "simple masses".⁴⁹ Among immigrants who came from the Spanish Morocco, "a number of them would be political escaped prisoners".⁵⁰ Actually, the administration elaborated three portraits of Moroccans: The foreigner, the worker, the immigrant. The first dominated the other two. The Moroccan workers were appreciated by agriculturists for "their sterling qualities of work, endurance and soberness".⁵¹ Besides, "they (were) hard workers".⁵² Reasons of immigration are also cited. "The extreme misery of the wage-earners in Morocco is one of the reasons of the emigration".⁵³ The Moroccan agricultural worker used to earn although he lived in miserable conditions and used to win 40-50 francs per day without there being any fixed minimum salary and without holding any professional qualification. In Morocco under Spanish protectorate, "the situation (was) even more critical since the wage hardly represents 2 kilograms of bread".⁵⁴ Once in Algeria, the Moroccan worker becomes important "... because he bends the spine more easily than the Moslem of the country while accepting conditions of wages inferior to the normal conditions of work".⁵⁵

The portrayal as a foreigner is even more threatening. After the Second World War, the danger was chiefly political. In 1952, the Prefect recommended a strict surveillance of Moroccans among whom there were supposed to be some who "could possibly be hidden members of the *Istiqlal* who had escaped the protector-

ate".⁵⁶ In the same year, the General Governor asked the Consul of France to be strict in order "not to encourage displacements between countries of north Africa due to the fear of Moslem separatist party activists".⁵⁷ The police surveillance became even more strict in 1954 because "some Moroccan workers reconstituted, in the sites and enterprises, where they were employed, cells of the *Istiqlal*".⁵⁸ In other respects, "very often they appeared to be the target of propaganda in Moslem surroundings and could possibly give birth to the trained (separatist) groups".⁵⁹ In 1956, the Prefect indicated that the situation had worsened during the previous months in the border regions of Morocco where "active or passive assistance were brought to the Algerian guerrilla".⁶⁰

The immigrant and the worker became practically foreigners with the proclamation of the independence of Morocco. The Prefect of Oran, in 1955, abolished the regime of the protectorate and argued that it was no longer a relevant question to consider any measure of favour for the Moroccan workers.⁶¹ Further, in 1956, "he proposed to forbid all arrival of foreign agricultural manpower".⁶² The Moroccan now definitely became a foreigner. By 1955-56, thus, this identity, which was assigned to him, overrode all other ones.

In conclusion, immigration in this first stage of globalisation presents features that are both integral and unique to it. The Moroccan immigrants were, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly seasonal and illegal workers. The institutions of the local country, much more than their own agency constructed their identity. This identity was, first and foremost, defined in political terms. The contrast is thus extremely strong compared with immigration in contemporary globalisation.



⁴⁷ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H86 Correspondance au commissaire divisionnaire, chef de la police des renseignements généraux, 18 June 1955.

⁴⁸ A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1996, p. 322.

⁴⁹ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85 Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

⁵⁰ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

⁵¹ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du maire de Aïn Kial au chef de section locale de l'office départemental du travail de Aïn Témouchent, 10 May 1950.

⁵² Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85 Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

⁵³ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85 Correspondance Préfet d'Oran au Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, 5 November 1955.

⁵⁴ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Directeur de l'office départemental du travail au Directeur de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Rapport à Monsieur le Préfet, 20 June, 1952.

⁵⁸ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du Gouverneur général de l'Algérie au Consul de France, 9 October 1952.

⁵⁹ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du Gouverneur général de l'Algérie au Préfet d'Oran, 14 January 1954.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Arch de la wilaya d'Oran. 3H85. Correspondance du Préfet d'Oran au Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, 10 April 1956.

⁶² Arch de la wilaya d'Oran 3H85. Directeur de l'office départemental du travail de l'office régional du travail, 7 July 1949.

Articles

Train Singers: What is the Use?



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Abstract

What is the use-value of a performance? Especially, when its relation with the dominant culture industry is not well articulated? To categorise the singers who perform in the train compartments, earning livelihood through a non-mechanical reproduction of their repertoire in front of the commuter audience, it becomes necessary to quantify the end products as commodities. This paper seeks to identify the ruptures when one tries to locate these performances within a contingent discourse of labour, through concepts such as exchange value and abstract labour.

In order to accommodate the train singers within the ambit of a contingent discourse of labour, it becomes necessary to quantify the value of the commodities they offer; their respective place in the (culture) industry; and the political economic (cultural) relations they are enmeshed in. It is problematic to term the act of performance a commodity because, as Marx would say, "[t]he utility of a thing makes it a use-value.... Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity."¹ And this problem regarding the result of a performance cannot be avoided by terming it a 'service' either.² Therefore the train singer cannot produce a commodity in this sense, whatever 'utility' it may possess. "A thing can be a use-value, without having value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not due to labour.... A thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity."³ A performance, which is non-productive in terms of goods, cannot be a commodity by Marxist standards.⁴ Hence, exchange value, or 'Value' of a performance is not necessarily quantifiable; the entertaining possibilities or aesthetic qualities of these song performances may not always correspond to the returns earned by the musicians.

Basically, the character of this 'return'— if it can be called by that name—is hard to define under any single category of economic exchange. Exchange value, as elaborated by Marx, is independent of the use value, which, by nature, is something intrinsic to the thing. But, exchange value can be abstracted to value, as 'crystals of this social substance', human labour-powers.⁵ In case of a performance, that labour would not be regarded as 'productive'. Marx wrote in *Grundrisse*:

The piano maker reproduces capital; the pianist only exchanges his labour for revenue. But doesn't the pianist produce music and satisfaction for the *taste buds of our ears*; does he not even to a certain extent produce the latter? He does indeed: His labour produces something; but that doesn't make it productive labour in the economic sense; no more than the labour of the mad man who produces delusions is productive.⁶

Extending the scope of this 'productivity', Walter Benjamin took it to reflect upon the culture industry of his times; in the context of the large-scale mechanical reproductions of works of art, he observed that 'the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value.'⁷ But with the

emancipation of this artwork from ritual, exhibition becomes the primary motive and '[t]o an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.'⁸ However, Walter Benjamin observed:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of a work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. The traces of the first can be revealed only by chemical or physical analyses which it is impossible to perform on a reproduction.⁹

This immediacy in time and space marks the non-commensurability of an artwork with the prevalent relations of production in an 'economic sense' and more so in the case of that performance, which is lost without the technological possibility of documentation. This possibility of being lost forever is one of the markers of a performance. Though it is always open to duplication, repeatability, its each occurrence must be distinctive from

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¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, English edition of 1887, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1954, p. 44, emphasis mine.

² 'A service is nothing more than the useful effect of a use-value, be it of a commodity, or be it of labour'; also 'It is not difficult to understand what "service" the category "service" must render to a class of economists...'; *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴ According to Richard Schechner, four basic qualities are shared by performance activities: 1) a special ordering of time; 2) a special value attached to objects; 3) non-productivity in terms of goods; 4) rules. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Routledge, London, 1977, 2004, p. 7.

⁵ Marx, *Capital*, p. 46.

⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, Pelican Books, London, 1973, reprint, Penguin Books, 1993, p. 305. See footnote.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, transl. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, Jonathon Cape, London, 1970, p. 226, emphasis mine.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art", p. 222.

Articles

the earlier to be a performance. Hence, the problem arises when one tries to categorise, classify performances in order to be able to assign definitive exchange values. The specifics of the performances do not allow this abstraction in terms of the homogeneity of the labours of the performers. The idea of abstract labour makes labour measurable and exchange of commodities possible by imposing uniformity and homogeneity on the heterogeneity of every individual's concrete labour. This is possible only through supervision and technology employed in the labour process.¹⁰ Therefore it can be said that, without this supervision and technology, a labour process is unaccountable by exchange values. From this vantage point, previous unique works of art can be clearly distinguished from the large-scale mechanical reproductions of the 'new-age' culture industry.¹¹



Gopal Das performing at Dhakuria station, Kolkata suburb

The train singers' relation to this culture industry is marked by a tension; though their performances certainly do not remain unaffected by the mediations of the industry, their job remains a non-mechanical reproduction of the oeuvre. This is one character underlying all kinds of song performances in the train compartments— the crippled beggar, the cultist Baul, singers with amplification devices— everyone must perform it anew; each of the listeners are entitled to hear and see his/her own performance which is unmediated, which remains unaffected by the mediations of the capitalistic mode of mechanical reproduction. During the course of my research, I witnessed that many people think that the singers who sing with karaoke tracks, are playing an audiocassette and are only play-acting

the lip movements. I have been informed of more than one incident where an angry audience has harassed these singers because they were proved guilty of this forgery. With this, the concern of the listeners with authenticity in these performances becomes evident. However, this notion of authenticity is not necessarily founded upon an appraisal of the lyrical or tonal qualities of the rendition or upon its success at closely following the 'original' (folksong or film-track); rather, it bases itself on immediacy. The appeal lies in its uniqueness, its possible erasure— the audience can be appealed to for subscription because the performer is singing only for them and if they do not respond by giving something, the performance is lost, it will be a waste. The possibility of its being reproduced in the very next compartment does not hinder the sense of exclusivity the audience enjoys at that moment. In a sense, the firsthand face-to-face experience makes the audience-of-the-moment the sole arbitrator of the performer's fate, his/her saviour. This display of the performer's helplessness becomes an essential part of the performance. 'Can pain be a spectacle? Not only can it be, but it must be, by virtue of a subtle right that resides in the fact that no one is alone, the poor man less so than others, so that he can obtain assistance only through the mediation of the rich... if others intervene with their knowledge, their resources, their pity'.¹² One can compare with this the way in which singers with any handicap prefer to showcase that deformity to their performances while asking for subscriptions or alms.¹³ Or the way singers address their audience at the end, and sometimes in the middle of their performances; as *ma-baap* (father-mother) and pray for their well-being because they are showing generosity to the poor. Or else, the explanation by the groups of lower-middleclass *Bhadralok* (lit. Gentlemen) singers with modern appliances as to why they are being forced to conduct musical soires in train compartments in return of small subscriptions to combat their unemployment which compels many to criminal activities, in a dignified manner. In short, the typical performers are more likely to represent their

inability to perform properly, the material (or clinical) constraints which prevent their doing so, as an attraction and justification of their performance.

The sort of public space a train compartment creates, is enough evidence to support the observation that the audience in question, the commuters are consumers of the culture industry— music companies, radio and television channels, music stars and so on. According to Walter Benjamin, the substitution of an unique existence through plurality of copies due to many reproductions and their meeting the listener in his/her own situation, 'lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.' In other words, a 'liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage.'¹⁴ Nevertheless, the desire for certain kinds of music, which apparently remain outside the reach of this industry, is quite obvious. Hence, it can be argued, that this industry, which obliterates the possibility of a live interaction, experience, witnessing between the performer and the audience, though affects everyone; it also incites a desire to experience something prior to itself, something unaffected, pure, authentic. And conveniently, that pure, authentic can only be witnessed in the other, who does not belong to ourselves, someone who cannot be included or affected because (s)he lacks something. Significantly, the space for this reinvention of tradition is the heterotopia of the train which belongs to no physical space, 'since it's something through which one passes; it is also something by means of which one can pass from one point to another, and then it is something that passes by.'¹⁵ And it creates a sense of time that has no utility in itself, this time of travel has to be passed in some way or the other, it is pass-time in a reverted sense. This not-belonging to someplace or sometime sets the perfect backdrop for a performance which, in other spaces and times, can safely be relegated to the domain of past, as a 'mere survival of an antecedent pre-capitalist culture.'¹⁶

Our performers often utilise this notion of being outsiders, to this space and to the larger music industry per se, to garner economic support and cultural validity for themselves. As a

¹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History Bengal 1890-1940*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 225-26.

¹¹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art", pp. 219-53.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York, 1975, p. 84.

¹³ It will suffice to give one example: Pradip Bhattacharya, an excellent and trained performer of Rabindra-sangeet (songs by Tagore), is of the opinion that people give him alms because he is blind, his songs are only a way of announcing his presence and the cause of that. Pradip Bhattacharya, *interview with the author*, Barrackpore station, Calcutta, 2005.

¹⁴ Benjamin, "The Work of Art", p. 223.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces', in James Faubion (ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, translated by Robert Hurley, Penguin, London, 2000, p. 178.

¹⁶ Ranajit Guha, 'Colonialism in South Asia: A Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography', *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, pp. 97-8.

Articles

fleeting reference, the tokenised Baul singers' prevalence and popularity can be cited.¹⁷ But it may be mentioned that the choice of songs by the singers and the appreciation by the commuters is determined, among other things, by the degree of familiarity a particular song enjoys with its audience; this familiarisation occurs again through the popular releases of the music industry. Many singers from different parts of Bengal, specialising in different genres, are known to base their repertoire on the popular audiocassettes and radio broadcasts.¹⁸ Some of the performers get their entry to the industry— audio releases, big shows, contracts abroad— beginning with their train-performances as well.¹⁹ Therefore the claimed 'outside', through much mediation, becomes a supplement to the culture industry. However, this link is achieved through an opposition; audience and performers both should maintain the claim/appearance/belief of remaining unaffected. To facilitate that appearance, one can only operate in those terms of exchange, which are believed to be 'pre-capitalistic', unpolluted by the market rules operating on a strict cost-benefit basis. Interestingly, all the singers in West Bengal describe the practice of accepting money by an English word— collection. They may not know the lexical meaning, but the word offers multiple connotations. One can collect alms, a due, a fee, an honorarium, a subscription and so on. Few of them, especially those who are physically challenged, ask for *bhiksha*, but call the process collection. Even the *Bhadralok* performers can fit themselves in the wide associative spectrum of the word, not hurting their pride.

The practice of asking for *bhiksha* or accepting alms has strong religious undertones often aimed at *punya* or earning merit.²⁰ Here, Marcel Mauss's

concept of gift-exchange, in which certain categories of people are involved in almost ritualised exchanges which are embedded in the larger continuum of social and economic relations, comes handy.²¹ Romila Thapar relates this concept to the practices of *dana* and *dakhsina* in ancient Indian societies.²² However, she thinks it is 'needless to say' that 'gift-giving in this connection refers to major gifts given on particular and special occasions and not to the daily or routine ritual or small-scale *dana*.'²³ *Dana*, as the act of giving, bestowing, granting, yielding and prostration, irrespective of what is being given and when; and *dakhsina*, a latter concept referring to sacrificial fee, gift, or donation; according to Thapar, are not impersonal because these are related to an individual/a group and utility is not the singular motivating force. *Dana* or *Dakhsina* is a token of wealth that is not necessarily money, which demonstrates the status of the donor by controlling others, winning followers and creating a bond between the donor and recipient if not placing the recipient under obligation. Moreover, this gift giving keeps materials and people in circulation in a particular pattern and maintains political relationships. 'Gradually gift-giving ceased to be something arbitrary and became systematised.'²⁴ The donation was based on value and expected something in return. It may be a fee for performing some task (like sacrifice) on behalf of the donor(s), or a token sacrificed to please gods or to ward off evil. Later on, with the rise of Buddhist, Jaina and other heterodox sects, the exchange of *dana* for merit became the dominant practice.

In Marcel Mauss's interpretation, gift-exchange follows the forms of exchange between clan, class and family, and precedes individual contract and the money market with fixed

price. This stagist explanation holds good for Thapar as well who blames 'the approximation to the impersonal market economy of commerce' in the larger towns with greater Buddhist followings, for the decline of the gift-exchange economy.²⁵ However, this setting of gift-exchange— *bhiksha*, *dana*, *dakhsina*— before the advent of the money-market relation, relegating it to the domain of the 'pre-capitalistic', or the 'ancient', does not explain the *bhiksha* or practice of collection in the present day.



Noni Khyapa, the Baul trope

This 'conceptualization of... time, one of the ultimate constituents of the historical narrative, is allowed to stand in as a silent but unflinching guarantor of "progress" or "development", dissolving the effect of all discontinuities and assuming the role that once belonged to "material base" or "economic structure".²⁶ This progressivistic notion bases itself on Marxist labour history, which sets emancipation as the universal telos of history. Again Marxist labour history in embracing the pursuits of Enlightenment: Liberty and freedom, heralded 'modernity'. And this 'modernity' which has revealed many frailties, observes Chakrabarty, 'fails even more miserably... in a country like India where the message of the Enlightenment and modernity was delivered only in an extremely travestied form by the mad and violent agency of imperialism.'²⁷ The danger of the concept of

¹⁷ *Baul* is a sexo-yogic cult or people of that cult. They express their philosophy and practice through songs with multiple sets of meaning. *Baul* has become one of the most celebrated folk icons in Bengal and India, and many other sects are denoted by this name. For a study on the representations of the *Bauls*, see Abhishek Basu, "The *Baul* Workplace: A Re-View", paper presented at the Convergences of Sufism and Bhakti seminar, organised by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, February 8-10, 2006. There is a vast literature on the subject, and here are only a few references: Sasibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Firma K. L. M., Kolkata, 1969; Akshaykumar Dutta, *Bharatbarshiyo Upasak Sampraday (Indian Religious Sects)*, vol. I, Kolkata, 1912, 1st Karuna edition, 1987; Upendranath Bhattacharya, *Banglar Baul O Baul Gan (The Bauls and Baul songs of Bengal)*, Orient Book Co., Kolkata, 1988; *Banglar Baul Fakir (Bauls and Fakirs of Bengal)*, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 1999; *Baul Fakir Katha (Tales of Bauls and Fakirs)*, Folk and Tribal Culture Department, Kolkata, 2001; Jeanne Openshaw, *Seeking Bauls Of Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

¹⁸ Interviews by the author of Mukul Biswas, on Up Teesta-Torsha Express between Katwa and Ajimgunj stations, 22 July, 2004; of Gurupada Adhikary, Ballygunj station, 02 July, 2004; of Gopal Das, Subhasgram station, 13 August, 2005; of Asim Kumar Chakrabarty, Sealdah station, 14 August, 2005 and on various other occasions; Amulya Burman, Belakoba station, 28 July, 2004; of Ranjit Kirtaniya, Siliguri Town station, 23 July, 2004; etc.

¹⁹ Interview by the author with Kalachand Darbesh, Dhupguri, 25 July, 2004; Debdas Baul and his youngest son Uttam Das Baul, Bolpur, January, 2005; Paban Das Baul, Bolpur, January, 2005.

²⁰ 'Often it is said that in India poverty is the chief but not the only cause for beggarhood. Giving alms to the beggars is considered a way of washing one's sin and a very act of religious merit (sic). This idea is commonly shared both by the religious-minded Hindus and Muslims in India.' Sumita Choudhury, *Beggars of Calicut*, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1987.

²¹ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, translated by W. D. Halls, Routledge, London, 1900, reprinted in 2002.

²² Romila Thapar, "Dana and Dakhsina as Forms of Exchange", *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Orient Longman, Delhi 1978, reprinted in 1996, pp. 94-106.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 94.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 104, emphasis mine.

²⁶ Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, p. 224.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 224-25.

Articles

'modernity' in its colonial variation chiefly consists in the attempt at explaining the cultures of the colonised either as a replication of the modern colonial culture or as a survival of an antecedent pre-capitalist culture.



'Modern' singers

The question of culture poses a dilemma. In case of England, either it privileges a liberal heritage with an exceptionalist argument, or, culture is subordinated to progress and modernity, which again emerges from a liberal heritage.²⁸ Even in the present context, the singers are regarded either as an excess of the capitalist labour power or a stronghold of the earlier cultural and economic systems. Marking them as 'traditional', these people, reminiscent of the 'pre-capitalist "community"' could easily be celebrated as a site of resistance against capital.²⁹ Thus we understand the significance of the pre-occupation with authenticity mentioned earlier. Now the people who are nonetheless skilful at their work can safely be relegated to the domain of culture. Culture becomes and can remain the only possible sanctuary for a contestation with capital.

Abstract labour, as the abstraction of concrete human labours, presumes equality. In Marx's own words:

The secret of the expression of value, namely, that all kinds of labour are equal and equivalent, because, and so far as they are human labour in general, cannot be deciphered, until the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice.³⁰

Therefore, abstract labour becomes

an extension of the bourgeois notion of 'equal rights' of citizenship. But the singers cannot be granted with any 'rights' when their very presence within a train compartment without a ticket- the passport to this public space- violates the codes of a civil society. This illegality of their presence, helps in excluding their acts from the market of free labour and thus unworthy of the needs of capital. The exclusion thus reasserts the privileged position of the commuters and eliminates any possibility of their being equated to the beggars denying their labour to be productive in relation to capital.

The performers, nonetheless, call the entire process or performance in Bengali- quite simply as- *kaaj*, which means work. The hawkers, professional beggars, *Bhadralok* and other singers alike, use this word. Despite remaining aware of the artistic implications of their profession, very rarely do they call their performance singing- only *kaaj* does suggest the hard labour involved with their livelihood. However, there are mixed feelings about this among the audience, the public. Many are uncomfortable with the phenomena of people living off begging and this is voiced in this oft-heard remark: '*Khete khete paarish na?*' ('Can you not work to earn your bread?'). Most of the singers also do not like '*hat pata*' (extending palms to beg); the *Bhadralok* singers feeling the most humiliated of the lot. Even some Baul singers, in whose cult the practice of *madhukari* or accepting alms is a necessary ritual, are ashamed of begging. Still, these 'non-working' *bhikharis* exist and the same public gives them something. What does the audience give to the performers: Alms or labour-value? The hawkers in the train compartment get paid in exchange for something, food or clothing or stationary. He trades in commodities; returning the exchange value of money with some material, tangible thing. But the singer does not offer that 'material' commodity; the immediacy of the performance does not last. The same commuter, in other

situations, may prove to be an ideal consumer of the music industry, but these singers or their performances are not classified, categorised, priced according to those rules. Marx's observation about primitive Indian society seems to hold true for these practices: 'In the primitive Indian community there is social division of labour, without production of commodities.'³¹ With the advance of capital (which runs concurrent with a world-embracing commerce and world-embracing market), they cannot remain 'outside' that market but the market-rules, in appearance, cannot control them directly.



Sahana Begum, singing fakiri style on a local train

This contradiction implies the mediation of several discourses. Performers, as shown above, cannot be called productive, whatever amount of labour they might employ in singing. The 'public', the state, cannot recognise their labour to be productive. Do they belong to that past, which, according to Marx, though contains 'antecedents' of capital, are not 'forms of its own life-process'? In order to abstract labour, to homogenise social labour power, the excess, the performance-in-itself, the individual labourers get sacrificed. Locating the use-value of the 'authentic art-work within the sanctuary of ritual, does not secure a place for the artisan, for the non-useful labourer; at least not in that history of Capital which is 'posited by itself', and which cannot acknowledge the mediation by the former history.³² So, they remain 'outside', just like passing things, like spectres of the past, singing and begging or begging and singing or whatever.

²⁸ Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, p. 224.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 226.

³⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 66.

³¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 49.

³² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, particularly see the second chapter, 'The Two Histories of Capital', pp. 47-71.

Articles

Female Indentured Labourers in Trinidad– A New Perspective



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Abstract

From 1845 to 1917, approximately 147,600 individuals migrated to Trinidad under the East Indian indentureship system. Of this number about 36,900 or twenty-five per cent were adult females while four per cent or 5,903 were girls two to ten years of age.¹ This article re-examines some of the historical writings on female indentured labourers in Trinidad during 1845 to 1917. It posits answers/explanations to some of the issues and questions previously raised by historians, which have been analytically deficient in one way or the other. This article contests common notions that female migrants immigrated as independent individuals and that those who immigrated as single women were of a certain character.²

Dependent vis-a-vis Independent

It has often been postulated that female indentured labourers left India as independent emigrants. Rhoda Reddock for example, has argued that the mere decision to emigrate showed the independent character of Indian women.³ Of course if this was the case, the question arises– why there was always a problem in acquiring the stipulated number of female emigrants– especially if Indian women lived in unsatisfactory social and economic conditions and may have independently sought a way out of their circumstances. While it cannot be denied that there may have been a desire to seek better economic and social conditions this does not mean that Indian women were truly independent, in the modern sense of the word. Putting aside the fact that there was a problem encouraging 'independent' women to emigrate there is also the notion of women feeling more 'secured' migrating with husbands. This is supported by the fact that many of them 'married' or took 'partners' at the port of embarkation– which goes contrary to the notion of independence that has been posited so far.

Also, it is important that the figures are interpreted correctly. The total number of unmarried female emigrants included children under the age of twelve years who accompanied their parents and had nothing to do with the decision making process which led them to leave for Trinidad. Often

these figures have been interpreted as females who made conscious decisions to emigrate but there is a clear distinction between an adult female who migrated on her own and a child who did not have a choice in the matter and simply accompanied her parents.

More importantly, the patriarchal nature of the society placed severe constraints on the movement and independence of Indian women so that they were a socially subjugated group on the whole.⁴ The patriarchal nature of the society and the control exercised over the female migrants extended beyond the homes/villages and was reflected in colonial policies. In 1879 a government circular stated: *In all cases where married women present themselves for registration, especially when they usually reside in another district, it should be ascertained in the best way available whether the husband is alive or dead, and in the former case, whether he has any objection to his wife becoming an emigrant.*⁵

Cases such as those of Zamiran of Fatehpur village and Lakhia of Paharpur village (both villages were in the district of Ghazipur) were common at the sub-depots. Both women were recruited in their respective villages but were not registered at the sub-depot. The Deputy Magistrate, Pt. Mohun Lall noted that in the case of Zamiran he had tried to "ascertain the willingness of her husband; but as the

woman appears to have falsified her residence, as is clear from a local enquiry, I refuse to register her."⁶ Regarding Lakhia, he noted that: *Orders have been sent to the police to enquire if the husband of the woman is alive, and, if he is alive, to ascertain from him whether he is willing to his wife becoming an emigrant. No reply has yet been received.*⁷



Map of Trinidad and Tobago

In addition to this some women were tricked/coerced into emigrating on their own. One immigrant, Partabia said that she was tricked. "She was given sweets and told to come on a trip where she would get much money. She was then taken to the Calcutta depot. When her father and father-in-law heard where she was, they came to look for her. But the authorities locked her in a room where she could hear her relatives but they could not

¹ According to the Ships' Registers, children under two years of age were classed as infants, those between two to ten years of age as girls/boys and those over ten years of age as adult male/female.

² The majority of female indentured workers came from Bengal, Bihar, Agra and Oudh while a handful emigrated from Madras. Thus, this paper will examine specifically the situation of women in these areas.

³ Rhoda Reddock, "Freedom denied– Indian women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917", *Review of Women Studies*, 1985. Reddock was one of the first Caribbean scholars to raise issues regarding female Indian indentured labourers. Other scholars such as Patricia Mohammed, Bridget Brereton and Verene Shepherd have contributed to historical writings on Indian women in the Caribbean.

⁴ See Radica Mahase, "Female migrants and the indentureship system in Trinidad– A Re-examination 1845-1917", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Sage Publications, Forthcoming, Delhi, 2006.

⁵ "Government Circular, No. 88, dated 19 July 1979, paragraph 3," *Proceedings of the Hon'ble Lieutenant- Governor of Bengal during 1900, General Department, Emigration*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1900, p. 569.

⁶ "Statement showing the cause of the rejection of emigrants" in Correspondence from Pt. Mohun Lall, Deputy to the Magistrate of the Ghazipur District, 1879, *Proceedings of the Hon'ble Lieutenant- Governor*, 1900, p. 540.

⁷ Ibid.

Articles

hear her."⁸ Every year certain number of recruits were 'claimed by relatives' at the Calcutta depot. For example in 1884 six emigrants were claimed by relatives at the sub-depot (located in one of the districts), while fifteen were claimed at the main depot at Garden Reach in Calcutta. In 1898, relatives at the sub-depot claimed as much as fifty Indians while four were claimed in Calcutta.⁹ There were numerous cases brought before the district magistrates where husbands and fathers or other relatives were attempting to locate women who they found out through some means or the other, were abducted and being held in the depot.

Immoral women vis-à-vis Virtuous women

There seems to be a recurring notion that female indentured labourers who immigrated to the colonies were immoral women— an idea that has been borrowed and regurgitated from the colonial documents. The colonial officers dealing with emigration have emphasised that some of the women who emigrated were prostitutes although substantial figures and intensive information regarding this claim have not been recorded. Hence, ultimately one realises that an assertion of this kind could have been based to a large extent on the perceptions of colonial officers in a land culturally unfamiliar to them.

Colonial officers in British India were operating in a Victorian age when it was extremely easy to affix stereotypes to women. In the Indian situation, given the patriarchal nature of the society it was rather easy for colonial officers to label single women as prostitutes. It was also rather easy to conclude that single women who were emigrating by themselves were therefore running away from their homes and from their male guardian or 'protector'. For example, one report on emigration in 1917 stated that:

*The women who come out consist as to one third of married women who accompany their husbands, the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or have been put away by them. A small percentage is ordinary prostitutes.*¹⁰

While one cannot completely dispute the idea that some of the female Indian emigrants may have been prostitutes, the only evidence which could point in this direction is the high incident of venereal diseases

recorded upon medical examination of the recruits at the Garden Reach depot in Calcutta. For example, in 1898, a total of 139 cases of sickness were recorded amongst the emigrants. Of this number there were forty-three cases of those affected with a venereal disease and this represented thirty per cent of the total number of sick cases.¹¹ However, even this cannot be seen as explicit attestation of the immoral nature of the Indian women who immigrated to the colonies. Indeed it may have been the case where the women contracted the diseases from their husbands rather than vice versa. Also, given the deficiency of medical care in the Colonial state one must note that a substantial segment of the Indian population was not aware of proper protection against such diseases or how to care for them and so diseases were rampant.



Map showing where indentured labourers were recruited from

Low caste vis-à-vis High caste

The common impression that a large number of prostitutes emigrated is usually connected with the idea that a significant number of low caste women therefore came under the indentureship scheme. Hence, the perception is that low caste status and prostitution went hand in hand. When the caste issue is analysed it is interesting to note that women of the higher castes emigrated as well. For example in 1884 out of the 861 women who emigrated to Trinidad, 179 were Brahmins and high castes, 170 were agriculturalists, 25 were artisans and 267 were recorded as low castes. From 1887 to 1892 of the total number of women proceeding to Trinidad, 591 were Brahmins, 363 were agricultural workers, 348 were artisans and 2,626 were low castes. Therefore, while it is accurate that the low caste women comprised the bulk of the female

migrant population there was a considerable number of women from the higher castes as well.

Plantation Issues

The dissertation on Indian women in Trinidad is one of continuities existing within a realm of changes. The parallel between Trinidad and India did not extend beyond the fact that they were both colonial states subjugated and exploited by Britain. Trinidadian society was dissimilar in numerous respects when compared with Indian society. Indian women arriving in Trinidad experienced both an interruption and a prolongation of what they were familiar with in India. There existed a conflicting situation where patriarchy was fractured but yet persisted to a certain extent so that while they were able to adopt 'original' lifestyles, their behaviour was regulated by expected 'norms' as was known in India.

First, in the economic sphere, a contradictory situation existed where Indian women were able to achieve some amount of status while at the same time they operated in a regulated environment. The mere fact that women were acknowledged as individual workers and separated from the males in the family was a budge towards some amount of elevation in their function in the economic aspect of the society. However, the indenture contract itself reflected the patriarchal nature of the world society as the female indentured worker was to work a full nine-hours day, at what was termed the 'lighter field tasks' (cutting grass, hoeing the fields, cutting cane, looking after animals) when she was doing the same work as her male counterparts. The only difference was that she was not allowed employment at any of the skilled tasks.

Secondly, the space to earn the same amount of money as the male indentured workers simply did not exist. The fact is that wages were paid according to how 'able-bodied' an immigrant was. Women received less than what was paid to an 'able-bodied' worker because they were not seen as physically strong enough to be classed as 'able-bodied'. Therefore, while most women worked alongside the men in the fields, at the same tasks, the wages they received were actually lower. This in turn affected their capacity to save the same amounts as the men. Lala Chimmanlal and James

⁸ Unfortunately only a few interviews had been recorded with Indians who were indentured labourers on the plantations in Trinidad. Some of these have been noted by Shamsu Deen in *Solving East Indian Roots in Trinidad, Freeport, 1994* and in John La Guerre, *Calcutta to Caroni, St. Augustine, 1985*.

⁹ Proceedings of the Government of Bengal in the Emigration Department, Revenue and Agriculture Department (NAI).
¹⁰ "Report by James Mc Neill and Lala Chimmanlal to the Government of India on the conditions of Indian immigrants in the West Indian colonies", laid before the Legislative Council on the 25 June 1915, *India Commerce and Indian Department, Council paper No. 87 of 1915*. The Government of India recognised that there was growing agitation by nationalists in India, against Indian emigration and agreed to send an Indian officer to investigate the conditions of Indians in the Colonies. Thus Chimmanlal was sent to the British West Indies along with James Mc Neill. Mc Neill himself was inexperienced regarding the issue of emigration and only qualified for the task in terms of his senior position. Chimmanlal on the other hand was specially chosen by the Government of India as the "Indian delegate" to accompany Mc Neill, as he was the manager of some tea plantations in the North East and therefore had some idea of conditions and terms of labour on plantations.

¹¹ *Proceedings of the Hon'ble Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, 1900*.

Articles

Mc Neill noted that:

*A steady man of ordinary industry and physique works on average about 260 days in the year. The average earnings for women varied very greatly because first women cannot be ordered to work after three years' residence and second, throughout the five years of their indenture, the employer seldom uses pressure to exact work except to reinforce the wishes of the husband. Their earnings were normally about one half to two thirds of those of the male immigrants.*¹²

The other point that comes out of Chimmanlal and Mc Neill's observation is the idea that the employer will 'reinforce the wishes of the husband.' Although it is not clear why the husband may wish that his wife be pressured to work, the mere fact that the employer can be an enforcer of such wishes should make one question the extent of the independence of the female workers within the plantation economy.

Thirdly, the status of Indian women increased as they became property holders. In Trinidad, Indian women were able to acquire land through the commutation system where they could forego the right to a free return passage to India for a grant of land (or cash) or they could have purchased land independently of the commutation system from 1869. In 1875, as much as 223 women accepted commutation grants and from 1869 to 1889, 1,873 Indian women had opted for the land grant rather than a return passage to India. Interestingly, these statistics represent the land held by wives and not single women.

Fourthly, conflicting notions of changes operating within an imported value system is most apparent when the position of the Indian women in the wider Trinidadian society is examined. The continuance of patriarchal principles can be seen but these were operational within an environment diverse in many ways from the Indian society. The main motivation for most of the changes was the disproportion in the male:female sex ratio, a topic that has occupied much space in the literature on Indian emigration. Throughout the period of emigration, there were a lower number of female Indians in the colony. For example, in 1851 for every 1000 native male Indians there were 512 native female Indians. On one hand, the lower number of Indian females helped to increase the status of Indian women, and on the other hand it created a situation whereby women's behaviour was highly 'regulated'. While female

infanticide may have been practiced in India it was simply unnecessary/ impractical in Trinidad as a female child was not a burden on the family and instead represented an additional income as she was allowed to work on the plantations. Also, in Trinidad, the Indians did not have to worry about finding spouses for their daughters and since Indian females were 'scarce' and Indian males were not inclined towards inter-racial marriages, parents were now able to demand a bride price rather than pay a dowry upon the marriage of their daughters.

However, the perpetuation of patriarchal philosophy and the domination of male Indians were evident at all levels in the society. It started within the home with the continuation of the joint family system that was common in India. This family structure was a diluted form of a patriarchal institution as the members of the household, including the women, were under the authority of the oldest male in the family. This family system did not allow for a female member to have 'control' over male members unless of course it was a situation where the woman was a single parent living with her sons who were minors and this scenario itself was not a frequent one as many single mothers took up residence with male partners. At the level of the village it was manifested in the *panchayat* system as men continued to dictate the law-making process and women were not permitted to sit on the village council. On a wider level, the law of the colony was used to ensure that women could not be taken away from their husbands. Obvious indicators of this are the laws against seduction of a man's wife and those intended to prevent the harbouring of an immigrant's wife that was imposed in Trinidad.

At the same time there were clear changes in the male-female relationship to some extent. The Hindu wife who was still expected to be a replica of the Goddess Sita (in a society where the Ramayana tradition became the dominant cultural tradition of the immigrants) but at the same time opportunities for her to change companions did exist. Sara Morton cited the case where, on a visit to a village she asked a female indentured labourer where the father of her children was at that moment. The woman calmly replied that he had misbehaved and she sent him away and took 'another papa' and if he misbehaved as well, she will also send him away.¹³

Fifthly, historical writings on Indians in Trinidad have also tended to ex-

press the general opinion that Indian women in Trinidad were able to 'benefit' more in terms of education. Educational opportunities were indeed made available for children of the Indian indentured labourers in general and schools were established by both government and various missionary groups. Mc Neill and Chimmanlal noticed that more than one quarter of the estates had schools located on or very near to the estates, while more than a half of the estates were within one-mile radius of a primary school. Of the remaining estates most were within two miles of a school while only ten estates had no schools within a two mile radius and some of these had either very few or no children at all. However, 16,477 Indian girls were not enrolled in a school.¹⁴ The Census of 1921 states that 531 girls were attending government schools, 1,895 were enrolled in government-assisted schools and 171 were in private schools. Therefore a total of 2,597 Indian girls were attending schools.¹⁵ Therefore the question arises: If educational opportunities were indeed available in Trinidad for female Indians, given the number of schools established and the proximity to the estates added to the fact that it was free, then why such a low number of females were actually attending schools?



Women working as indentured labourers

The answer to this question can actually be found in the patriarchal value system that the Indians transported and transplanted in a diluted form, in the colony. The unspoken diktat of Indian society was that an Indian girl was reared to be a faithful wife and a good mother. Hence she would learn how to carry out the duties of the home and when she was 'of age' she would be married to a suitable Indian man. In the host society many parents saw it unnecessary to send their girl children to school when they already had an idea of what kind of future they would have. Also, within the plantation economy the girl child was allowed to do minor tasks for a small sum of money and thus supplemented the family's income and she

¹² "Report by James Mc Neill and Lala Chimmanlal".

¹³ This incident was noted in D.W.D. Comins, *Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1893.

¹⁴ "Report by James Mc Neill and Lala Chimmanlal".

¹⁵ *Census of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago*.

Articles

could only do this if she stayed away from school. Added to this, the Indians were always suspicious of the work of the missionaries and missionary schools and feared that Indian children would forsake their own cultural heritage and convert to Christianity. Thus the distrust that had been common in India was transported to Trinidad so that parents continued to be reluctant to send their children to schools which were run by another

race or religious group.

These issues/ideas have been ignored by some historians writing on Indian women in Trinidad. This article has discussed the way in which patriarchy has prohibited the liberated movement of Indian women- so that single Indian females were simply unable to immigrate to Trinidad and that those who were able to do so were not necessarily women of 'questionable' characters. In Trinidad,

although Indian women were workers they were still restricted by the diluted form of patriarchy that existed. This paper represents an attempt to re-initiate discourse on female indentured labourers so that various aspects of this topic can be taken up at a more intense level of discussion. It is an attempt to at least raise some significant issues on the topic of Indian women in Trinidad.

Articles

Forms of Workers' Protest Amidst Dilemmas of Contesting Mobilisations: The Jamalpur Strike of 1919 and 1928



Nitin Sinha

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Abstract

This paper looks at two strikes in 1919 and 1928 in Jamalpur, one of the oldest Railway Workshops in India. Through these two strikes an examination of the organisation of the strikes and the nature of mobilisation has been attempted. The elements of political involvement in these strikes have also been discussed. Political parties played a role in the politics of mobilisation. This paper also takes consideration the various community involvements in the strikes.

Introduction

The year of 1919 has been represented as a landmark in the history of workers' resistance in both colonial and later Marxist accounts, the latter, such as of Sukomal Sen and others, which treats trade unionism as a focal-point in explaining workers' protest in this period.¹ These accounts (Colonial and Marxist-Nationalist) have also agreed on certain other issues, the role of 'outsiders' being one such.² The colonial state as well as the management at that time regarded economic hardships as the primary reason behind strikes, yet they argued that the instigation to strike came from 'outside'. This outside mediation was imagined as political in nature, different from the economic reasons of the strike. Simultaneously, the political leaders of the Congress and also the trade union leaders called for the 'political education' of the workers.³ The argument remained the same though preferences differed. So far as the state was concerned, the lesser the role of the 'outsiders', more minimal the danger of the strikes being 'political'. For the Congress, however, the role of the political leaders in controlling the activities of workers was most desirable. Trade unions wanted the workers were to be 'politicised' but their training was to be different. Workers' own ways of organisation and politics were not thought to be 'political' by any of these groups or organisations. Ranajit Guha's influential intervention has already established that the activities of subaltern groups were political in their own cast.⁴ The denials (that

workers strike under the provocation of political leadership) and mediations (that workers need to be politically trained) were actually varied attempts by different parties to regulate, discipline, and control the workforce. In other words, workers were a site over which various groups sought control, legitimation and mobilisation.

How are we then supposed to know about the workers' own ideas and organisation of politics, if at all there was any? It appears that they were too burdened with the contesting and disciplining exercises of various parties and institutions. D. A. Low's model of 'nationalisation of local events' provides one way to study local events just before they were nationalised.⁵ For instance, Partha Datta has shown how the Lilloah Workshop strike was originally started by workers but later was 'taken up' by the Khilafat members and union leaders.⁶ Most of the time, even when there were outside interferences or participation, they were, as Bhattacharya has noted, 'often ex-post fact after the workers had joined issue and gone on strike'.⁷ The colonial state was not altogether wrong in accusing the leaders of deriving political mileage out of workers strikes. However, they were wrong in imputing a non-political character to the 'workers' politics'. Also, the nature of interface was not always one way. It is here that Low's model needs to be qualified. Even when workers started a strike on their own, often they themselves sought 'national' intermediation. The notion of 'subaltern autonomy' therefore also needs qualification. The workers may

have been autonomous in initiating agitations, but they were also aware of the importance of 'outside' influence. We will look at few of these issues in following sections.

The strike of 1919

The Jamalpur workshop strike started on 2 December 1919.⁸ A few notices written in Kaithi had been found pasted on the walls of the workshop on 27 November. This indicated some calculation. The notices mentioned workers' discontentment regarding pay conditions and Sunday labour. Initially, occupational differences (into skilled and non-skilled) and related wage differentials hindered unity. On 3 December, two hundred piece-workers (better paid than the others) re-entered the workshop. The work manager, however, in response to protests from other workers, ordered these piece-workers to remain out. He asked for delegates from among the workers, which the latter denied. The Superintendent of Police, Monghyr, on 9 December reported about three notices written in Hindi within the coolly yard. It appears clear that the workers started the strike on their own, without any outside mediation. Even after a week, there was no mention of any organisation or outsider. Moreover, the way the workers mobilised themselves in the initial days also speaks of independent action. On 10 December, the workers met in a mango-garden at Mobarakchak Akhara, about a mile from Purabsarai station on the Jamalpur-Monghyr Branch. This meeting, attended by at least two thousand men, brought the

¹ See Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement - 1830-1970*, Calcutta, 1977; also M. K. Mast, *Trade Union Movements in Indian Railways*, Meerut, 1969. For typical colonial understanding see Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, Calcutta, 1931, esp. pp. 333.

² I have dealt in detail with some of these issues in "The Worlds of Workers' Politics: Some Issues of Railway Workers of Colonial India 1918-22", *Modern Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

³ See, for instance, K. K. Datta, *Gandhiji in Bihar*, Published by the government of Bihar, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1969, pp. 75-6.

⁴ Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1983.

⁵ D.A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1919-1947*, Arnold Heinemann, London, 1977, p.17.

⁶ Partha Datta, *Strikes in Greater Calcutta Region 1918-1924*, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 30,1,1993, pp. 81-84.

⁷ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Role of Outsiders*, (Mimeo), pp. 6-7.

⁸ The following account of the strike is from file no. 406 of 1919, Government of Bihar and Orissa (GOBO), Political Department (Pol. Dept), Special Section (Spl Sec.), Bihar State Archives (BSA), unless otherwise mentioned.

Articles

first instance of outside mediation in the form of one Bhagwan Singh, who was not a Railway workshop worker but a co-villager. If the report is to be believed, then this person was socially similar to the striking workers; 'he was literate only in Hindi, and little enough of that', so this intervention was not from any big political figure or even any figure locally well known. The following demands were put forward by Bhagwan Singh, which were accepted by the workers present there.

Increase of pay by per cent,
Same working hours as the clerks,
Power of dismissal taken away from the sergeants and kept by the Locomotive Superintendent in his own hands,
Same concessions in the way of family free passes as granted to clerks,
Same terms regarding overtime as given to clerks, viz., wages for one and a half hours when an hour worked,
Ten delegates to be chosen to represent their claims to the Agent and the District Magistrate,
No mischief to be done either to public or private property,
To act in the conformity with the advice given by the ten men selected,
None to resume work until case favourably decided,
A Barrister or Vakil to be briefed with the sum subscribed.

The sixth and eighth points therein illustrate the desire of the workers to organise. They may have been influenced by the representational discourses and policies of the colonial state; in deciding on a delegation to put forward their case. The trope of peaceful representation, again stressed upon by all the parties; the colonial state, the trade unions and the Congress was also accepted. In contrast to these strategies, there were three anonymous letters found three days before the meeting that 'purported to urge the men to hold out and if necessary to commit mischief by destroying Railway property'.

The meeting was not attended by any pleaders or Mukhtars, but the last point in their charter testified to the workers' own desire, notwithstanding subaltern autonomy, to secure the help of elites to further their case. The management/state in the meantime maintained their usual stance of resuscitating their authority by insisting that 'grievances cannot be discussed till the men actually return to

work'. The 'unconditional' return to work was the first premise for the management to enter into any negotiation. A Report on 17 December said that the men tried to contact the leading lawyer of Monghyr but the later refused to take up the case at which point a lawyer from Allahabad was approached. The District Magistrate of Monghyr also noted that 'a wire was sent to Gandhi to come and help the men' but the latter expressed his inability to come.

In the following meeting on 27 December, workers reiterated their decision not to return to work. However, the men who addressed the meeting proposed to ask the Locomotive Superintendent not to send the coolie trains.⁹ Perhaps they were fearful that some of their men might join work. Once again, the language of violence surfaced, but anonymously. The SP noted, "irresponsible murmurings were overheard amongst the men to the effect that the Locomotive Superintendent should be moved to pay them for the days on strike and, should he decline to do so, to molest him. This however was not spoken in the meeting."¹⁰ The management insisted on an unconditional return of workers, but did not force them to do so. The Work Manager posted the notice on 24 December at the Keshopur gate of the shops giving them 'another opportunity' to join work on 2 January 1920. The trains, the notice said, would run as normal. This was followed by an anonymous response found posted at the same gate on 29 December. The letter invoked the qualities of forbearance and patience for the success of the strike, and that the order granting the demands had already been passed in England. The author also assured the workers that Gandhiji would come to visit them in a few days. The workers again met on 1 January. The repeated calls to maintain unity suggest that at least some sections of the workers entertained the idea of returning to work. One Habib Mia who addressed the meeting charged the earlier selected delegates of not 'doing anything' to achieve the demands. He exhorted the workers to form a proper association for an organised representation, of which he was selected the Secretary on the spot. He again assured the workers about Gandhi's visit. He claimed to have sent no less than five telegrams to Gandhi and two to C. R. Das for their help.

There are glimpses of the nature of intra-subaltern politics. The strike brought forth competition among the leaders to gain prominence and

establish control. Habib Mia, clearly, made a bid for leadership and won. In the meeting, differences emerged with one group in favour of resuming the work from the next day, the other in going to shops but not starting work unless assured about their demands, and the third against going near the shops and in favour of forcibly detaining those who wished to go. The threat appears to have been used, as the SP reported that one engraver, Bansi, living near the Keshopur gate at Jamalpur had received a letter warning him to refrain from working in the fitting shop, or 'he would be beaten up, his house looted and his females outraged'. On 2 January, as earlier announced by the management, the coolie trains ran, bringing in the workers. The men, however, after coming to the workshop, refused to join work and were hence sent back. On 6 January, Habib wired Gandhi Rs. 40 for his expenses to come immediately to Jamalpur. Gandhi again expressed his inability to do so. He instead asked Habib to send a representative to explain the situation. The first direct involvement of any, even locally known, elite was on 27 December. Babu Tejashwar Prasad, a pleader of Monghyr, had wired the Private Secretary, Lieutenant Governor to intervene in the matter, as 'local authorities are still unsympathetic'.¹¹ On 16 January, Habib submitted the memorial to the Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Orissa, mostly reiterating the earlier points. The workers, however, had started returning to work before the sixteenth. On 12 January, over 5000 workers had joined and by sixteenth, almost the whole strength of about 16,300 returned to the work. If fulfilment of demands is the measure to assess the success of a strike, this one-and-half-months' strike ended in failure. The last meeting on 15 January was attended for the first time by a number of pleaders who 'advised the men to go back to work and to form a Workmen's Association'.¹²

There were multiple strands in the workers' politics: The fear of being identified and thus fired from the work; the violence hidden in the language of meetings and campaigns; organising delegations; peaceful representations; and securing the help of 'outside' leaders. At times these complemented each other, for instance, hidden violence aided in attaining unity, which in turn provided for the show of solidarity for peaceful representation. The workers were ready to come in public collectively but not individually. Perhaps these workers knew that it would be easier for the management to

⁹ With the expansion of the Jamalpur workshop during 1896-97, three coolie trains were started to bring in the labour daily. G. Huddleston, *History of East India Railway*, Calcutta, 1906, p.245.

¹⁰ GOBO, Pol., Dept., Spl., Sec., file no. 406 of 1919, BSA.

¹¹ Tejashwar Prasad floated a 'People's Association', which took some interest in the ongoing strike. However, not much is known about this Pleader or his association. The colonial authorities reported him as eager to get his association recognised as intermediary between the authorities and the men. Home Political-A, proceedings 366-372, February 1920, National Archives of India, Delhi.

¹² GOBO, Pol., Dept, Spl, Sec., file no. 406 of 1919, BSA.

Articles

deal with them individually than collectively. This strike, which took place during a watershed period in labour politics, late 1919 and early 1920, witnessed a new interface between the 'subaltern' and 'elite' domains. Workers themselves carried the whole strike, yet the state regarded outsiders as one of the causes of the strike: the 'movement being fostered, if not actually engineered by educated persons of the agitator class working behind the scene'.¹³

The strike of 1928

If 1919 witnessed a rise of trade unionism and an increase in strikes (though not functionally related), the intensification of the process came in 1928. The year was marked by different 'industrial strikes' in every major industrial city, like, Howrah, Lillooah, Jamshedpur, Kanpur and Kharagpur. Jamalpur did not remain untouched by this strike-epidemic. Another important feature of this period was the active involvement of trade unions in these strikes. I argue that this period saw a consolidation of control by the trade unions but this consolidation came with its own debilitating limitations, especially vis-à-vis 'workers' politics'. The workers had become a site of both contest and control and also a source of legitimisation that the unions needed. Decision-making was to flow down from the trade union leadership. They were attempting to establish themselves as the sole representative of workers as well as the sole authority able to regulate their activities. Joshi has rightly pointed out: "Order was a measure of the strength of the movement, and organisation expressed as well as ensured order. Lack of support to independent initiative meant a loss of legitimacy, while affirmation of workers' action threatened organisational discipline."¹⁴ We will elaborate some of these issues after examining the 1928 Jamalpur strike experience.

The 'trouble' at Jamalpur followed in the wake of the ongoing Lillooah strike in March 1928. The reason for the strike at Lillooah was the dismissal of some workers.¹⁵ The East India Railway Union tried to use this as an opportunity to ask workers of other

workshops to go on a strike. Leaflets were distributed at places like Jamalpur asking 'all employees of every branch to take up the struggle'. The first leaflet in Jamalpur appeared on 15 March giving details about the Lillooah strike and the demands like, increase in wages, better quarters, leave facilities and other allowances. Two more leaflets appeared on 20 and 21 March, which urged the men to demand better wages.¹⁶ The leaflets urged the workers to 'act like men', which meant two things, first to join the union and second to start an agitation.¹⁷ A party was formed in Jamalpur to supply "Mazdoor", a magazine published from "Mazdoor Press", Danapur, of which B. C. Mitra was the editor with the workshop information. The same Press had released a leaflet signed by Mitra on 30 March giving details of the atrocities committed by railway officers and Gurkha force, who had opened fire on workers of Bamangachi returning from a meeting. The leaflet urged the men to be prepared, as a strike could be declared at any moment throughout the line. A meeting was organised on 23 March by B. C. Mitra, which was attended only by thirty men.¹⁸ Mitra accepted that in Jamalpur the workers were not sympathetic towards strike. In Lillooah union membership was 'cent per cent', in Jamalpur only four hundred workmen were members.¹⁹ On 21 April, an anonymous petition in English was sent to the Deputy CME demanding an increase of 25 per cent in wages. On 24 April, a pamphlet in Hindi was posted which 'threatened to strike if the increase demanded was not met'. The management thought this to be the work of one Karulal, who was a close associate of B. C. Mitra and was the branch secretary of the union.²⁰ In spite of these repeated calls, there was no strike. On 18 May, an appeal was circulated amongst the workmen but the SP ascertained that "there is nothing to show that it has produced any effect at all on the Jamalpur employees."²¹ On 4 July, K. C. Mitra, the general secretary of the EIR union addressed a meeting at Jamalpur. He regretted the lack of interest shown by the Jamalpur men. For him the reason was the presence of some treacherous agents among

workers 'who carry all tales to the Sahebs'.²² Strike was still elusive. The final report of 16 July in this series said that though the speech by K. C. Mitra on 5 July was objectionable, given the return of the Lillooah workers to work the EIR Agent did not want him prosecuted.²³ Thus there was no strike at Jamalpur.

Can we compare the two cases - a prolonged if not wholly successful strike with another that never was? Such a comparison does tell us a great deal about the world of workers' politics. The 1919 strike was initiated and carried by workers. There was no call from 'above'. But in the latter case, the workers appeared disinterested, unresponsive to calls from the trade union, which sought to resuscitate its authority by imposing a strike. K. C. Mitra was in fact 'badly heckled by men', who had struck work on the previous occasion (in 1922) and thus had suffered on account of promotion. Also, he was accused of misusing the money collected by the strike leaders for his personal comfort. B. C. Mitra's attempts were also described as failure. During K. C. Mitra's speech on 5 May one Puran Singh rose in anger and interrupted the speech:

I was working in the pay bill section before I came out in the 1922 strike, I am still looking for a job. We haven't forgotten what it is meant to have taken part in that strike. Every year some leaders come round but we never get any further forward. They raise subscriptions and take away our money - and then they get motor cars...²⁴

It is not hard then to understand why the workers refused to subscribe towards the Lillooah strikers. Trade union leaders were dishonest in the workers' eyes. Both the Mitras in their speeches recurrently accused the 'Burra sahibs' of dishonesty. It may have been a ploy on part of trade union leaders to deflect the angst the workers harboured against the union leaders. After the 4 May speech (in which K. C. Mitra called railway officials 'chor' (thief), 'baimaan' (rogue) and 'dagabaad' (traitors) the report does mention that "it produced its effects and chances are that the

¹³ "Confidential Report from the SP, Monghyr", GOBO, Pol., Dept., Spl., Sec., file no. 406 of 1919, BSA.

¹⁴ Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories*, New Delhi, 2003.

¹⁵ "Confidential Copy of a Report from the SP, EIR, Patna, 20th March 1928" and "Confidential Copy of a Special Branch, Sub-Inspector's Report, 16th March, 1928, Monghyr", in GOBO, Pol. Dept, Spl. Sec, file no. 95 of 1928, BSA. The specificities of Lillooah strike are outside the scope of this paper.

¹⁶ Rs 30 for unskilled labour, Rs 60 for skilled and Rs 120 for those 'performing responsible duties'.

¹⁷ "Confidential Copy of a Report from the SP, EIR, Patna, 20th March 1928" in GOBO, Pol. Dept, Spl. Sec, file no. 95 of 1928, BSA.

¹⁸ "Extract from Fortnightly Report, 28th March 1928" *ibid*.

¹⁹ "Confidential Extract from a Special Branch, Sub-Inspector's Report, Monghyr 26th March 1928", *ibid*.

²⁰ "Confidential Report from SP, Monghyr, 28th April 1928" *ibid*.

²¹ "Extract from the Confidential Diary of the SP, Monghyr, 14th June 1928" *ibid*.

²² "Confidential Report from SP, Monghyr, 5th July 1928" *ibid*.

²³ "Report from Deputy General of Police, C.I.D, Patna, 16th July 1928" *ibid*.

²⁴ "Report from SP, Monghyr, 6th July 1928" *ibid*.

Articles

speaker will receive a certain amount of subscription today".²⁵ However, a later reporting dismissed this view, saying, "There is nothing to show that Mitra has gained any ground so far—nothing to show that strike is probable."²⁶

The other difference in the two strikes was of composition. In the 1928 instance the clerical staffs were more eager to strike. In fact the leaders and the clerical staff believed that the railway authorities had not allowed the lower classes of employees to take part in the strike. This was in contrast to 1919 strike wherein workers recurrently compared their underprivileged conditions vis-à-vis clerks. Many of the demands of the workers in the previous strike referred to the facilities enjoyed by clerks. In 1928, the lack of unity was clearly marked. The third difference was in the context. The 1919 strike was held under the larger context of the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement and Gandhian modes of mass mobilisation, which were different from those of late 1920s. In the earlier phase, the *sadhus* played an important role— and the idioms in which they explained 'swaraj' and the benefits of strike were more intelligible to the audience than the logic of 'capital' and 'labour' as explained by trade unions.²⁷

The mobilisation

In the 1919 strike, a *sadhu* named Banke Behari Lal intimidated the management as well as the state. On 23 December, after the District Magistrate of Monghyr had addressed the strikers, this *sadhu* asked the strikers not to resume the work till their demands were fulfilled. The SP in his Report criticised the *sadhu* for occupying the same seat from which the Magistrate had spoken, betraying the fear of losing authority. This *sadhu*, who had come to Jamalpur on 17 December, was later prevailed upon to

leave Jamalpur on the 25th, before he was supposed to address the workers again on the 27th.²⁸



Map of Bihar showing Jamalpur

This was not a singular instance of a *sadhu* trying to organise workers. The period of 1914–15 to 1922–23 was marked by the political activism of *sadhus*.²⁹ About 106 of them had first attended the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920.³⁰ In the same session, the Congress, for the first time, publicly pronounced in favour of taking up the cause of workers. Gandhi thanked these *sadhus* for attending the session and for supporting the Non-Cooperation movement. In that very session, a Sadhu Sangha was formed, which was to be affiliated to the Congress and work for the fulfilment of Swaraj. An All India Political Sadhu Sabha was formed in April 1921 at Hardwar, with Acharya as president and Munshi Ram (Swami Shradhdhananda of Arya Samaj fame) and Satyadev as vice-presidents.³¹ Further the Larkana Gazette of 1 January 1921, reports that a Committee of 15 members was appointed to frame rules and draw up a programme of work. It was said that such societies were to be formed in different parts of the country.³² Local organisations had started springing before that. A Sri Sadhu Mahasabha Society was formed in 1918 in North Bihar (Darbhanga district) to take up

the issue of landlord and tenant. It was reported that all the Mahants of the Madhubani subdivision of this district had joined this Society.³³ Swami Bidyanand was active in this region for the cause of peasants.

The need to recruit these *sadhus* was felt long before 1920. In a 1909 issue of Nagri Pracharak, a monthly Hindi Journal, the author lamented the degraded moral character of the *sadhus* and called for their participation in the regeneration of the country.³⁴ In another article in 1914, it was urged upon the national leaders to enrol the services of *sadhus*.³⁵ The 1911 census, as the author said, defined 56 lakhs people as *sadhus* who lived by begging.³⁶ The author then went on to explain how this group could be reformed and utilised. One way would be to send religious preachers to important pilgrimage centres, like Haridwar, Benares, Gaya, Puri etc. to educate the other *sadhus*. Another article of a relatively later period however argued that political leaders needed a band of committed workers. The *sadhus* could help political leaders spread their messages.³⁷ What happened in 1920 was thus preceded by almost a decade of discussion.

The Congress, in its quest to 'localise' its universal messages of swadeshi and swaraj with popular signs and symbols, sought the help of *sadhus*, who were perhaps more effective in organising the masses. There were many *sadhus* who were active amongst workers in this phase. Bishwananda was most important among them all. He was involved in strikes of railway menials at Adra and Bhojudih in January 1921. Like in the case of the Jamalpur strike, the Bhojudih menials also went on strike on their own on 30 January 1921 after sending a wire on 19 January to the Chief Mechanical Engineer asking him to enquire into the grievances, of which no notice was taken. They went

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ For a fuller discussion on these issues see my forthcoming paper mentioned above.

²⁸ GOBO, Pol., Dept., Spl., Sec file no. 406 of 1919, BSA.

²⁹ By the term 'political activism' I do not intend to create a division between 'religious' and 'political' domains and religion being an instrument of politics. In fact on contrary, I argue that such divisions are inadequate to understand the nature of mobilisation of this period. The language, which these *sadhus* used, and the motifs they used though were overtly 'religious' but their message cut across the semantics of class, race, caste, violence and ahimsa. The arena of politics was thus constituted of multiple strands. It was more diffused but more comprehensive.

³⁰ Home Department, Political Section, file no. 118 of 1922, NAI.

³¹ It's not clear from the Report who this Acharya was. The linkages with Arya Samaj are not only limited and visible by the active role of Shradhdhananda, but also by the very logic of the selection of Hardwar as the seat of the Sadhu Sabha. The Arya Samaj Gurukul Kangri School was also there in Hardwar, which the Report further characterised as the 'training ground for political sanyasis'.

³² Paragraph 120 of the Bihar and Orissa Police Abstract of Intelligence Extract, Bombay Extract dated 15th January 1921 in GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 80 of 1921, BSA.

³³ GOI, Home Department, file no. 404 of 1919, NAI.

³⁴ "Sanyasi", Nagri Pracharak, part 3, issue 5, 15th May 1909, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Academy Library, Patna. [Henceforth BRAL].

³⁵ "Sadhuwon ki Siksha" (Educating Sadhus), Sahitya Patrika, part 1, issue 1, April 1914, BRAL.

³⁶ Seemingly, the term *sadhu* in this period had become a 'generic' term. Both the above articles mention that anyone who wishes dons the ochre robe and becomes a *sadhu*. See, for instance, Lakshminarayan Singh "Sudhanshu", "Railgaadi Par" (On Railways), Ganga, part 1, issue 8, (year missing), BRAL.

³⁷ "Rashtra ka Utthan aur Sadhu-Samaj" (The Regeneration of Country and Sadhus), Ganga, part 1, issue 1, November 1930, BRAL.

Articles

on strike when they did not receive any increment with the December pay. Bishwananda reportedly gave a speech there in the beginning of January.³⁸ The Adra menials had before Bhojudih men struck work on 1 January, which was said to be the effect of Bishwananda's speech made there on 30 December. The menials returned to work shortly after, but Bishwananda or any other 'disciple of Gandhi were forbidden to make any inflammatory or seditious speech at Adra'.³⁹ On 1 February the workers of Bhaga struck work. On being visited by R. K. Missir, reportedly a disciple of Gandhi, the strikers said, "ten months ago they had applied for an increase and although the office babus and others had received an increase, they had got nothing, so at the request of their brothers at Bhojudih they took the oath and struck work."⁴⁰

Bishwananda was also a regular visitor to Jharia coalfields. Throughout the year 1921 he travelled and made speeches at places like Purulia, Patna, Arrah, Jharia etc.⁴¹ He was also active in areas like Chandpur, Goalunda, and Chittagaon in connection with the Assam Tea Coolies' strike and the shipping strike.⁴² His message of swadeshi and swaraj were couched in very different terms and idioms. He supported the cow protection movement. In fact the ban on cow killing was one of the demands made by the Adra menials. The feeling of race and class distinction was also prominent in his speeches. The poverty of Indians was ascribed to the British exploitation. But for him the *vakeels* were not to be trusted. He called the menials and lower classes to boycott the social services given to the British, a deflection from Gandhi's official programme of political boycott.⁴³

Mahant Ishwar Dass of Chapra, during the Bihar Provincial Sadhu Sabha meeting, asked the audience to inculcate swadeshi spirit and to throw off foreign clothes because 'they were saturated with the fat of cows and swine and as such no true Muslim or a true Hindu can wear them at the time of prayers or puja'. Bishwananda always equated British Raj with

'Ravana Raj' or 'Kans Raj'. For the colonial state such equations were more frightening than Gandhi's use of term 'satanic' for the British rule. The state gauged, quite correctly, that the selection of popular characters from religious mythologies influenced the audience more. For workers too the notion of 'dharma' incorporated the 'non-secular' language.

Trade union leaders may have missed this point. During the Liloah workshop strike in 1927-28, the slogan 'lal jhanda ki jai' (salute to the red flag) was accompanied by 'ganga mai ki jai' (salute to Mother Ganges). When the communist leaders returned from the nearby market they found three separate cooking-places set up by workers; one for Muslims, one for Brahmins, and one for so-called low caste Hindus. After heated arguments, the workers replied "jaan dene ke liye taiyar hai comrade, lekin dharma kaise chorega?" (We are ready to sacrifice our lives, comrade, but how can we give up our dharma?).⁴⁴

During this later phase, there was increased circulation and mobility of trade union leaders covering various places like Kharagpur, Jamshedpur, Jamalpur, Howrah and even going down south to organise railway workers of South India. But internal feud between trade unions also existed. The contest was for being the sole representative of workers and having complete authority over them. The labour politics of Kharagpur town of 1927-28 explains this best. The contest was between Makundalal Sirkar who had floated a new union, Bengal Nagpur Railway Labour Union, and V. V. Giri, who commanded the Indian Labour Union. The desire to impose authority is best manifest when the whole menial staff, numbering around four hundred, struck work on 19 January 1928. Though only thirty menials attended the meeting called by the Labour Union; Kashinath Mitter, the vice-president of the Union urged the menials "to return to work and represent their grievances to the union in the first instance".⁴⁵ The report further said, "They promised that the union officials would carefully consider

the grievance and would then advise what action should be taken."⁴⁶ The workers however remained determined to continue their strike. The workers returned to work on 23 January without getting their demands fulfilled.⁴⁷ Factionalism bedevilled the union. W. V. R Naidu, the local branch secretary, was accused of misusing the money. In 1927, at the Kanpur Meeting of the AIRF, Makundalal Sirkar was removed from the post of Secretary. Sirkar afterwards came to Kharagpur and tried to mobilise the workers on the issue of retrenchment by counter-propaganda against Giri. He together with Naidu formed the new union at Kharagpur. The new union needed the legitimacy; hence a strike was necessary. On 3 and 4 April, about 300 employees of the blacksmith shop went on strike demanding better wages but they submitted next day on the promise given by the CME to look into the matter. The Indian Labour Union also kept conducting the meetings and asking for monthly subscription. They found it hard going, though. Sirkar lamented that though his union had 2000 members, not more than 100 attend his daily meetings. Till May, after six months, they had collected only 28 rupees. And also there was no strike.

There was instead a serious communal clash in the town on the day of Muhharram. The tension started in June and persisted throughout the year, the union leaders failing to control it. Even in 1929, the 'Mohomedans' were said to be boycotting the Indian Labour Union.⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the sadhus had fared better in this field. Their sense of Hindu-Muslim unity was premised on Muslims giving up cow slaughter and which the latter did actually. Following Bidyananda's speech at village Jhajha, there were no cows sacrificed in that area on Bakr-Id.⁴⁹

What happened to sadhus in the later phase? Why and how were they marginalised?⁵⁰ We can only suggest a few factors. The impulse to involve the *sadhus* in politics was tied to a programme of social reform. This hope faded during the decade of the twen-

³⁸ GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 318 of 1920, BSA.

³⁹ GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 4 of 1921, BSA.

⁴⁰ "Copy of Demi-Official Letter no. C/50/21, 3rd February 1921 from the SP, BNR, Kharagpur" in GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 318 of 1920, BSA.

⁴¹ A file contains a description together with the translation of his speeches made at these places. The file number is though missing. The file belongs to the Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., BSA and probably is of 1921.

⁴² Appendix G in GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 80 of 1921, BSA.

⁴³ For the discussion of the variant forms of boycotts, see Ranjit Guha, *Discipline and Mobilise*, in Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey, eds., "Subaltern Studies VII: writings on History of South Asia", Delhi, 1992.

⁴⁴ Gautam Chattopadhyaya, "The Working Class in India's Struggle for freedom - A Historical Perspective", Presidential Address Section III, Modern Indian History, Indian History Congress, 47th session, Srinagar, 7-9th October 1986, p.19.

⁴⁵ "Confidential Report of SP, BNR for the week ending 24.1.1928" in GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 25 of 1928. (Emphasis added). The following account is based on this file unless otherwise mentioned.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Weekly Confidential Report of the SP, BNR for the week ending 3rd February, 1928" *ibid*.

⁴⁸ "Extract from the Confidential diary of the SP, BNR, Kharagpur, 1st June 1929" in GOBO, Pol. Dept, Spl. Sec., file no. 158 of 1929, BSA.

⁴⁹ GOBO, Pol. Dept., Spl. Sec., file no. 333 of 1920, BSA.

Articles

ties.⁵¹ Second, the nature of Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement was more conducive to the sadhus than trade unionism. Gandhi's charismatic appeal and the idea of renunciation and sobriety provided a possible language for them, not so much the language of class, capital and labour (which though were present in their speeches but diffused). Most of the sadhus fashioned themselves after

Gandhi. Third, most of the sadhus worked using the organisational and infrastructural networks of the Congress. The district level Congress committees were one of the chief platforms. The growing distance between the Congress and organisations like Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha by the middle of the 1920s may have contributed to the

marginalisation of the *sadhus*.⁵² The growing socialist tendency within the Congress from the latter years of the 1920s contributed to the squeeze.



The railway workshop today

⁵⁰ The Englishmen of 20th February 1922 remarked, "He (a railway coolie) loses his respect for the guard and the station master to begin with and then for all railway officers. The Swami or Mullah who openly defies the whole railway organisation is the man he learns to respect and fear." Home Department, Bengal Selections, January to June 1922 in file no. 109 of 1922 Archives of Contemporary History, JNU, New Delhi.

⁵¹ There is a very illuminating cartoon "Mahanti Leela" (published in Ganga, November 1930) suggesting how a sadhu only cared for his ganja and lewd gaze upon women.

⁵² For the issue of gradual 'secularisation' of Congress (in terms of distancing itself from 'communally vitiated messages) from 1923-24 onwards see Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, New Delhi, 1992.

Articles

Urbanisation, Gender and the Informal Labour Sector in Africa



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Abstract

Urbanisation as a strategy of development has a differential impact on men and women. These differences are particularly accentuated by the peripheral nature of African urbanisation. One of the regrettable impacts of contemporary urbanisation in Africa is its ability to undermine women's traditional spheres of power and influence, while at the same time creating new conditions for their further dependence. The informal sector as a social and economic category is one such condition. Limited by the stringent requirements and gender segregation current within the formal sector, women have turned to the informal sector, as a survival strategy within the urban socio-economic milieu. However, informal sector work offers only slight relief to women from their grinding poverty. Informal women workers are subject to double exploitation. First, as a proletarian group within the informal sector, which is characterised by low wages, low productivity and precarious working conditions. Second, as women, a gender that occupies a subordinate position in the gender order in society. For even within the informal sector, women are still discriminated against, in terms of wages and other facilities that would otherwise enhance their productivity and socio-economic status. This paper assesses women's activities in the urban informal sector and observes that the regulatory and policy environment has been hostile to these activities.

Introduction

Prior to the penetration of Africa by western capital, with its adjunct urbanisation, pre-colonial Africa had its own type of urbanisation. Urbanisation in this context was characterised by equality of access to the means of production. Hence, the size and composition of cities were determined by the surpluses generated from production and these surpluses were accessible to all the urban dwellers.¹ However, colonialism brought in its wake a different form of urbanisation, which has been growing at an accelerating rate ever since. Presently, Africa's urban population is growing at the rate of 4.7 percent annually with an estimated 35 percent of the population residing in the urban areas.² This growth rate has been particularly accentuated by the continuing 'urban bias' in the distribution of government and private investments.

Part of the socio-economic manifestations of contemporary urbanisation is an increase in productivity per worker and levels of income in general, and a shift from subsistence and pre-capitalist production to commercialised, surplus production. This tends to create opportunities for employment and the achievement of 'the good life'. A consequence of these actual or perceived opportunities is the

excessive migration of people from rural to urban areas. However, the opportunities created by urbanisation are unequally shared amongst the various strata of the urban population. This is due to the nature of third world urban centres, which are often 'over-urbanised'.³ This acts as an impediment to formal wage employment, thus resulting in surplus urban labour and a basic trait of this surplus labour is that it is largely unskilled and unemployable.

From this perspective, urbanisation as a strategy of development, within peripheral capitalist states, generates and accentuates many of the contradictions it was supposed to solve, and women as producers and consumers both in the rural and urban areas have increasingly become victims of these contradictions. In fact, the inequities generated by urbanisation have a differential impact on both men and women as social categories. Women become the victims of urbanisation as their status declines with their diminished productive role in the transition to an urban economy based on wage labour.

However, women in the urban centres have refused to become passive recipients of change. Guided by decisions that are sometimes rational and sometimes irrational, they

have made the most out of their underprivileged situations. Women have turned to the exploited and subordinated urban informal sector for employment as a survival strategy. This paper aims at analysing the economic survival strategies adopted by women in the urban socio-economic milieu and their role in enhancing or otherwise, women's socio-economic well being.

The paper consists of five parts including the introduction. Part two deals with conceptual clarifications. While part three analyses women's income generating activities within the urban informal sector. Part four assesses the policy and regulatory environment and their impact on women's activities. Part five concludes the paper.

Conceptual clarifications: Urbanisation

Although the urban question constitutes one of the most persistent socio-economic and political problems of the third world, scholars and practitioners are yet to agree on a common 'definition' of the concept. There is a divergence of views with regards to its meaning. In the literature of third world urban studies, such concepts as 'urbanisation', 'urban-growth', 'urban processes', 'urbanism', are constantly

¹ A. L. Mabogunje, *Urbanisation in Nigeria*, University Press, London, 1968. For example, the Yoruba cities of pre-colonial Africa, which were established based on trade, and all the city dwellers had access to the surpluses generated from trade.

² S. O. Akinboye, "The Socio-Political Implications of Urbanisation" in M. A. Adejube (ed.), *Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Development in Nigeria, 1950-1999*, Concept Pub. Ltd., Lagos, 2004, p.154.

³ United Nations, *World Population, Environment and Development*, New York, 2001, p. 64. Also, the location of third world urban centers within third world economies, which are unstable due to their peripheral location in the global capitalist system has further affected their abilities to generate employment.

Articles

conflated.

For demographers, the population size constitutes the yardstick for measuring urbanisation. Thus, for them, urbanisation is a process of growing population concentration, whereby, the proportion of total population which is classified as urban is increasing in comparison to that of the rural.⁴ This figure however, varies depending on the country. For example, Nigeria uses 20,000, USA, 2,500, while Canada uses 1000 and India 5000.

Economists, on the other hand, define urbanisation from the perspective of the far-reaching economic transformations that occur as a result of the congregation of a large number of persons within a limited space. Thus, for them, urbanisation is essentially the product of capitalist development and expansion.⁵

However, from a sociological perspective, urbanisation is seen as a social process whereby people acquire both material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originate in or are distinctive characteristics of the city.⁶ Thus Wirth speaks of urbanisation in terms of the cumulative accentuation of characteristics distinctive of the mode of life associated with the growth of cities.⁷ While Castells interprets the phenomenon in terms of the 'social production of spatial forms'.⁸

Gender

While sex, that is being male or female, is biologically determined, gender on the other hand is the social conception of the expectations and behaviour considered appropriate for those identified as male and female. Hence, there are male roles and female roles. However, most cultures tend to assign higher values to male roles, while female roles are undervalued.⁹ The result of this devaluation of female roles is the marginalisation of women in all spheres of society. And this marginalisation is reflected in

terms of differential economic benefits, dependent relations and social inferiority.

Informal Labour Sector

The informal sector as a social and economic category arose in response to the capitalist penetration of Africa, as both the formal and informal sectors developed as by-products of colonialism.¹⁰ However, as an academic concept of analysis, it has attracted more theoretical debate than empirical studies.¹¹ The thrust of this debate centres on its definition and scope. Till date, the definition of the informal sector as a concept has remained elusive. This is due to the high level of heterogeneity in the sector, as the informal sector constitutes a complex of productive and reproductive processes, which cannot be captured easily in a single definition. Similarly, it is difficult to establish the heuristic boundaries between the formal and informal sectors, as individuals do oscillate between the two. However, despite its dominant presence in the third world, the informal sector is not restricted to third world economies, as fifteen percent of employment in fifteen European countries and twentyfive percent of the total employment in the United States is in the informal sector.¹²

The first attempt at defining the informal sector was given by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its report on economic activities in Kenya. The ILO simply identified certain traits that characterise the informal sector. These are— ease of entry; reliance on indigenous resources; family ownership of enterprise; small-scale operations; labour intensive and adapted technology; skills acquired mainly outside the formal system of education; and unregistered and competitive markets.¹³

Hart in his seminal work on the informal sector identified informal

activities as all the economic activities carried out, outside the formal employment sector. He drew a typology of two sets of activities within the sector— legitimate activities, for example— wage labour, trading, artisans, etc; and illegitimate activities such as prostitution, theft, hired assassins, child trafficking, etc.¹⁴ Scheingart on the other hand defines informal activities as those activities that face a shortage of capital, use relatively rudimentary technology and often find themselves cut off from institutional channels of finances. According to him, their emergence is a consequence of natural population growth and the influx of migrant workers, who cannot be absorbed by the formal sector in the urban economy.¹⁵

Datta however, argues that given the heterogeneity of the economy of most third world urban centres, it is meaningless to try and capture such heterogeneity, by introducing two distinct sectors of productive activities viz formal and informal, as close interactions and overlapping between people engaged in these activities make such a distinction meaningless.¹⁶ Olurode also corroborates Datta's assertion. He argues that the distinction between the formal and informal sectors is merely a myth, artificial and academic. According to him, contrary to popular characterisation such as the ILO's (as earlier discussed in the paper), the informal sector is highly organised and regulated with a high level of discipline for erring members. Olurode also argues that some individuals do operate within the two sectors simultaneously. For example, formal sector workers such as teachers, clerks, nurses, etc., who are engaged in informal services, while some even use official hours/infrastructures for their informal activities and vice versa. Thus, he concludes that rather than drawing a demarcation between the two sectors, they

⁴ D. Slater, "Capitalism and Urbanisation at the Periphery: Problems of Interpretation and Analysis with Reference to Latin America", in D. Drakakis-Smith (ed.), *Urbanization in the Developing World*, Croomhelm, London, 1986, p. 8; See also, F. D. Oyekanmi, "Current Themes in Population Studies" in L. Olurode and O. Soyombo, (eds.), *Sociology for Beginners*, John West Pub., Lagos, p. 261.

⁵ B. Roberts, "Cities of Peasants", in Drakakis-Smith, (ed.), *Urbanisation*, p. 11; see also, M. A. Adejube, "Industrialisation, Urbanization and Development in Nigeria: An Introduction", in M. A. Adejube (ed.), *Industrialisation, Urbanisation*, p. 14.

⁶ K. Little, *Urbanization as a Social Process: An Essay on Movement and Change in Contemporary Africa*, Wiley, New York, 1974, p. 7.

⁷ L. Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life" in Max Weber, *The City*, Heineman, London, 1958.

⁸ M. Castells, *The Urban Question*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977, p. 7.

⁹ F. D. Oyekanmi, "Gender Issues in Globalisation: An Overview of the Situation in Africa" in F. D. Oyekanmi, (ed.) *Development Crisis and Social Change*, Department of Sociology, University of Lagos, Lagos, 2005, p. 154.

¹⁰ L. Olurode, "Nigeria's Urban Informal Sector: Globalisation and Poverty Alleviation Strategies" in Adejube, (ed.) *Industrialization*, p.278.

¹¹ A. Gonzaleze, "Informal Sector and Survival Strategies: A Historical Approach" in S. Datta (ed.), *Third World Urbanization, Reprisals and New Perspectives*, Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Stockholm, 1990, p. 90.

¹² International Labour Office, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, ILO, Geneva, 2002, p. 20.

¹³ International Labour Office, *Employment, Incomes and Equity: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya*, ILO, Geneva, 1972.

¹⁴ K. Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana", *Modern African Studies*, Vol. 2, 1, March 1973, pp. 118-225.

¹⁵ M. Scheingart, "Production and Reproduction Practices in the Informal Sector: The Case of Mexico" in S. Datta (ed.), *Third World Urbanization*, p. 106.

¹⁶ S. Datta, "Introduction" in S. Datta (ed.), *Third World Urbanisation*, p. 15.

¹⁷ L. Olurode, "Nigeria's Urban Informal Sector: Globalisation and Poverty Alleviation Strategies", in M.A. Adejube (ed.) *Industrialization*,

Articles

should however, be viewed as both sides of the same coin with emphasis being on their mutual compatibility rather than contradiction.¹⁷

The position of this paper, however, is to analyse the informal sector from the perspective of survival strategies adopted by poor women within the urban socio-economic milieu. All these strategies, share one common characteristic, which is the fact that they are not restricted to any specific sphere of the urban economy, for in their struggle for survival, poor urban women do shuffle between the spheres of production, distribution and consumption. Thus, by problematising the role and position of poor women in the urban productive and reproductive spheres, it is our belief that this paper will throw more light on the contradictory reality of African urban centres.

Women's Activities in the Urban Informal Sector

The increase in the economically active urban population, coupled with inadequate absorption capacity of the formal sector has forced a significant proportion of the economically active population to seek work in informal activities. Similarly, for many urban wage earners, poverty is ever present and the informal sector provides opportunities of improving their real incomes. Thus, the informal sector has generated employment for a large number of the lowest income groups.

According to the United Nations, between the 1970s and 1990s, employment in the informal sector in Africa grew so fast that it came to account, on an average, for three-fifths of the urban labour force. For example, in 1992 Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, had sixty-nine percent, fifty-three percent, and fifty-one percent respectively of their urban employment in the informal sector. In fact, in sub-Saharan Africa alone, the informal sector created six million jobs between 1980 and 1986, compared with the 500,000 created in the formal sector over the same period.¹⁸

Currently, the informal sector accounts for one half to three quarters of employment in the third world, with North Africa having forty-eight percent; sub-Saharan Africa seventy-two percent; Latin America fifty-one percent and Asia sixty-five percent.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this employment is characterised by intensive labour input but low productivity and wages, employment instability, as well as substandard and precarious working

conditions.

Women are represented disproportionately in the informal sector, as they constitute the bulk of the population left out of the formal occupational sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, eighty-four percent of the female labour force is engaged in the informal sector compared with sixty-three percent of male, although the figure is slightly lower for North Africa where only forty-three percent of women are in the informal sector.²⁰ Statistics have shown that between 1991 and 1997, women in Benin, Chad, Guinea and Mali, constituted ninety-seven percent, ninety-seven percent, eighty-four percent, and ninety-six percent respectively of the informal sector labour force.²¹ However, it is very difficult to establish the heuristic boundaries between women's formal and informal job activities, especially at the low income and productivity levels, as women formal sector workers also engage in informal activities simultaneously. Similarly, women participants in the urban informal sector do not constitute a homogenous category, as the informal sector incorporates a variety of modes of work, ranging from regular wage labour in micro/small enterprises, casual wage labour, unremunerated labour, house/out work, to self-employment. These have given rise to significant variations in employment patterns, working conditions and wages. Below is a further analysis of the various modes of women's work in the sector.²²

Regular Wage Labour

These are informal activities in which participants receive a regular weekly/monthly wage for work done or services rendered. For example, domestic servants (who do constitute an extremely vulnerable group amongst informal sector workers as employment is often linked to paternalism and naked exploitation), workers in micro/small enterprises such as trading shops, hair saloons, restaurants, tailoring shops, etc.

Casual Wage Workers

These comprise of two variants, first, wage earners not regularly attached to any employer or enterprise but employed on a day-to-day basis and paid daily wages without any social security in case of an accident on the job. For example, casual workers on construction sites. Second, temporary wageworkers, who are hired by

multinational capitalist firms on a temporary or time-limited basis. Employment in this context is characterised by low wages, lack of social security and other benefits, as well as adverse working conditions.

House/Out Work

This involves the production of goods/services under subcontract terms for large capitalist firms by workers who work at home and are paid at piece-work rates. For example, textile and footwear industries. This mode of work is equally characterised by the lack of social security and other benefits. This mode is particularly common in northern Africa, where women (Muslims) are in seclusion.

Unremunerated Labour

These are people not remunerated for goods produced or services rendered. For example, apprentices in hair saloons, tailoring shops, trading stores as well as unpaid family workers (people who assist household member in carrying out market oriented activities without remuneration.)

Self-Employed

These consist of two types, with each type being characterised by diverse activities. First, the own-account enterprise where women are mostly engaged in commercial trading encompassing the sales of almost every kind of products varying from the control of extensive volumes (large wholesale/retail stores) to those which are almost unbelievably small (street hawkers/vendors). According to the International Labour Office, in West Africa, women constitute sixty to eighty percent of the urban work force in trading and dominate the open market and petty trading.²³ It also includes women who render such services as prostitution, drug trafficking, child/girl trafficking, etc. Women in this category are subjected to all forms of abuse and exploitation, such as being used for ritual murder, rendering services without payment, concealment of drugs in private parts, powerless to negotiate safe sex, etc. Second, employers' enterprises, which vary from those rendering services (hair saloons, restaurants, tailoring, trading stores, etc), to those engaged in petty production such as soap making, weaving, pottery, etc.

The full extent of women/men's participation in the informal sector and the value of their contribution to production is still unknown, as to date,

p.278.

¹⁸ United Nations, *The Advancement of Women*, New York, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women, 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*, New York, 2005, p. 41.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ United Nations, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, New York, 2000, p. 122.

²² International Labour Office, *Women and Men*, ILO, Geneva, 2002.

²³ International Labour Office, *Gender, Poverty and Employment: Turning Capabilities into Entitlement*, ILO, Geneva, 2000, p. 13.

²⁴ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women*, p.13.

Articles

relatively few countries have comprehensive statistical data on the informal economy.²⁴ However, the informal sector is estimated to generate up to a third of the local wealth in many third world countries.²⁵ Of course, since women constitute the bulk of the informal labour force, they have a huge share in this contribution. For example, in Benin, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Chad, women's informal sector activities from 1992 to 1998 is estimated to have contributed fifty-one percent, forty-six percent, sixty-one percent, and sixty-two percent respectively to the Gross Domestic Product.²⁶ However, despite this huge contribution, women informal workers are concentrated in the more precarious forms of informal employment, where earnings are the most unreliable and the most meagre.²⁷

A key factor in enhancing productivity in any economy is the regulatory and policy environment. The next section of the paper therefore assesses government's policies and their impact on the informal sector.

Government Policy and the Informal Sector

A key factor in informal sector operations is the regulatory and policy environment (local, national and international). Although both formal and informal sectors are usually subject to constraints emanating from unfavourable policy and regulatory environment, however, the informal sector is perhaps a greater victim of unfavourable policy. For example, government's development policy in African urban centres, normally excludes a wide range of informal activities, which are nothing more than the expression of the socio-economic reality of these centres. Informal activities such as street trading, market sites, motor garages, etc. are persistently viewed as constituting a nuisance, ostensibly because they pose a threat to a faithful execution of the centre's master plan and the general environmental outlook.

This attitude has resulted in majority of the operators in this sector being subjected to frequent official harassment and continuous insecurity, as official policies towards these persons range from eviction, fines and demolitions to partial acceptance of their existence, so long as they conform to a plethora of rules, sanctions and controls.

Despite this harsh operating environment, the informal sector is quite resilient and has survived. Of course, a consequence of this survival is the constant victimisation, and harassments of the most under privileged sections of the urban population, who have no option than to engage in these activities for their survival. These acts of frequent eviction, confiscation, destruction of goods and infrastructures, resettlement and other forms of disruption, further jeopardise the limited potential of the poor to save and accumulate in order to increase their productive base. Of course, women are the worst affected, since they are disproportionately represented in this sector. This scenario is a clear manifestation of the contradictions of African urban centres. Urbanisation, which is an offshoot of modernisation, is a strategy of development, whose essence is to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality. However, urbanisation in African countries, rather than alleviate poverty and reduce inequality has further accentuated it.

Similarly, the persistent international economic crisis in the past three decades had a devastating effect on the economies and social structures of many developing countries and the poor are the most hurt by this crisis and women of course have been particularly affected because many of the poor are women. In response to this crisis, economic adjustment and stabilisation measures such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) have been implemented with the aid of international institutions, to aid the recovery of these economies. However, SAP, although apparently gender-neutral, has demanded more women than men. The neo-classical economic themes incorporated in SAP packages have been found to be particularly detrimental to female labour force participation.²⁸ In fact, SAP has placed the heaviest burden on poor women, who earn less, own less and control less.

SAP policies resulted in cuts in governmental expenditure on social services (food, fuel subsidies, health, education, etc), falling wages and rising prices reducing women's spending power. Yet they must cope daily with the sheer survival needs of their families. Thus, there is a gender bias in the distribution of the social costs of SAP. Also, the decline of formal sector

employment and income, an aftermath of SAP, has an impact on the informal sector activities of women. Decreasing family income tends to increase the time women spend on unpaid domestic work and the financial cuts in social services add to their overwork.²⁹ These new constraints have worsened existing inequalities, which further victimise women.

Similarly, the commercial trading sector, which is the main employer of women in the informal sector, is saturated with the mass arrival of retrenched workers from other sectors (public and organised private) and all other persons looking for avenues of improving their real income. These and the reduction in the purchasing power of households have resulted in a fall in the demand for goods and services and consequently, low turnover for women. Thus SAP has adversely affected the informal sector as an alternative source of urban employment in Africa.

Economic globalisation, which implies an end to the compartmentalisation of economies at the international level, has not benefited Africa, which is a marginal player in the international trade scene with an estimated share of one to two percent.³⁰ Globalisation has had a differential impact on women and men's economic activities, as changes in international markets have interacted with gender-based pattern of economic activity to produce differential effects by sector and by region in their economic position. The traditional gender disparities in wages appear to be widening in globalised economies.

This is a result of the cumulative effects of persistent discriminatory practices, a deepening polarisation of skilled and unskilled labour with women being caught in the low skilled/low paid job trap.³¹ However, some scholars like Olurode have put up a case, for the possibility of using the informal sector as a strategy for poverty alleviation in a globalised world.³²

Our submission in this paper is that the informal sector as it is presently structured only promises slight relief from grinding poverty, as the sector is enmeshed in a complex web of exploitative relationships that favour the developed capitalist countries at the expense of their developing counterparts. Thus, women in general

²⁵ J. Vickers, "Women and the World Economic Crisis", Zed Books, London, 1991, p. 25.

²⁶ United Nations, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, New York, 2000, p. 122.

²⁷ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women, 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*, New York, 2005, p. 8.

²⁸ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ International Labour Office, *African Employment Report*, Regional Office for Africa, 1995, p. 81

³¹ International Labour Office Gender, *Poverty and Employment: Turning Capabilities into Entitlement*, Geneva, 2000, p. 15.

³² L. Olurode, "Nigeria's Urban Informal Sector: Globalisation and Poverty Alleviation Strategies" in M.A. Adejube (ed.) *Industrialisation, Urbanisation*.

Articles

and especially those in the informal sector seem to be losing out in the globalised economy, as the gains of globalisation for others, means further pauperisation of women.

Conclusion

Contemporary urbanisation in Africa has ushered in radical changes in the organisation and performance of work. It has resulted in greater competition for work outside the home between men and women as well as an intensification of gender struggles and contradictions within the household. Women, in response to these challenges have turned to the urban informal sector for employment. Participation in the informal sector has provided women with a source of living, while allowing flexibility of time and space for reproductive chores.

However, these earnings have only provided a slight relief from grinding poverty.

Women's informal activities have been stalled by the contradictory mode of African urbanisation, which is peripheral in nature. Hence, women and other workers in the informal sector are outside the realm of conventional social protection schemes such as leave and leave grants, maternity leave, gratuity, pension, sick leave, job security, medical bills, etc. Also they have limited access to resources, information, products, markets, credit, infrastructure, training facilities, technical expertise and improved technologies.

Although there have been interventions by government and other devel-

opment agencies to help alleviate and improve these conditions, these interventions are merely palliatives. This is because there can be no meaningful change in the condition of women in the informal sector, without the transformation of the entire socio-economic system within which women work. Doing this however, prejudices the interests of those who benefit from their availability and insecurity and is thus prone to resistance, as women's subordination and marginalisation in the informal sector is reproduced through a dialectical interaction between economics, politics and culture on local, national and international levels.

Articles

Chargola Exodus and Collective Action In The Colonial Tea Plantations Of Assam*



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Abstract

Chargola exodus is considered to be one of the striking examples of workers protests in colonial India. This paper traces the actions of these workers in the tea gardens of Assam in their attempt to establish the legitimacy of their demands. The protest against low wages took a more violent turn with the workers coming together as one united front to face the oppression of their colonial masters. The image of the Mahatma played a significant part in propelling these workers to wrest their demands.

The Chargola exodus of 1921 is one of the most celebrated episodes of 'mass resistance' to plantation systems operational in Assam during the colonial period.¹ Early in May 1921, plantation workers, popularly known as *coolies*, "struck" work in the Chargola valley² in opposition to the authorities' refusal to grant them better wages. This was followed by a desertion of the plantations by the *coolies*, *en masse*. They resolved to go back to their home districts, chanting victory cries to Mahatma Gandhi and claiming to have served under his orders. Having started from one or two gardens, by the middle of June, the entire Chargola valley looked deserted, with two gardens reported to have 'lost' virtually their entire labour force, and on an average, most gardens had suffered losses of around thirty to sixty percent.³

The *coolies* of Chargola Valley marched right through Karimganj– the subdivisional headquarters, continuing their onward journey either by train or on foot, and also by steamer they made their way back to their home districts. The Government of Assam and Bengal when called upon to intervene in this extraordinary situation refused to 'meddle' in relations

between 'labour and capital'. Local volunteer groups and district level Congress workers did mobilise their resources, and came to the aid of the *coolies*, in the form of food and medical supplies.

By the middle of the first week, nearly a thousand *coolies*, from Anipur, Mookamcherra and Damcherra had already left their gardens, and *coolies* of Balacherra too were reportedly on strike. The local planter community was extremely anxious. They had warrants issued on certain *coolies* who had been under agreement and a few of them were in fact arrested. However these *coolies* were soon bailed out and received as heroes by the Congress non-co-operators in Karimganj, and on the advice of local officials further issue of warrants was stopped.⁴ An emergency meeting of the managers of the Chargola valley plantations and government officials was called on 6 May.⁵ The mutually profitable nexus that the planter community and the official machinery were part of, was clearly reflected in their getting together and devising a common course of action. Both expressed grave concern over the unrest among the *coolies* and feared more strikes would take place in the

forthcoming days, and that these would be increasingly violent. There was a general consensus that the wages were too low and it was decided to offer new rates, which amounted to an increase of thirty to fifty percent, to apparently quell the disquiet among the *coolies* and check the exodus.⁶ This was not received very well by the higher echelons of the powerful and highly organised tea lobbies. Representatives of the Indian Tea Association, from Calcutta and the Surma Valley met the Governor and Chief Secretary of Assam on 17 May and raised this issue, maintaining that if the wage increase was allowed, the gardens would be compelled to close down.⁷



Meanwhile, the 'non-interventionist'

* This is a selection from a much larger work by the author. The space constraints of the e-magazine do not, unfortunately permit the full breadth of the issues explored by the author to be presented here. We hope to complete the exercise at a later date.

¹ Rana Pratap Behal generally talks about the "evolving" modes of labour protest in the post World War I period especially the predominance of *strikes* showing a greater degree of organisation and political consciousness in comparison to the earlier forms of protest, shown by the changed terminologies by the officials to describe these activities. Chargola exodus he argues was significant, as it obviously had connections with the non-cooperation movement though economic factors were predominant. However his focus being the Assam Valley does not allow him to go into the matter extensively. Rana Pratap Behal, 'Forms of Labour Protests in Assam Valley Plantations', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XX, No.4, 26 January 1985.

² Chargola valley was located in the district of Sylhet in the Surma valley, one of the two valleys in which tea was commercially cultivated in Assam.

³ *Fortnightly report of second half of May for the province of Assam; Communiqué issued by Government of Assam on 5th June 1921*. Reproduced in Appendix II of *Report of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee 1921-22*, pp. 116-118; *Report on the administration of Assam for the year 1921-22*; *India Annual Register 1922* (Ed. N. N. Mitra) and P. C. Bamford, *Histories of Non cooperation and Khilafat*. Though strikes were showing a sharp upward trend in the Assam Valley plantations during this period but it did not see a mass exodus of the scale witnessed in Chargola Valley and to some extent the adjoining Longai valley area.

⁴ *Report of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee 1921-22*, p.57. (Hereafter *ALECR 1921-22*).

⁵ *Conference of Chargola Valley Tea Planters and Government officials, 6th May* (See Appendix III).

⁶ This position however was retraced by the planters during the course of the enquiry suggesting that they accepted the stand because of the awe of the officials present! *ALECR, 1921-22*, p. 12.

⁷ *Fortnightly Report 2nd half of May for the Province of Assam and Conference of Chargola Valley Tea Planters and Government officials, 6th May*.

Articles

stand of the government of Assam and Bengal on the repatriation of *coolies* was being severely criticised by the nationalist press of Calcutta, which had been reporting the turn of events rather carefully.⁸ The situation became all the more critical especially after the 'Gurkha Outrage' of 21 May, when a large number of *coolies* waiting to be repatriated were brutally assaulted by fifty men of Gurkha Rifles, under the personal supervision of the Assistant Deputy Commissioner K. C. De, at the Chandpur railway station. The official position on this incident was that a threat of cholera epidemic, due to the unsanitary conditions in the vicinity of the station, had induced the action, and force had been used "minimally". The high degree of public outrage over the incident could be gauged from the series of hartals, which followed in the wake of the event.⁹ C. F. Andrews, a close associate of Gandhi, who was on his way to Assam in fact stopped at Chandpur. He made a scathing attack on the Bengal government for not having involved itself in the repatriation of the *coolies* and for taking a pro-plantocracy stance in general.¹⁰ Even the official enquiry committee's report on the incident which had led to heated debates in the Bengal legislative assembly in July 1921, was considered by the Calcutta press as nothing but a 'white-washing' attempt. Meanwhile the situation was becoming more critical in the plantation areas with the 'strike wave' spreading to the Assam valley plantations as well. In late 1921 a Labour Enquiry Committee was instituted with J. C. Arbuthnott as the President, and various politicians, bureaucrats, tea industry representatives and missionaries on board, to understand and explain this new moment of crisis in the tea industry of Assam.¹¹

The problem of scarcity and inefficiency of the local labour as claimed by the Assam tea planters, was ameliorated by the 'magic-solution' to the labour problem for the colonial plantations increasingly from the 1860s. Their suitability for plantation work was most explicitly expressed in the racialised colonial sociology of labour, so that these

coolies were seen as innately expressing the qualities of docility and hard work, as against the Assamese locals who was understood to be lazy, indolent and addicted to smoking opium. These racial ascriptions were aimed at masking the vested interest of the plantocracy in shaping and perpetuating such identities and stereotypes. The immigrant coolie bound by a series of legislations, supposedly aimed at regulating and facilitating the supply of labour and their settlement in the plantations, actually gave rise to the system of indentured labour in the Assam Tea plantations. However even these circumstances of extreme subjugation could not ensure that the stereotypes were internalised, and subversions and challenges continuously expressed the existence of a dynamic and contested relationship.

The Chargola Exodus can therefore be an interesting site to interrogate these strategies. The various existing narratives, I will argue, are in fact clearly informed by these stereotypes of the *coolie*, although they serve different purposes in the different accounts. Moments when these identities were subverted, that is the 'exodus' making it a dynamic and contested one which can be sifted from the fragmentary primary sources on the event, is the focus and interest of this enquiry. The "moment" of collective action defying the docile apolitical stereotype, as brought out by the exodus in Chargola, being the focus stems out of such concerns. A closer look at the area of "turmoil" helps us not just question the premises of the various accounts but also informs us about the specificities of the development of the industry in Chargola as well as the labour recruitment and settlement strategies, which because of their peculiar nature opened up the possibilities of labour solidarities, modes of communication and dissemination of information critical to the collective action in the plantation set-up.

It was in a telegram dated 13 May 1921, that the Assam administration brought to the notice of the Government of India the unrest among *coolies* in Karimganj Subdivision. The

affected *coolies* were described therein as the newer recruits from the famine stricken provinces, who, feeling the pinch of 'hard times', had fallen prey to Non-Cooperation propaganda that had been doing the rounds in the village marts, *haats* and as well as the neighbouring towns.¹² The Government of India too concurred with this view, stating that "[the] trouble is economic in the main and though being exploited by politicians has probably no political complexion in the minds of the *coolies* themselves."¹³



Assam tea garden

The underlying argument in most of these accounts was that the "grim" situation would not have taken this aggravated form had it not been "exploited" by the manipulating Non-Cooperators working on the ignorant, docile yet extremely excitable *coolies*. The Labour Enquiry Committee also came to this conclusion, arguing "[that] the unrest was due to a combination of economic and political conditions, and undoubtedly the existence of economic grievances rendered *coolies* more ready to listen to the exhortations and incitements of non-cooperators and other agitators."¹⁴ The Non-Cooperators were said to have exploited their religious sensibilities and made false promises under the commands of Gandhi who was fomenting all the trouble. The officials argued that the *coolies* were made to believe that British Raj had in fact ended and that 'Gandhi Raj' had taken over; and that Gandhi had personally sent a steamer to Karimganj to take them back home where they would be given land for free. Further, the *coolies* were reportedly told that Gandhi had issued orders that they were to no longer to work for European employers and were to leave the garden *en masse* or face grave supernatural consequences!¹⁵ The assumption of complete lack of the agency on the part of the *coolie* and his falling prey to the slightest provo-

⁸ The attention that the Calcutta Press gave to this episode can be gauged from the increase in the articles published on the Assam tea gardens. See the *Report on Native Newspapers of Bengal for the years 1921 and 1922*.

⁹ There was hartal in the town of Chandpur, Karimganj and steamer strikes etc. Most significantly the "sympathetic" Assam Bengal Railway strike led by C. R. Das. For details see R. Chatterji, 'C. R. Das and the Chandpur strikes of 1921', *Bengal Past and Present*, 1974 and Dipankar Banerjee, 'Historic Assam-Bengal Railway Worker's Strike (1921): A Survey', *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Barapani, 1983.

¹⁰ CF Andrews's role in the whole incident is carefully documented in P. C. Roychoudhury, *CF Andrews: His Life and Times*, Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1971, especially Chapter IV, pp 78-95.

¹¹ The other members of the committee were Rai Bahadur Giris Chandra Nag [MLA], Major H. B. Fox [MLC], Babu Ramani Mohan Das [MLC], S. S. P. Barua [MLC], T. MacMorrin [representative of ITA], Rev. Dr. OC Williams [Medical missionary], Khan Bahadur Wali Muhammad and J. A. Dawson [bureaucrats].

¹² *Telegram from Chief Secretary of Govt of Assam to Secretary to Government of India, Home Department dated 13th May 1921*. Home Department, Political Branch, June 1921, Nos 143-146, NAI.

¹³ *Telegram from Secretary to Government of India, Home Department to Chief Secretary, Government of Assam dated 20th May, 1921*. Home Department, Political Branch, June 1921, 143-146, NAI.

¹⁴ *ALECR 1921-22*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *Evidence, ALECR, 1921-22 and P. C. Bamford, Histories of Non cooperation and Khilafat Movement*, Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1974, p. 61.

Articles

cation in the name of religion and supernatural forces is implicit in these narratives.

To establish the role of the nationalists and their emissaries in the event, the local officials were at pains to establish a chronology of their activities dating back to the annual meeting of Surma Valley Conference—a major agency of nationalist politics in the region, held in September 1920.¹⁶ The Non-Cooperation meetings held in May 1921 at Ratabari in the Chargola valley, which was the focal point of the exodus, acquired particular significance in this explanatory strategy. *Coolies* were understood as having been persuaded by the circulation of religious exhortations like '*dharam ka bat hoga: sab kohi ah ke suno*' ('speeches will be delivered about religious matters; all attend and listen') to attend this meeting, which finally boasted of an attendance of around four hundred tea *coolies* from all the nearby gardens.¹⁷ In the first meeting, held on 1 May, apart from the speeches made by local nationalist leaders on politically charged themes of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat wrongs, one Hindi speaker Radhakrishna Pande specifically addressing the *coolies* bitterly criticised the managers of the European owned gardens comparing them with *Shaitan* (Satan). He directed the *coolies* to ask for higher daily wages of 12 annas for men and 8 annas for women, and 3 annas 6 pies for boys, claiming it to be *Gandhi ka hookum* ('Gandhi's orders'). In the next meeting held on 2 May, the demand was reduced to 8 annas and 6 annas, but now the *coolies* were urged to cease work like the *coolies* of Khoreal Tea Estate, if their claims were not met.¹⁸ On the very next day, *coolies* of adjoining Anipur Tea Estate numbering in excess of seven and half hundred stopped work, and started moving out of the gardens with shouts of *Gandhi Mahatma ki Jai*.¹⁹ The Subdivisional officer of Karimganj where Ratabari was located, in his testimony to labour enquiry committee talked on these lines:

I am of the opinion that it [the exodus] was mainly the result of the efforts of the political agitators.

I believe that for some time before this event happened there was some sort of propaganda work in the neighbourhood of the tea gardens carried on by the political agitators in the villages, and matters came to a head when the meeting at Ratabari was held.²⁰

The managers and planters interviewed by the Enquiry Committee underplayed the economic sluggishness of the industry arguing that the concessions offered more than compensated for it. The political meetings and the interference in the garden *hats* by the Non-Cooperators were of particular concern to them, and a constant refrain was, 'it was only after the Non-Cooperators came, did trouble begin at my garden.' Managers of some gardens in Chargola valley who 'lost' *coolies* during the time of the exodus, interpreted this as a new and big move on the part of Non-Cooperators, ordinary strikes on other gardens having failed.²¹

The Anglo-Indian press, which acted as the mouthpiece of the colonial regime was engaged in a 'verbal' battle against the Non-Cooperators and their "ringleader" Gandhi. The middle class public opinion were sought to be impressed upon, about the malicious intent of these people who were of late gaining a lot of attention and popularity.

The *Englishman* writes in this tone:

Events in East Bengal, as in other parts of India, are now tending in precisely the direction in which it has been forecast would go unless the Government took steps to combat the cancer of non co-operation.... Agents were employed to spread those sections of the population who were most likely to be infected... there are, for instance, a great many tea districts where the labour has not yet been exploited by the agitators to the extent that the people in the Chargola valley have suffered.²²

In a similar vein the *Statesman* of 1921 writes:

Upon those heedless and malicious agitators who fooled these poor people rests the terrible responsibility for all their sufferings.²³

These accounts in order to establish

the "true" nature of Congress activity were using the stereotype of ignorant *coolies* falling prey to motivated objectives of the wily politicians. Which is why they read these strikes as "manufactured" and as a ready "weapon" against Europeans and the Government.²⁴

Chargola Valley was located in the Bengali majority district of Sylhet which was transferred to Assam when the latter was made a Chief Commissionership in 1874. This decision to club Sylhet with Assam remained an issue of great controversy as the local native intelligentsia cried themselves hoarse about having been attached to a backward province simply for commercial reasons, and with which they anyway did not share any linguistic or cultural affiliations. Interestingly however, this unification did not define the trajectories that the "nascent" nationalist movement was taking shape in Assam proper, and in Sylhet, district. The Assam Association, which was slowly emerging, as the major platform of middle class nationalist politics in Assam valley was largely absent in Sylhet, and the latter's representatives were sent to the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee.²⁵

The Surma Valley Association emerged as one of the main agencies of nationalist politics and was particularly active in the Non-Cooperation period along with the Muhammedan Conference articulating the Khilafatist sentiments of a substantial Muslim population. Following the special session of Congress held in Calcutta in 1920, where the programme of Non-Cooperation was adopted, the Surma Valley Association summoned a special session of the Surma Valley Political Conference, on 19-20 September 1920, held in Sylhet itself. The Conference endorsed the Congress programme and adopted the methods of non-violent Non-Cooperation for themselves.

The recommended plan of action was a refusal to serve under European planters and merchants; gradual withdrawal of those who are already in such service; non-acceptance of briefs by lawyers and non-official Europeans; refusal on the part of the people to

¹⁶ ALECR 1921-22, p. 14.

¹⁷ Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 63.

¹⁸ ALECR, 1921-22, p. 10 and Communiqué issued by Government of Assam.

¹⁹ Evidence, ALECR, 1921-22, p. 61.

²⁰ W. R. P. Gunnery, Manager, Chargola Division, Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 57.

²¹ The *Englishman*, 9 June 1921.

²² The *Statesman*, 7 June, 1921.

²³ J. H. Broomfield in his study of "elite" politics in twentieth century Bengal a work in the 'high traditions' of the Cambridge school claims that a group of Congressmen from Calcutta moved into the tea gardens of Assam and started an agitation for higher wages. However on the refusal of the planters to concede to these demands the *coolies* accepted the offer of Non-Cooperators to arrange for transport back home. However stranded in Chandpur, the *coolies* realised that the scheming politicians took them for a ride. J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1968, pp. 215-16.

²⁴ Santanu Dutta, "The Surma Valley Associations and the Nationalist Upsurge", in Arun Bhuyan (ed.) *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam*, Guwahati, 2000, p. 125.

Articles

grant or renew leases of land to them; immediate withdrawal from any kind of association with them and abstention from all gatherings in which they were invited. It is very apparent from the resolutions and the demands that it had a very distinctive 'middle-class' tinge and appeal. But in the whole process of 'nationalising' the *coolie* exodus, this particular meeting is seen as having been very significant because of the 'anti-planter' stand that was taken, which, it was argued, had a lasting impression on the *coolie* mind. A nationalist account unambiguously draws up this connection:

The impact of the programme, of the Association, was felt in the British tea gardens of the valley and the tea garden labourers, in Chargola valley and Longai valley, of Karimganj, were encouraged to leave en masse, their gardens, in 1921.²⁶

Ironically, while in the accounts of the local officials this conference was seen as the fountainhead of the "evil" spreading in the gardens of Assam, the nationalist accounts parallel this approach, but attach positive liberating qualities with the all the events. The nationalist press of Calcutta saw the exodus of coolies as a confirmation of the awakening impact of the Non-Cooperation movement. They com-

prehended the situation as evidence of the coolie finally breaking his chains of servitude and ending the long years of exploitation to joining his fellow countrymen on the road to freedom. In one stroke not only had the specificity and novelty of the situation been flattened out but also the entire history of resistance of *coolies* was obliterated and said to have been simply another manifestation of the nationalist freedom struggle— a legacy of the Non-Cooperation movement. *Liberty*, a newspaper of Calcutta writes in its 23 May 1921 issue:

The non co-operation movement caught the fancy of poor *coolies* even and they have emigrated from the land of hardships. The exploiters tried to keep them under subjection but they could not prevail upon the ignorant this time.²⁷

The use of terms like 'awakening', 'catching the fancy' etc to assess the impact of nationalist ideas in the official accounts also denies agency to the *coolies* and suggests an acute passivity in negotiating with these ideas. *Servant*, another Calcutta paper writes in the 19 May 1921 issue:

Reports that on their way to Karimganj uttered an exclamation wishing victory to Mahatma Gandhi... unconsciously imbibed the

spirit of Non-Co-operation.²⁸

It wasn't simply a case of representing the poor *coolies* but also claiming to be the voice of the voiceless and in the final analysis, his last and only resort. Like in the official-planter narratives that sought to protect it from the scheming politicians and his evil designs, a case is being made in these narratives to launch a struggle on behalf of the *coolies* who were seen as lacking the faculty to comprehend his/her interests and fight for them himself. *Vishwamitra*, a Calcutta daily writes:

Though not directly involved, Mr. Gandhi has by giving a severe shock awakened those who were asleep. If Mr. Gandhi's efforts had not created a consciousness in the country, the *coolie* would not have found their sufferings unbearable and given up their work.²⁹

In C. F. Andrews's account too, the *coolies* of Chandpur are seen as epitomising the 'poor' of India, seeped in ignorance and oppression, and seeking liberation in the person of Gandhi! Highly stereotyped images are thus invoked in his account as well to bring home the argument of a nationalist 'awakening' of not just the *coolies*, but by logic of extension— all the people of India.



Map of Assam

²⁶ Santanu Dutta, "The Surma Valley", pp. 130-31.

²⁷ Report on the Native Newspaper of Bengal for the week ending 21st May 1921

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Special Feature

The Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (PILER)

On the way to commemorate its silver jubilee in 2007 PILER remains dedicated to the cause of supporting a democratic and effective labour movement together with mobilisation for social justice. Its activities are increasingly directed at informal sector workers, for mobilisation and organisation of their communities by stressing on rights-based development. PILER strategies reflect a commitment to universal rights, stressing the essential complementarities of economic, social, cultural and political dimensions.

Faculties

PILER's Director is Karamat Ali. The Executive Committee and Managing Board is headed by Justice (Retd) Rasheed Razvi as the President. Members include M. Tahseen from South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAPP-PK) and Dr Saba Khattak from the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). The Research group is managed by Senior Associates Zulfiqar Shah and Zeenat Hisam including A. Ercelawn as Senior Fellow. The professional staff, largely from Karachi and Lahore, includes twenty men and women having post-graduate degrees. They are now organised into four groups- Research, Education and Training (RET), Advocacy and Networking (AN), Organisation and Mobilisation (OM), and Administration and Finance (AF).

Funds

PILER is funded by many international bodies like NOVIB and FNV from Netherlands, with additional support from Stichting De Zaire (Netherlands) and Frere des Hommes (France). Currently funding is provided by Anti-Slavery International (UK) and Trocaire (Ireland) for work with and on bonded workers and by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and the International Dalit Solidarity Network for works on Dalit issues.

In the recent past the EU provided substantial funds. A notable contribution also came from the Dutch government. CIDA and the ILO have supported preparation and dissemination of several studies on labour issues, most recently on labour standards for small enterprises.

Endeavours

Training at PILER is undertaken with the primary purpose of supporting and advocating social justice, including critical discussions of government policies and proposals. Across two decades, hundreds of workers have been part of such training programmes at PILER focusing on training of trainers so that partners can run their own training sessions. Recent training includes sessions across Pakistan with workers and employers on potential labour protection through codes of conduct for trade. Skill development centres for women have been initiated for families affected by the 2005 Earthquake, with plans to develop cooperatives around the centres.

In the field of research PILER functions through extensive interactions with activists and academics in national, South Asian and international arena for human rights in general and labour rights in particular. Intensive inter-actors include partners in the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) and in several newly formed national unions- of workers in textiles, construction, transport, and light engineering. Both the PFF and the latter have benefited by support of EU through a Project on Strengthening Vulnerable Workers.

Major Ventures

A major venture in 2006 has been PILER's deep involvement in organising the World Social Forum, Karachi. The Forum brought together thousands of Pakistanis along with hundreds of international activists for discussions on a range of issues. Some years earlier PILER had also organised a large South Asian Conference on Labour for Peace. Recent contributions to Workshops and Conferences include participation in a wide network for issues in poverty and labour. These include SDPI, Action Aid, ILO, Global Labour Forum, Child Workers in Asia, Anti-Slavery International, South Asian Summit for Peoples', SAARC, SAAPE, Mahidol University, IUCN, UNDP, PANOS, Dalai Lama Foundation for Peace and Aga Khan University.

Recent Activities

PILER is involved in several national committees and task forces for government policy, and also advises Labour Welfare institutions like Women Employment, Child Rights, Bonded Labour, Old-Age Benefits and Social Security, Poverty Reduction and Social Protection. In the recent past PILER has prepared draft policies and action plans against bonded labour, a new Labour Policy, revision of the Industrial Relations Ordinance and other labour legislations. Reviews of labour legislations and welfare institutions were also carried out with a view for reforms.

PILER interactions with the judiciary included the preparation of a constitutional petition against contracts for fresh water fisheries and of a challenge to recent amendments in labour legislation. Its advocacy against debt bondage includes a successful intervention in the Shariat Court against repeal of national legislation.

Conferences and workshops through December 2006 included the Peoples Convention on Natural Resources (APRN, Thailand), Jobs for Justice (APRN, Manila), CWA Task Force on Bonded Child Labour (Kathmandu), WTO Asia Regional Workshop (FES-HomeNet, Singapore), Social Protection for Home-Based Workers (FES, Dhaka).

Future Goals

PILER's experience and its reading of the current situation suggest that its future strategies and work plan should return PILER to a much stronger and original emphasis upon *reflection in action by the labour movement- as a resource centre for research and education* in support of core labour rights. To achieve this goal from 2008 onwards, the thrust of the Work Plan for 2005-2007 is to make a smooth transition through emphasis upon the following strategies:

- > *Autonomy of partner organisations-* towards planning and efforts for mobilisation, training, research, financial management and fund raising
- > *Broader solidarity on core labour rights-* towards a larger and stronger coalition including youth, political parties, public officials and representatives. Developing concerted advocacy in South Asia
- > *Extend national and regional alliances against militarisation and for cooperation-* through networks such as the Pakistan Peace Coalition and Committee for Nuclear Disarmament & Peace
- > *Wider impact through high-level research and formal education-* to enable broader advocacy of core labour rights and respond to and complement partner organisations
- > *Expanded financial autonomy of PILER-* towards increasing local resources, including user fees and sponsored research, for PILER operations

Publications

Special Feature

During 2005-2006, PILER publications as discussion papers, policy notes and advocacy briefs included the following:

- > *Wages, Salaries and Pension of Workers: Need for a Realistic Revision.*
- > *Social Security in Informal Sector: A Case Study of Pakistan's Bonded Brick Kiln Workers*, Global Labour Forum Conference, New Delhi.
- > *Collective Care Arrangements in the Informal Labour Market: Road Transport Workers in Pakistan*, Economic & Political Weekly, Mumbai.
- > *Country Report on Poverty*, SAAPE, Kathmandu.
- > *Gender & Poverty in Pakistan*, SAAPE, Kathmandu.
- > *Food Sovereignty: A Case of Pakistan*, SAAPE, Kathmandu.
- > *Analysis of Effectiveness of Bonded Labour Interventions in Pakistan*, Anti-Slavery International, London.
- > *Bonded Labour in Pakistan* (published in Urdu & Sindhi with support of Anti-Slavery International, London).
- > *Women at Work in Bondage*, Conference Volume on Sustainable Development, Islamabad.
- > *Labour Policy in Pakistan*, Conference Volume on Sustainable Development, Islamabad.
- > *Does Labour Regulation Hinder Small Enterprise Growth?*, APRN Journal, Manila.
- > *A Special Labour Policy for Small Enterprises?*, APRN Journal, Manila.
- > *Brick Kiln Workers: Debt and Bondage* (in Urdu through the ILO, Geneva).
- > *Labour Struggles in Karachi 1972* (in Urdu with the collaboration of Pakistan Studies Centre, University of Karachi).
- > *Public Policy for Old-Age Support.*
- > *Realising Universal Labour Rights.*
- > *Issues and Concerns in Social Auditing Practices in Pakistan in the Garments Sector* (in collaboration with the Clean Clothes Campaign).
- > *Contested Donor Approaches to Labour Regulation: A Review of the World Bank, ADB and ILO.*
- > *Narrow Visions and Grim Outcomes: Japan ODA to Pakistan*, Conference volume Fifty Years of Japan ODA, Tokyo.

Collective Care Arrangements in Informal Labour Market: A Case Study of Road Transport Workers in Pakistan*



Zeenat Hisam

Ms. Zeenat Hisam, senior research associate at Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, has been writing on gender, labour and urban community development issues since the last 25 years for mainstream and alternative media. She holds a Master's in Development Studies (specializing in Women and Development) from the Institute of Social Studies, the Hague. She lives in Karachi.

Abstract

This study presents an overview of the road transport sector. It examines the work environment, labour relations, working conditions and workers' response, in order to address some of the issues related to social security through collective action. The methodology includes a review of the existing literature and an assessment through informal discussions with a select number of transport workers/operators, representatives of transport workers' unions/organisations/federations, and private transport companies.

Introduction

In Pakistan, the road transport sector is characterised by the non-compliance and non-applicability of labour legislation. The road transport labour force is comprised mainly of male wage workers and self-employed operators owning a single vehicle purchased by taking loan from money lenders on exploitative terms. It also includes small entrepreneurs, who own individually, or jointly, five to twenty or larger vehicle fleets. They fail to comply with the rules, thereby depriving the employees of the minimum social security that state institutions offer to permanent employees in

registered industrial/commercial establishments. In a de-regulated, competitive work environment, road transport workers struggle with low wages, long working hours, poor working conditions, occupational health hazards and lack of social protection.

In the absence of a unified, regulatory framework, transport activities are governed by a complex mix of formal and informal rules, fiscal arrangements, institutions and mechanisms of mutual help and trust. The sector is also characterised by a strong presence of a number of loosely organised, (vehicle) mode-specific, workers/operators' unions, or

associations, that attempt to address some of the issues of self-help on a collective basis. A few broad-based transport workers' organisations/unions have devised mechanisms to address some of the social security concerns through collective care arrangements. The issues that are given priority are harassment and extortion by law enforcing agencies and the lack of economic protection in times of contingencies (injury/death in accidents, loss of assets).

Social security in its broader meaning refers to benefits that cover both risk management and risk prevention, and is viewed as a crucial

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Special Feature

tool to prevent deprivation (promote living standards) as well as vulnerability to deprivation (protect against falling living standards).¹ As per as the ILO's concept of 'decent work',² social security embraces security of basic needs— and rights— for self and the family (food, health, shelter, education) and economic needs (job, income, skill formation, access to capital and markets), expanded by the ILO under its Socio-Economic Security Programme into seven forms of work-related security.³



The existing state mechanism for social security (contribution-based social insurance schemes)— Employees' Social Security, Workers' Welfare Fund, Workers' Profit Participation Scheme, Compulsory Group Insurance Scheme, Employees' Old-Age Benefit Institution— are applicable only to permanent employees of the formal sector and has very low coverage even within the formally registered establishments. The tax-financed social protection schemes for destitute (Sakat and Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal) have low coverage due to poor governance and exclusionary criteria. It is to be noted that the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standard) Convention of 1952 (No. 102), which identifies nine areas of social benefits— medical care as well as sickness, unemployment, old-age, employment injury, family, maternity, invalidity and survivors' benefits,⁴ remains one of the many ILO Conventions not ratified by Pakistan. The proclamation of the Constitution in Article 38, to provide social security to all, is yet to be translated into reality. The overwhelming majority of road transport workers thus remain excluded from statutory entitlements and benefits either through legislative/regulatory

exclusion or poor governance/implementation mechanisms.

Road Transport: Overview

The transport services sector comprising four sub sectors— road, rail, sea and air transport— contributes 11.1 percent of the GDP⁵ (excluding manufacture) and employs 2.4 million labour force or 5.7 percent of the total labour force.⁶ This study focuses on road transport, a sub-sector, now almost wholly under private ownership and predominantly in the informal economy both as regards finance and labour. Road transport accounts for ninety one percent of passenger traffic and ninety six percent of freight traffic.⁷ Pakistan has a road network covering 259,758 km⁸, with around 4.2 million on-road vehicles, and a road density of 0.32 km/sq km which is lower than the average density of 0.50 km per sq km in developing countries (Pakistan needs to develop 157,115 kilometres of roads to meet this deficiency). The main source of state investment in the transport sector (infrastructure) is the Public Sector Development Programme (PDSP). Transport development is heavily tilted towards big projects— highways, expressways, and bridges. In the 1999-2000 PDSP, twenty seven percent of the total budget was allocated to the transport sector out of which 88.5 percent went to the development of highways and bridges and only 7.5 percent was allocated to rural access roads.⁹

With an annual growth rate of seven percent for passenger traffic and six percent for freight traffic, road transportation is the fastest growing sub-sector, absorbing a large number of unskilled/semi-skilled and skilled labour force and generating micro/small enterprises. The sector contributes to the government revenues through taxes and duties on production and import of vehicles and parts, petroleum products and fees on ownership and operation of vehicles. According to an estimate, road-related revenue collection itself amounts to Rs. 32.5 billion per year (52 per cent from federal surcharge on POL products).¹⁰

Governance

There are three ministries responsible for the four modes of transport— Ministry of Railways (rail), Ministry of Communications (road and sea), and the Ministry of Defence (airways). "Each ministry formulates its plans independently and they have negligible coordination with each other...".¹¹ The need for a single ministry of transport was identified in the early decades. The Planning Commission had proposed in 1977 to bring all modes of transport under a single ministry.¹² At present, the Ministry of Communications is responsible at the federal level for road transportation through the National Transport Research Centre (research and policy guidelines), the National Highway and Motorway Police (implementation of rules and regulations), and the National Highway Authority (infrastructure).¹³

In Pakistan, development of road transport services— inter-city, intra-city and cross-boundary freight and passenger traffic— has followed distinct phases. In 1947, three large private transport companies, subject to controls by the state authorities, were operating in the port city of Karachi, the hub of transport activity. By 1951 five more private companies (with 30-50 vehicle fleets) came into being.¹⁴ These private companies were rendered unprofitable and disbanded in 1956 due to disabling fiscal and regulatory policies. In the late 1950s, transport control and ownership in major cities was largely taken over by public authorities under East and West Pakistan Road Transport Corporations with municipal undertakings. In 1969, the Motor Vehicle Rules were enacted. Micro and small entrepreneurs were allowed to enter the market with single/multi-vehicle fleets purchased on loans from informal moneylenders or formal financial institutions.

In 1971, regional and provincial transport authorities were set up to devise rules and enforce implementation and provincial transport corporations in Sind, Punjab and NWFP were established to undertake operation of passenger bus services competing with private operations. Within a decade all

¹ J. Drèse and A. Sen, "Public action for social security: Foundations and strategy", in E. Ahmad, J. Drèse, J. Hills and A. Sen (eds.), *Social Security in Developing Countries*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991.

² As proclaimed in the ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

³ *Economic Security for a Better World*, ILO, 2004.

⁴ "Decent Work and the Informal Economy", International Labour Conference, Ninetieth Session, Report VI, ILO, Geneva, 2002.

⁵ *Pakistan Economic Survey, 2004-05*, Government of Pakistan, Finance Division, Islamabad.

⁶ *Pakistan Labour Force Survey, 2003-04*.

⁷ *Medium Term Development Framework, 2005-10*, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, May 2005.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Perspective of Civil Society on the Transport Sector in Pakistan*, *The World Bank Summary Report*, Vol. I, 24-25 Jan, 2000.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Transport Sector Development Initiative Report*, Roads and Road Transport, May 2002.

¹² *Re-organisation of Administrative Control of Transport*, National Transport Research Centre, Planning Commission, GoP, October 1977.

¹³ See <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/ministries/MinDep>.

¹⁴ Aquila Ismail (ed.), *Transport*, URC Karachi Series, City Press, Karachi, 2002.

Special Feature

these three corporations were running in deficit due to "...lack of entrepreneurship..." and other constraints.¹⁵ The 1980s and 1990s witnessed increased activity of largely de-regulated, fragmented, informal private sector entangled in a myriad of issues besetting all the stakeholders—transport workers, operators/owners, users and regulators. Unlike other stakeholders, the impact of de-regulation and privatisation on road transport workers has been negative as the workers' terms and conditions of employment are the main target of cost-cutting initiatives.

Till today, regulatory and governance mechanisms of road transportation have not been brought under a unified, central authority. Vehicles are registered by provincial Excise and Taxation Departments, authority for license issuance and renewal lies with provincial Home Departments, while grant/renewal of route permits and vehicle fitness certificates are issued by provincial Transport Departments that work under provincial Transport Authorities. The provincial Transport Authorities and Regional Transport Authorities are responsible for the administration and enforcement of Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1965 & Motor Vehicles Rules, 1969¹⁶ and their functions include planning and allocation of routes. These Authorities 'assert day-to-day control over inter- and intra-city passenger transport services which are dominated by the private sector'.¹⁷

As the provincial/regional transport authorities plan, devise and enforce rules/legalisation independent of each other and do not function under a unified federal policy-making body, the governance issues are compounded. Also, dealing with several inefficient and corrupt bureaucracies poses hardship to workers/operators.

Regulatory Framework

The Motor Vehicles Act, 1939 was enacted by the British when Karachi was made the military base (1939-45) during the second World War. The British also promulgated the Motor Vehicles (Drivers) Ordinance, 1942. After independence, the Act was amended in 1952 and then in 1965 (Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1965) followed by the enactment of the Motor Vehicle Rules, 1969. The first Highway Code was introduced on the basis of UN Convention in 1968, and the draft

Road Safety Ordinance was formulated in 1977.¹⁸ The draft was finalised and enacted as the National Highway Safety Ordinance in September 2000 to provide for safe driving on highways. The Ordinance covers licensing, registration of vehicles, construction, equipment and maintenance of vehicles, traffic control, offences and penalties. The Ordinance has several anomalies and needs revision.¹⁹ Its implementation is weak and the majority of transport workers remain uninformed about it.²⁰



Transport Policy

The need for an integrated national transport policy had been identified decades ago. The Chartered Institute of Transport Pakistan (CIT), a private body, drafted a National Integrated Transport Policy in 1977. The CIT modified and updated this draft policy in 1998 for the Ministry of Communications 'but received no response whatsoever from the Ministry'.²¹ In 1999, the World Bank facilitated public sector consultations under the Transport Sector Development Initiative and the process of developing the 'first integrated transport sector policy' began in May 2000 and the draft transport policy and strategy document was prepared by the World Bank.²² In October 2004, the Asian Development Bank approved a grant to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Communications to formulate a comprehensive national transport policy.

To date, there is no proper 'Transport Policy'.²³ Indicative of this is that medium-term planning and strategies for transport laid out in eight five-year plans till 1998 were not implemented. According to the latest plan, termed as Medium Term Development Framework 2005-10, a 'comprehensive and integrated transport policy will be developed during the MTF'.²⁴

Road Transport Labour Legislation

Road Transport Workers Ordinance,

1961, was enacted to regulate the hours of work and other conditions of employment of road transport workers. The Ordinance stipulates a break of at least of thirty minutes after five hours of driving, limits total driving time to eight hours per day and forty eight hours per week, and allows for at least twenty-four hours of consecutive rest in a week. The Ordinance was amended in 1974 and the West Pakistan Industrial and Commercial Employment (Standing Orders) Ordinance, 1968, was made to apply to every road transport service. The legislation, however, excludes transport workers operating in unregistered small and micro enterprises. Private transport companies with bigger fleets evade these laws through various mechanisms devised in connivance with the regulatory authorities. In any case, transport workers, due to literacy and information deficits, remain ignorant of both national laws and international standards. The ILO Hours of Work and Rest Periods (Road Transport) Convention No. 153, 1979 requires a break after four hours of driving. It limits total driving time to nine hours per day and forty-eight hours per week and recommends at least ten hours of rest in each twenty four-hour period. It is not yet ratified by Pakistan.

Systems of Operation

Liberalisation of road transport market in the 1970s resulted in fragmentation of the sector's structure, with a majority of the worker-cum-operator entering the sector to secure livelihood with little investment, followed by the emergence of individual/joint ownership of small fleet inter-city passenger and freight services. The big investors stayed off the market as they did not envisage lucrative dividends. In the late 1990s large private sector companies were inducted through fiscal incentives. At present the sector has several systems of operation, each impacting differently on labour relations and labour rights.

Many skilled labourers are self-employed as owner-cum-drivers (operators) and the unskilled ones as cleaners/conductors of public service vehicles (bus/wagon/mini-bus/loader suzuki/taxi/motor rickshaw/school van) purchased through loans from traditional moneylenders. The intra-city passenger and freight vehicle ownership falls under this category. At

¹⁵ *The Study on National Transport Plan in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, Draft Final Report, Vol. II, Pacific Consultants International, November, 1994.

¹⁶ See www.punjab.gov.pk/terms.htm.

¹⁷ *Medium-Term Development, 2005-10*.

¹⁸ *Implementation of Highway Safety Ordinance 2000*, UNDP/Enercon Fuel Efficiency in Road Transport Sector Report, July 2002.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *National Transport Policy*, The Chartered Institute of Transport, Pakistan, October 1998.

²² *Transport Sector Development Initiative (PO68857)*, Concept Note (draft 5/21/00).

²³ *Policy Paper on Transport*, dated 01.02.2000 (official document released by NTRC, Ministry of Communication through letter No. NTRC-2(2)/99, dated 09-05-2000.)

²⁴ *Medium Term Development, 2005-10*.

Special Feature

whatever amount is left after paying a contractually fixed amount to the vehicle owner and the gasoline charges. The worker, thus, has to maximise returns in order to maximise his income, which results in long working hours on the roads and disregard of occupational health and safety measures.

Life on the Road

Mustachioed, grim-faced, 44-year-old Najibullah Khan is on the road for the last twenty-nine years. He works as a driver on long a distance route— Karachi to Islamabad. "I get Rs. 1500 per trip. A trip takes twenty six to twenty seven hours. I make about six trips a month and that adds up to Rs. 9000 per month". Born in a village in Musakhel, Mianwali, Najib dropped out of school after class six and was pushed into the labour market as a child. Initially he worked as bus cleaner and helper. When he got his license at 18, he took to driving. In 1973 he came to live in Karachi where he shares a rented accommodation with another person. Najib's family members (parents, wife and five children) work as sharecropper in the village. These days he is paying a monthly instalment of Rs. 1000 to the money-lender for a loan of Rs. 10,000 he took to help his family buy agricultural inputs.

"There is one more driver along with me in the bus, and we take turns after 4-5 hours of driving, taking 2-3 hours rest in between. After each trip I am off the bus for 24 hours and busy with maintenance of the vehicles and carry out related errands. I get little time to spend with my family whom I visit fortnightly". For Najib, there are no holidays, no medical or other facilities and no social security.

Labour Force Characteristics

Transport workers— drivers, conductors, cleaners, helpers— in Pakistan are predominantly male, with the exception of a couple of women taxi drivers found in big cities. Women, due to social barriers and cultural constraints, refrain from entering the sector though, since the late 1990s, women are being inducted by a few medium-to-large sized passenger transport companies as hostesses or as office workers. The review of data of the select number of transport workers²⁶ indicates that the majority belongs to the age group of twenty to forty five (for the work is physically/mentally demanding), is literate and semi-skilled or skilled. These characteristics are corroborated through an

earlier study²⁷ where the bulk of times, a single vehicle is owned jointly by two to three persons (i.e. driver, conductor) who pool in money to purchase the vehicle from the owner/permit holder at a high interest rate. A single vehicle service cannot be registered as an establishment or company. The vehicle is not insured as insurance companies charge high premium for individually owned public transport vehicles due to rising incidents of arson and looting. The workers under this arrangement are the most vulnerable, have no social security and live under the constant risk of losing their livelihood (in case of injuries in accident or damage/loss of vehicle).



Inter-city passenger and freight services are dominated by small (bus/goods transport) registered companies, either under proprietorship or joint ownership. The services comprise of fleets of 5-20 vehicles, and are run by hired employees (drivers, helpers, conductors) paid on a per-trip basis without any base salary. Often, the owner-driver of a single vehicle operates under the umbrella of these small companies, paying a monthly commission and accessing the bus-stand/parking facility and the company's clout in dealing with regulators (law enforcing agencies, legal structures). These owners evade the laws, their workers are deprived of decent working conditions and social security benefits. A few big companies (i.e. Daewoo Bus Service Company)— with fleets of more than 100 vehicles— that have emerged since late 1990s comply with labour legislation and protect labour rights to some extent. In intra-city transport services (mini-buses, wagons, taxis, rickshaws), particularly in big urban centres, offer informal employment contracts based on residual income principle.²⁵ The worker retains workers were found to be in the twenty to forty years age group, were literate and skilled. The schooling reported by the older cohort (age group 35-50) is limited to five to eight years while the younger workers (20-35) tend to have twelve or more years of education. Family size varies from six to twenty members (including dependent extended family members). Majority of the workers originally

belonged to rural areas, a trend indicative of diminishing livelihood opportunities in rural communities, a decline in agricultural and agro-based occupations, and consequent rural-to-urban migration. Many of the workers appear to enter the transport sector when their income generating activities— as petty shopkeeper, fruit-seller, tailor, goldsmith, manual labour, cleaner, mechanic, etc— collapse under pressure of contingencies (prolonged illness, death, loss of assets) or market forces in the absence of social safety nets. A PILER survey conducted in 2001 showed that 31.5 per cent of the respondent transport workers had been unemployed in the past twelve months and the modal period of unemployment was two months.²⁸

With the exception of administrative work and financial management, many of the occupations in the road transport sector (i.e. driving, cleaning, assisting passengers, loading/unloading, and vehicle maintenance) do not require higher education and formal skills. Easy transferability of skills (basic driving skills, vehicle maintenance/repair) acquired on-job (traditional ustad-shagird pattern) is one of the factors that make this sector absorb the steady flow of literate (educated up to primary/secondary/higher secondary level), unemployed labour force. The sector also holds opportunities for self-employment as the amount of investment required to own a used vehicle, or new light weight vehicle (taxi/rickshaw) can be accessed through traditional credit lines, or raised through social support networks (family/relatives/friends).

The most vulnerable, at the lowest rung of the hierarchy, are those who work on daily, or per trip, wages as helpers, conductors and cleaners in long distance freight and passenger transport vehicles. This work force comprises unskilled, illiterate or barely literate, unemployed young men who are being increasingly pushed out of the deprived rural or semi-urban environs in search of livelihood. Roaming at *bus addas* in small towns and big cities, they are hired on casual basis on site by drivers/operators on low wages, treated harshly and often fired on slight pretexts and kicked out of the vehicle on the highway. Lack of steady employment poses hindrance to skill formation and traps the workers in a vicious cycle of deprivation. These workers are also discriminated against by transport workers' organisations and are denied membership due to several factors that include inability to contribute to the membership fund due to unstable employment/low wages.

²⁶ Data gathered on forty participants of the National Convention of Transport Workers held at PILER Centre, Karachi.

²⁷ Asad Sayeed and Sohail Javed, People's Security Survey, August 2001, Pakistan Institute of Labour Research and Education, Karachi.

²⁸ Ibid.

Special Feature

Vulnerable and Dispossessed

Ghulam Sabir, 26 years old, clad in a crumpled salwar-qameez, is reclining on a seat in a bus parked at the General Bus Stand on Bund Road, Lahore. Unassuming, frail and shy, he doesn't look like he wields a gun, hidden in his salwar: Sabir works as a gunman on a long route inter-city bus run by a small company. He gets Rs. 200 per trip and makes fifteen trips a month pooling a monthly income of Rs. 3000 to a household of fifteen members with two more members (his father and a brother) earning more or less the same amount.

Sabir is a new entrant to the transport sector labour force, which he joined a few months back. Before that, for twelve years, he worked as tailor/embroiderer in his family micro enterprise. He started as a child worker at the age of 14 after he dropped out from school, studying up to class seven. "We had five sewing machines. A few months back the shop was gutted with fire caused by an unplugged iron. Whatever little assets we had, went up in smoke. In the villages there is no concept of insurance. In any case, most of small businesses like ours cannot afford insurance. Kalalwala, where I live, is a small village, with no opportunities for employment. My family doesn't own any land. So I left home and boarded the bus for the city, got down at the adda where I found this job." He doubts that with this paltry amount he could ever save money to buy sewing machines and go back to the work he was comfortable with.

Unsure of what the future holds for him, Sabir, who looks tired and lethargic, remains on board for twenty-four hours, followed by twenty-four hours of rest. While on the bus, he takes small naps during the day, cramped in a seat, when the vehicle is passing from safe areas. At night he must keep vigil. "For being a gunman, you don't need any training. There are so many weapons in villages and cities that every man knows how to use a gun. Luckily, I have not come across any bandits on my vehicle. So far, so good", he smiles wearily.

The select data indicates that the road transport workers do not have women wage earners in their families, indicative of either male perception of woman's traditional role—harboured by the rural Pakhtun community who dominate the road transport sector—or non-reporting of income-generating activities of their women due to social constructions of honour.

Working Conditions

Road transport sector is marred with one of the most critical and damaging working conditions—long and irregular working hours. Often the workers (on the inter-city routes) are on the vehicle for as long as twenty-six hours at a stretch. The work includes not just driving or assisting passengers, but loading/unloading, training, cleaning and maintenance, work related to ensuring safety of vehicle and its cargo and passengers, administrative formalities or work linked to legal or regulatory (either formal or informal) obligations. Working time also include waiting periods when the worker cannot freely dispose of his time and needs to be at the work-station waiting to be called on duty. On intra-city routes bus workers work on average fourteen hours a day while rickshaw and taxi drivers are on the wheels on an average of twelve hours a day.²⁹

Transport workers in Pakistan are faced with hazardous work environment that include worn-out and poorly maintained vehicles, dilapidated roads, poor traffic management on city routes/highways, lack of traffic signs, road-side facilities, properly designed bus/truck terminals, parking facilities and rest houses. Ill-designed, uncomfortable seats for drivers and absence of proper seating area for conductors/helpers compound the hardship at the mobile workplace.

In addition to poor physical infrastructure, road transport workers have to deal with threatening and corrupt regulatory infrastructure and rising service provision cost. Harassment and extortion of *bhatta* by traffic police and check post officials are a norm and transport workers have to co-opt, else devise mechanisms for confrontation. Low literacy level, inadequate skills due to lack of proper training and refresher courses on traffic rules and regulations, and lack of awareness on labour rights and legislations, hinder empowerment and render road transport workers vulnerable.

Occupational Health and Safety

Road transport workers are faced with a number of safety issues topped by driver fatigue, which is considered the main cause of accidents in the transport industry around the world. In Pakistan, a total of 9,377 traffic accidents were reported in 2002-03. Of them, 4,045 accidents were fatal resulting in the loss of 4,813 human lives,³⁰ including those of drivers and other transport workers. The incidence of serious injuries in Pakistan is reported at 41.2 per 1,000 persons per year, traffic accidents being the most common cause. According to a

study,³¹ 36 per cent of these injuries are transport related. In the PILER study on urban transport workers, 40 per cent of the respondents reported work-related injury incidents.³²

The high rate of traffic accidents is related to fatigue and lack of sleep and rest, excessive hours of work, poor road design, ignorance and violation of traffic rules and regulations. Stress caused by harassment of law-enforcing agencies (traffic/highway police, check posts and custom officials) for extortion is a common condition. Aggressive behaviour (verbal or physical assault) and humiliation hurled by passengers is frequent. In addition, the workers run the risk of vandalism, robbery, dacoity and vehicle-jacking where the consequences (physical injury or damage/loss of the vehicle) have to be borne by the workers.



Informal Fiscal Arrangements

Umar Hyat, in his early forties, is owner-driver of a bus plying on Karachi-Hyderabad route. He left his home town in Mian Chunno, in 1978 after he finished class ten and secured work as a bus conductor. He took to driving in 1980. In early 1990s he was able to raise some money through the help of his father and bought a second-hand vehicle. Umar pays Rs. 1500 per month as commission to an established bus service company to operate his vehicle under its name. "They let me use their office facilities and the bus addas for embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. They also help me deal with police and other officials. But I have to bear all the costs that incur in such cases. It is just the company's clout that helps me settle things quickly".

"After paying Rs. 800-900 *bhatta* to various check posts, monthly commission to the company, vehicle's maintenance cost and the other driver and conductor's salaries and food, I am left with around Rs. 12,000 per month", he states. "I can't take days off work. If I do, where will my family of six members get our next meal from? The only advantage of owning the vehicle is that nobody can kick me out of work. As long as the bus is there, and I am hail and hearty, I will keep driving and earning".

²⁵ Asad Sayeed and Sohail Javed, *Work Security Issues Among Urban Transport Workers in Pakistan*, 2001.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Pakistan Statistical Year Book*, 2004.

³¹ Sania Nishtar, "Road Traffic Injuries— Integrating Injuries into Non-communicable Disease Prevention: A Case Study from Pakistan", *Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan*, 14 December 2004.

³² Saeed and Javed, *People's Security Survey*.

Special Feature

Rickshaw Drivers' Association: The Beginning

Rickshaw driver, Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 29, works for twelve hours at a stretch. He is one of the three earners in a family of eight. He studied up to class eight and after a few odd jobs, he took to rickshaw driving in 1996. "After paying commission to the owner, I was left with a meager amount of Rs. 1500-2000 per month. So in 2003, I took a loan of Rs. 50,000 from the money-lender. I pay him a monthly installment of Rs. 3000 out of Rs. 6000 that I earn in a month, which is inadequate but at least now I own the rickshaw and once the loan is paid off, my take-home earnings will enhance". Yusuf has no social security coverage and once when he suffered an accident, he paid for hospitalisation through support from his family member and partly from a small loan from a friend. He finds the attitude of traffic police harsh and humiliating though he pays them a total of Rs. 500 per month as *bhatta*.

The only silver lining for Yusuf is his participation in a recent initiative—Muslim Youth Transport Federation—a yet-to-be-registered organisation formed by young and educated rickshaw drivers in Muslimpura, a small town near Baghbanpura, Lahore. "At present we have 64 members. We are trying to expand our membership. There must be at least 200 members to have real impact, both in terms of fund raising, and in dealing with police harassment. Still, we support each other in times of crises through pooling in whatever individual resources we do have".

Loading and unloading heavy cargoes, transport of hazardous materials and wastes (the nature of which is often not known to workers), exposure to noise, vibration and pollution, in addition to irregular and low-nutrient meals at roadside eateries pose serious health risks for many transport workers. They also suffer stress from long working hours and night driving. Locally manufactured vehicle bodies (truck/bus/mini-bus) usually lack sound technical design and specifications. Economising of space leads to narrow seats and uneven floors with protruding edges posing hazard to conductors/cleaners/drivers and assistants. Often trucks, containers and tall cargo vehicles do not have easy climb to the driver's seat. Overloading of cargo and passengers is a common phenomenon, which increases the risk of accidents.

Ergonomic hazards include back and other injuries caused by lifting

excessive weight during loading and unloading cargo. Poorly designed driving seats that cannot be adjusted to provide proper support and long-term comfort, often result in back problems or other musculoskeletal damage. Ergonomic injury may also result from repetitive use of poorly placed vehicle controls or gearbox. Exposure to polluted air may increase the risks of breathing problems and lung diseases. In the PILER, eleven percent of rickshaw-drivers have reported breathing problems. Drivers are also at a risk of hearing loss caused by prolonged exposure to loud engine noises.

Two major health risks, linked with transport workers in the country, are drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. Cargo and passenger transportation on long-distance inter-city and trans-border routes require long working hours and night-time driving, hence an increased probability of use of drugs to fight off sleep and exhaustion. Also, trans-border drug trafficking between Pakistan and Afghanistan make harmful drugs easily accessible to workers. Unofficial estimates and media reports indicate high incidence of drug addiction among road transport workers.

Though Pakistan has low prevalence of Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the number of AIDS and HIV positive cases is increasing. According to UNICEF estimates of 2005, there are 70,000 to 80,000 (or 0.1 percent) HIV positive people in the country with a 7 to 1 male/female ratio. The two categories of people most infected with HIV/AIDS are cited to be sex workers and transport workers operating on long distance routes. As the nature of work keeps the workers away from their conjugal partners for long periods, the workers, mostly men, are more prone to avail services of sex workers, hence are at higher risk.

Organisation/Unionisation

The informal work relations pose a number of barriers to forming unions. Unregistered enterprises and resultant exclusion from labour legislation, clash of interests with big-fleet owners of the same mode and between heavy and light vehicle operators, diversity of work force and modes of operation, plethora of provincial and federal regulatory mechanisms and constant mobility make it difficult for road transport workers to organise. Despite numerous constraints, workers have adopted the existing traditional indigenous organisational mechanisms to advance their occupational interests.

The road transport workers have been organising themselves since the

late 1970s on the pattern of community-based, non-profit organisations. The workers involved with specific modes of transport (truck, bus, taxi, rickshaw, donkey-carts, etc.) mobilise co-workers locally around issues confronted in daily work routine. Dynamic leadership have been provided by activists-workers, who are well informed on governance issues, national and provincial legislation and ground realities. They have better negotiation skills and networking resources, which play an important role in the collective bargaining status of organisations.

Unlike formal sector trade unions, registered with the Labour Department under the Trade Unions Act, 1926, many road transport workers' organisations get themselves registered with Social Welfare Department due to relatively user-friendly nature of these laws. However, there are several transport workers' organisations with larger membership that are registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions under IRO 1969 and have obtained the status of collective bargaining agent. The IRO 2002 has taken away this right of association from general workers who work in the informal sector. Hence transport workers cannot form countrywide transport workers trade unions. Fortunately, the trade unions registered earlier under IRO 1969 are entitled to function as previously.

Though the transport workers' networks, or associations, are membership-based, they vary in size, longevity, institutionality, and the degree of success. The active associations are those that adhere to the constitution, hold regular elections, stick to their objectives, interact with other civil society organisations and learn strategic tactics to deal and dialogue with other stakeholders. By 2005, all major, and most of the intermediary, cities have each had a number of transport workers' associations or unions. In the city of Karachi there are numerous informal sector associations in the transport sector, representing informal transport workers/operators, who "not only act as a powerful bargaining force but in case of riots in the city, they can use their 'muscle' to defend their interests".³³ The unions/federations with larger membership have recognition and credibility and their office bearers are invited by relevant state departments for dialogue and consultation.

The majority of these area-based organisations have low membership, ranging from 50 to under 1000. Only a few have 1000 to 5000 members. Those with large membership are effective as the strength in number not only empowers the organisation but

³³ M. Sohail (ed.), *Urban Public Transport and sustainable livelihoods for the poor: A case study: Karachi, Pakistan*, Loughborough University, WEDC, 2000.

Special Feature

also makes collective care arrangement in the form of a welfare fund viable. The genesis of transport workers' organisations/unions shows that these sprang up spontaneously—despite a weak labour movement and non-existence of democratic political framework of the state—mainly in response to growing vulnerability and insecurity due to inefficient regulatory policies, hostile and corrupt administrative bodies and exclusion from labour protection systems.

The reasons for low membership include lack of mobilisation skills, information deficits (on labour rights, regulatory framework, organisational strategies) and the presence of divisive tendencies among workers leading to emergence of several weak—instead of single strong—vehicle-mode organisations/unions.³⁴ Another factor is the inherent complexity of transport sector labour force, which is a mix of hired labour, self-employed labour or owner-operators, hence a clash of interests, both perceived and real. Though transport owners' associations exist separately, there are many organisations and unions who represent both wage workers and owner-operators/micro entrepreneurs. Owner-operators, in such unions, tend to dominate the leadership and hence organisational politics.

The Workers' Collective Care Arrangements

Review of the work of select transport workers organisations indicates that membership-based unions/federations have evolved certain collective care arrangements in response to threatening and insecure work conditions. The priority issue for transport workers has been securing protection against abuse of power by regulatory personnel. As prevalent attitude and practice of law-enforcing agencies adversely impinge upon transport workers' already precarious livelihood, the workers have come up with collective, informal arrangements that serve as a bulwark

against misuse of power by other stakeholders and keep the damage at bay.

An important tool— as used by stronger transport unions— is their officially acknowledged identity as union members. The registered unions issue membership cards, on the pattern of national identity cards, which contains the worker's picture, his name, name of the union/organisation, its registration number and the secretariat address. This card comes handy when the member is approached (for harassment) by law-enforcing agencies. 'As soon as our member shows this card, the police refrain from excesses'.³⁵ The recognition of this particular unions' federation has been made possible due to its strength in number and the political clout exerted by its key office bearers whose activism (i.e. networking with administrative bodies) of twenty-six long years have borne fruit. The other strategy, as reported by Pakistan Transport Workers' Federation, is confrontation or a 'rule of the jungle' that is, using harassment and committing excesses on the opponents in retaliation.

Next, the membership-based unions give priority to minimum security in times of crisis in the life of the worker to prevent his, and his household's sliding down the poverty line. Usually such intervention is required for traffic accidents resulting in injuries, prolonged hospitalisation or death of the worker. Transport workers organisations, whether narrow or broad-based, help their members in such crises. This is done either through voluntary pooling in money from personal resources and extending it to the affected worker's family (as aid or loan without interest), or utilising the union welfare fund.

The union welfare fund is maintained through mandatory financial contributions of the members. The amount of these welfare funds varies from Rs. 30,000 (Mini-Taxi Workers' Union) to Rs. 700,000 (Pakistan

Transport Workers' Federation). Union membership fee is kept affordable and its collection logistically viable. The collection methods vary. Some collect monthly fee ranging from Rs. 10 to 20, other organisations charge monthly collection per vehicle. The linkages established by office bearers with related resource persons (doctors, lawyers, councillors/politicians, media, NGOs) facilitate the organisations to achieve objectives of collective care arrangements (legal help, medical care, advise on regulatory procedures). These are essential ingredients of a universal labour protection system. A universal insurance system for transport workers could be evolved with premium paid as part of vehicle and driver licensing and petroleum products taxes.

Due to deficits in administrative, managerial and strategic skills among members, these arrangements, however, remain informal, carried out on ad-hoc basis and are dependant on several variables (i.e. involvement of the union in court procedures and subsequent drying up of the funds, inability of members at times to pay dues, good-will of office bearers).

Some of the activists-office bearers, of larger transport unions/federations, have been lobbying with government officials to bring about the required legislative change to include transport workers as bona fide beneficiaries of state social security institutions. Legislative changes in the state-run social security schemes to include informal workers have been recommended earlier. This could be done through self-registration or self-declaration by worker— as recommended in a recent study³⁶ or establishment of a central, unified institution for universal coverage. Resourceful civil society institutions need to strengthen the existing organisations and facilitate formation of larger unions, merging the splintered vehicle-mode based self-help groups and small organisations.

³⁴ A recent initiative is the emergence of All Pakistan Transport Workers' Union, facilitated by PILER.

³⁵ Informal interview with Mohammad Rafiq Qureshi, President, Pakistan Transport Workers' Federation.

³⁶ A. Ercelawn, *Realising Universal Labour Rights: Labour Standards for Small Enterprises in Pakistan*, A PILER study for ILO, 2005.

Prostitutes Vs. Sex Workers



Samira Junaid

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She is deeply passionate about her music, her tastes spanning all genres and continents, with her latest discovery being the late Ali Farka Toure from Mali.

Prostitution may very well be the oldest profession in the world, but that certainly has not made it the most respectable. In fact, as we all know, in most parts of the world it remains illegal even today. Prostitutes the world over (with just a few notable exceptions) have no rights, their work is often considered a criminal and punishable offence, and the women engaged in this trade are perhaps one of the most marginalised sections of society. The word prostitute itself brings up images of unsafe neighbourhoods, cheaply dressed women wearing loud make up, trying to entice men of less than reputable character, with bodies which are often battered and bruised. There is nothing enviable about these women's lives. The special nature of their work, which entails having intercourse with multiple unfamiliar men puts them at risk of getting raped, battered and assaulted as well as becoming hosts and carriers of Sexually Transmitted Diseases including AIDS, in addition, of course, to being socially ostracised and physically segregated. With virtually no rights to claim, and no friendly legal redressal system at their disposal, these women are left with nowhere to go, and are forced to suffer with no respite.

Something must be done for these women. This has been the understanding current among feminists and social workers for a couple of decades now. This kind of violence against women, and their exploitation could not possibly be tolerated. This is something everyone would agree on. And yet, in most parts of the world, the issue remains unresolved. Various explanations were offered, various solutions were suggested— with differences of opinion even within feminists. And the debate continues even today. Broadly speaking, there are two positions on this question. The more conservative opinion, sees prostitution as morally unacceptable— for women in particular, but more importantly, for society in general, and therefore strongly opposes any attempt at legalising prostitution, even if done with a view to improve the condition of these women. The more liberal take on this subject is that the work that prostitutes perform must be seen as legitimate, taxable work and that their practitioners ought to be treated like any other formal or informal worker, with comparable rights and privileges. This interpretation brought the term 'sex worker' into common parlance. Therefore depend-

ing on whether a person uses the term 'prostitute' or 'sex worker', their position on this debate can be gauged.

In some ways, both views reflect an idealised situation. In one case where there would be no instance/ need for prostitution, and one in which as a worker offering a certain service, the women involved would be accorded the respect given to any other productive member of society. If countries decide in favour of one, will such an ideal in fact be realised? This is a contentious question, which if answered in absolute terms will only effectively end all hope of alleviating the conditions under which the women function and practise their trade. There is in fact very little chance that sex work can altogether be done away with. And the argument that legalising prostitution will increase its incidence seems at once fallacious and judgemental. Similarly, to think that the simple granting of certain rights will end all the problems mentioned above, is also rather presumptuous. Even in countries like Holland, where prostitution has in fact been legalised, the instances of rape and assault have been reported as high as sixty per cent. What then is the solution?

Here what needs to be taken into account is the manner in which a woman's decision to be a sex worker/ prostitute comes into being. Once again, broadly speaking, there are two schools of thought over here. Some people view all the women involved as victims, who were forced into this profession either by their family, or were illegally trafficked and held against their wishes. According to this view, these women regret becoming prostitutes and were keen to have a 'normal' life with a husband and children of their own. To that extent, the aim of these groups becomes providing these women with precisely these opportunities, in the process setting an example which would tell other women to desist from taking up this profession. The other opinion on this question acknowledges that in fact these women do exercise some degree of agency in choosing to participate in sex work, and to that extent their choice should be respected, and what ought to be ensured in their view is that women then enjoy the requisite rights of sex 'worker', and not be coerced into quitting the profession and getting married. Agency and coercion are understood differently therefore, made even more complicated by the fact that there are significant overlaps. Whether sex

work undertaken because of extreme poverty is effectively a 'real choice' and whether the subjugated life of a wife tied squarely to her domestic chores with no financial independence can be seen as an example of a 'better life'— these are extremely poignant questions, which often lead us to conclude that there is no one solution to this problem. And yet, something needs to be done about the condition of these women, which all would agree, is deplorable.

I am personally more moved by the call for de-criminalisation and legalisation. The grinding poverty that large sections of society in third world countries face has no quick fix solutions. And more often than not, it is poverty coupled with social neglect and lack of equal opportunity in other fields of work, that prompt women to take up sex work as a means of feeding and clothing themselves. With no real solutions for eradicating poverty or gender inequality, it is a little hard to accept that an anti-prostitution stand can be sustained in more than simply ideological terms. If women, out of choice or otherwise, are engaged in sex work, they do not immediately lose their human status, or that of being citizens of a given country. The state must continue to act in their best interests and cannot renege on these responsibilities. The question however, isn't simply one of what the state ought to or ought not to do. At a deeper level, one needs to understand why sex work can be seen as 'work' at all, and what exactly is being envisaged in demanding that sex work be legalised.

Women's work in the domestic sphere has been re-coined as socially necessary work for it plays a critical role in reproducing healthy and productive citizens on a long term as well as daily basis. Two forms of labour have been identified here, one is social reproduction and the other is sexual labour. The latter is intended either for biological reproduction, or for physical, emotional and bodily pleasure via sex. All of this labour is in fact unpaid labour, but it is still technically speaking, work. Therefore, technically speaking, once these roles are disaggregated, and brought into the realm of the market, in the form of maids, cooks, wet nurses, nannies etc. they continue to be legitimate forms of work which command a price. However, in actual practice, these are seen as unskilled or low-skilled jobs, and are generally devalued. Prostitution, which is essentially biologically non-

Contemporary South

reproductive sex aimed as physical, emotional and bodily pleasure as mentioned above, has not even been seen as acceptable. Why there is a refusal to accept it is anybody's guess, however what needs to be kept in mind is that it is precisely this lack of recognition of reproductive labour as work which causes it to be devalued, exploited and abused. Therefore, legal recognition for prostitutes as sex workers is not only more gender just, it is also extremely important from the perspective of preventing sex workers from being raped, and abused.

What are the specific demands being made as part of this call to legalise sex work. The web page of the International Union of Sex Workers provides us with a comprehensive list. They demand—

1. Decriminalisation of all aspects of sex work involving consenting adults.
2. The right to form and join professional associations or unions.
3. The right to work on the same basis as other independent contractors and employers and to receive the same benefits as other self-employed or contracted workers.
4. No taxation without such rights and representation.
5. Zero tolerance of coercion, violence, sexual abuse, child labour, rape and racism.
6. Legal support for sex workers who want to sue those who exploit their labour.
7. The right to travel across national boundaries and obtain work permits wherever they live.
8. Clean and safe places to work.
9. The right to choose whether to work on their own or co-operatively with other sex workers.
10. The absolute right to say no.
11. Access to training— their jobs require very special skills and professional standards.
12. Access to health clinic where they do not feel stigmatised.
13. Re-training programmes for sex workers who want to leave the industry.
14. An end to social attitudes that stigmatise those who are or have been sex workers.

While simply passing legislations to this effect may not put an end to exploitation, what it does do is allow those affected with at least the possibility of redressal, health care and justice in the case of an eventuality. Criminalising sex work can achieve nothing but further exploitation and oppression of the women involved.

The systems of prostitution however, as mentioned before, have certain important regional differences, and the pro- and anti-legalisation debates here take on different hues. The case of Thailand for example, is very interesting. All the way up till

2003, prostitution was in fact illegal in this country, which from the days of the Vietnam War has been infamous for its "R&R" facilities in Patpong, Pattaya and Soi Cowboy. In 2003 finally, the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra suggested the possibility of legalising prostitution. What is interesting about the case of Thailand however is that this has been seen, along with the legalisation of gambling, as a strategy for boosting Thailand's economy. In its existing illegal form, brothel owners and prostitutes are not liable to pay taxes, but they do end up paying millions of dollars in bribes and hush money to corrupt policemen and politicians. A study conducted by the National Economic and Social Advisory Council says that massage parlours alone pay a staggering US \$114 million a year in police bribes. By legalising prostitution, and making its revenues taxable, the government stands to gain a lot in monetary terms, because in Thailand, the sex industry is in fact the most lucrative of all the illegal trades. Thailand's tourism industry is also booming because of these sex bars, which continues to offer as it were, cheap R&R facilities to western tourists. In fact, the sex industry of Thailand is at the nerve centre of its tourism industry, which in turn has been touted even by international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank as a legitimate and necessary path to 'development'. Clearly therefore, the government is simply seeking to get for itself a piece of the pie, and legalisation here does not stem from any desire to alleviate the problem of sexual abuse, violence or prevention of AIDS. In fact, most sex bars which cater to foreign tourists already require 100% condom usage as well as regular medical check ups in order to ensure that these women do not become carriers of STDs. This is done more to safeguard their western clients than the prostitutes themselves, for once they are found to be affected, they are demoted as it were to brothels and bars which cater to the local Thai population. In these brothels, if desired by their clients, the women are obliged to engage in unprotected sex. What we find therefore is a curious distinction being maintained between two tiers of the industry, and how far legalisation will help the cause of the women themselves remains highly suspect. Feminist groups in Thailand such as the Empower Foundation which champions the rights of Thailand's estimated 200,000 sex workers do not believe that registration would really be able to do anything to tackle the bribery, unfair-profit sharing, coercion and repressive regulations that plague the industry. What kind of merit then does the call for legalisation really have?

The cultural context of Thailand, and the reasons for prostitution to become as widespread as it is in that milieu is beyond the scope of this article. What Thailand's case serves to

highlight is that the question of legalisation cannot be viewed in clear-cut good vs. bad terms. There are other, much more powerful forces at work, which make a similar demand, with no real interest in the health of the sex workers themselves.

The case of India in that sense, is rather different. Prostitution in India is not illegal as such, however a host of other activities that develop around it, enable it and sustain it, have been branded as criminal. In practise therefore the prostitute practices her trade virtually like a criminal, and in order to be able to do so she pays heavy bribes, has to depend on pimps and madams who have greater clout in these neighbourhoods and finds it virtually impossible to seek medical or legal help when required. As a result women prostitutes are forced to continue to work in unhygienic and oppressive conditions, are vulnerable to violence and disease, and are virtual social outcasts. It is these conditions that calls for decriminalisation seek to address. However, these calls for decriminalisation have not come from the government, unlike Thailand. As part of the special category of 'women's work' the question of better rights for sex workers has been taken up mostly by NGOs and other social groups working in the field of women's empowerment.

There is however, strong opposition to this move for de-criminalisation from within feminists and other women's groups. Many people do not accept that prostitution can be tolerated as an acceptable profession at all, and this argument has come both from right wing conservative groups as well as progressive, liberal feminists. They believe that licensing prostitution will not only not help in alleviating the miserable conditions in which prostitutes work, but that it will on the other hand probably encourage more women to take up the trade. Giving prostitution legal sanction is seen as being morally unconscionable and practically ineffective. They argue that no prostitute, if given the choice, would want to remain as one, and therefore what the government and other interested organisations ought to do is to find ways of rescuing and rehabilitating these women, and providing them with the opportunity of leading a 'normal' life. Roughly speaking this is the kind of stand that a Kolkata based NGO Sanlaap has taken. The opposing stand on this subject can be seen in the work of an NGO called Durbar Mahila Samanaya Committee (DMSC) a forum for 60,000 sex workers in West Bengal. Durbaar has a pro-legalisation stand on this question for they feel that the first step to improving the condition of these women is to enshrine their rights legally, so that there is at least the possibility of redressal if desired.

Neither of these two positions can be seen as 'right' or 'wrong' in abso-

Contemporary South

lute terms. Neither solution is free of loopholes. The complexity of the problem is such that deciding simply in favour of one or the other is virtually impossible. However, it seems to me that there is greater merit in calling for legalisation insofar as it allows, even if only on paper that these women, as members of civil society, can enjoy the same rights that are available to other members.

A third geographical setting within which the peculiarities of the question of legalisation can be studied is Africa. One of the biggest problems that Africa faces as a continent is that of AIDS. According to UNAIDS, the year 2005 saw 3.2 million new cases of infection, and 2.4 million deaths in Africa. At the individual level, the arithmetic of risk is horrific. In Zimbabwe and Botswana, one in four adults carry the virus. For every ten young men (15-24 years) infected with HIV in Kenya and Mali, there are as many as forty-five women who are currently infected. In West Africa in the war-ravaged economies of Liberia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, one industry that actually thrives is prostitution. On the streets of Abidjan, prostitutes are known as serpents because of the hissing sound they make to hail down men and soldiers, driving or walking by. At \$30 to share the rest of the night, these young women are able to earn what is roughly the equivalent of a monthly

salary for most in Abidjan. The figures are truly alarming. The major route is heterosexual intercourse, estimated to account for 93 percent of all adult cases, where in prostitution arising from grinding poverty emerges as a major factor contributing to this pandemic. There is little on offer for them from elsewhere which would compel these women to quit the trade. This is perhaps one of the reasons why organisations such as Hope for Africa concern themselves more closely with the rights of children. As a result engagement with issues surrounding prostitution in Africa, revolve mostly around the need to address the problem of AIDS. Dakar, the capital of Senegal, which has a majority population of Muslims, is known as one of the commercial sex capitals of the world, with prostitutes coming in from all over the sub-region as well as the Middle East. What is even more striking about Senegal however is that it has one of the lowest numbers of AIDS cases in Africa. Some years back, the World Health Organisation put the figure at less than 3,000 in a population of 8.3 million. The WHO believes that legalising prostitution is part of the reason. Senegal's government has been registering sex workers since 1966- long before AIDS was even heard of- to combat sexually transmitted diseases like Syphilis and Gonorrhoea. These registered prostitutes are required to regularly get health

checkups and are sometimes given medication as well. While these checkups are often resented, the fact that this has allowed the spread of AIDS to be checked, is welcomed and appreciated by many of the women themselves. Similar demands are being made in other countries including Namibia, Ghana and South Africa, where prostitution continues to be illegal.

Is legalisation and granting of better rights then the solution to the problem? Insofar as AIDS control is concerned it needs to be remembered that while protecting both these women and their client from the disease is important, the AIDS epidemic that Asia and Africa face has not been produced simply by prostitutes, and similarly the threat to their lives caused by this disease is not the only problem they face. What is required is the creation of conditions where women do not have to face violence and rape, coercion and oppression or anything else that goes against their own wishes. What is needed is a method whereby they can approach the police and the legal system without too many problems and seek justice. What is needed is easy accessibility to medical care. And to this end, giving some rights and privileges is a necessary first step. A sex worker must be provided her rights. The term should no longer be seen as a euphemism.

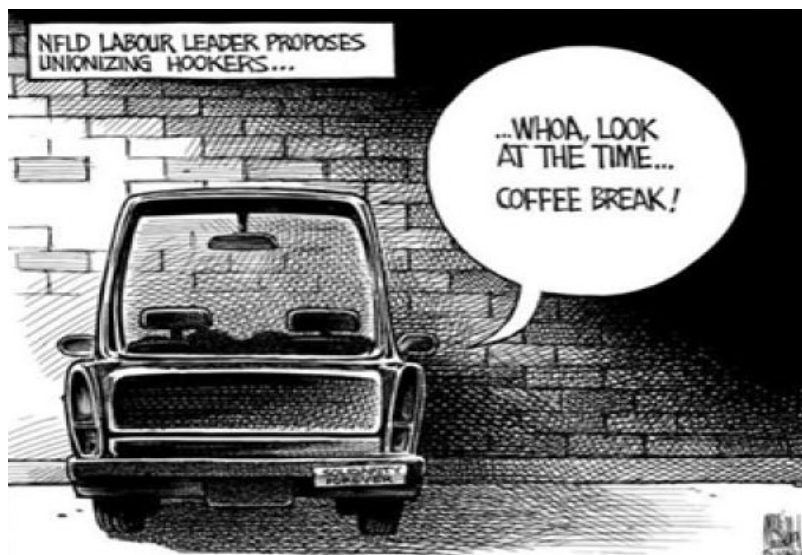


Illustration © Halifax Herald

Comtemporary South

Virtual Labour Issues¹



Jishnu Dasgupta

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When not in the thick of political fray, he is an aesthete, lover of book and music, old things and this city of joy.

I grew up with Tapesh, or Topsy, to put it in the more familiar term that one would read in the 'Pheluda' Adventures of Satyajit Ray. He, of course, like Tintin and the 'Five' of Blyton, could not be expected to reciprocate. And in the early 1990s, with the passing away of his creator, his reports also came to an end about his cousin, Bengali literature's Holmes. But if this young Watson had nothing new to add any more, he still generates empathy in me in some cultural mores. One was the inability to remember the new names of old roads and markets, buildings and localities. Thus, way before I learnt that changes of nomenclature was a political conspiracy on part of the state, to hide behind linguistic/regionalist/racist sentiments, the failure to govern, I had become suspicious, or at least, uncomfortable with the change of names of all these and even metropolitan cities.

But, this did not train me to be suspicious about new names. When the media and the government seem to repeat a name in unison, I did not investigate. I took it to be the only name possible for the new problem of labour in a new industry, Information Technology, IT for short. What continued to amaze me was the newness of it all, (or should I say difference) from all that I have known or seen. The office buildings were very different from either the new, ugly blocks that are sprouting all over Calcutta (Sorry, the new name is Kolkata) and indeed, far removed from the grandeur of the colonial buildings around the old heart of the city, Dalhousie Square, now rechristened BBD Bag. Sector V, as it is called, is really spanking new, where all the markers by which I know my city seem to come to an end. Even the politics seemed to change. In the IT sector, there were no unionising rights. No rallies are permitted. Thus, it seems, Sector V can never be part of the culture that has led to Calcutta being called 'The City of Processions.'

And all this because IT is *obviously* an essential sector, where the work revolves around a global clock. If it too, fell under the spell of West Bengal's 'notorious' Trade Unions, then the work would necessarily be ham-

pered, and there would be a flight of investment, as there had been a flight of industry in the turbulent years following the establishment of Left rule, or even before that, in the halycon, or disastrous days of the Maoist Naxalite agitation. Or so was the argument of the new mandarins of the old Left Front. Championing of the Sector has already been the hallmark of the new Chief Ministers across India. Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh and SM Krishna of Karnataka are merely the best examples of this new genre of Heads of Governments, at least one of who preferred to be called the CEO of his state. The CM of West Bengal is also no exception. He also is a champion of the IT industry, an icon of the upwardly mobile middle class and a darling of the media.

Yet, the media told us, Bengal's long-running traditions of trade union movements and his own (Communist) party's political compulsions, some of which had all-India ramifications, that shackled him. Thus, after a long battle, the government was forced to give in. Trade union rights were granted in this new industry, though of course, they were somewhat *different* keeping in mind the special status and situational realities of the Sector. It was only a few of the permanent critics who (completely unjustifiably) continued to say that this was not difference, it was truncation!



An IT building in Sector V

If this was the mainstream thought, the critical view was also wrapped in, at best, conventional terms of rhetoric of movements and rights, within which I was also caught. It is only so much later, while doing my research for this industry, that I realised how incompetent our conventional wisdom was to

tackle what was a new industry and presented a whole new set of problems, raising new issues. The piece, then, exceeded the brief I set for myself at the beginning, of researching the issues surrounding labour rights in a new arena. Instead, it became this.

At the very beginning, there was a stumbling block. So many of the employees in the Sector were prepared to whine about the hours that they had to keep, but hardly anyone saw unions to be the answer. I also saw this with the glasses of my politics firmly in place. I saw in it either the evidence of the faithlessness of the ruling 'Left' Front or, better still, the hegemony of depoliticisation of that great villain, Globalisation. And, in any case, the small discomforts were balanced by returns that were quite startling when one sees it in perspective of the rest of the economy. So, I explained the silence.

But more difficult to explain was the silence on another front. I had stumbled on another roadblock in the path charted to me by my editor. What about this issue in other Southern countries? Except in China, I could find no such restrictions. But then, in China, anything that has to do remotely with earning dollars, seemed to be under similar restrictions. Even in the North, there seemed to be no such issues. Nowhere does it seem to enjoy this special status. Only when it came to India, leaders, either political or industrial, are at pains to explain why it should be there or the opposite. After all this, I was left with an incomplete view, with no extra-Indian perspective, no global story, only a small sector with its 'petty' sectional problems which, in any case, seem too hard to comprehend, for the simple reason that one is simply at a loss to understand why there has to be such a hue and cry over what seems to be such a routine matter everywhere else.

But then, does one come to rest here? What does one then, have to say about the special status of the industry? These explanations of the silence is merely an excuse, one that might be easy to hide behind, but then, like all easy ways, it hides so

¹ My thanks are due to the extensive help that I got from Soumitra Bose, who shared his knowledge, both as someone who has worked many years in the industry, and as a political worker with me, over a couple of long chats. Bodhisattva Kar and Samata Biswas also helped out in crucial matters.

Contemporary South

much. Why does IT enjoy this special status? That is the question, which, by remaining unanswered, might only be begging one. And yet, if one wishes to understand the issue of unionising, one cannot escape this.

The act of keeping Information Technology so separate from the rest of the economy is deeply implicated in, or to put it in more politically correct terms, informed by some processes. Processes, that this piece wishes to interrogate.

I have already said that there is a discourse of separateness marking the industry. It is this separateness, this distinction that necessitates different unionising rights. This distinction can be measured in terms of other claimants, albeit (relatively) unsuccessful, to such a status. BPO companies and banks have a much closer relation with the new global clock. By the logic of globalisation, these sectors have to serve needs that are far more immediate. They often have to be "on call" at all times, given the compulsions of that moment. IT companies, on the other hand, work on projects over longer periods, and the time distribution is far less erratic. Yet, there are no curbs comparable to that on unions in the IT sector there. BPO companies, in particular, far from being accorded a higher status, are often regarded with a degree of suspicion and vilification. Even now, there are press reports of sordid incidents and whispers of the usual villains, sex, drugs and alcohol, being rampant there.

Alcoholism in the IT sector, on the other hand, is socially legitimised as something that happens *naturally*. Those who (over) indulge in alcohol, still something frowned on in large sections of Indian society, are pitied as martyrs who have been put in the uncomfortable position of being in the frontlines of adjusting with the global clock. The mounting pressures of this new line of work are seen as responsible. But the answer, it is asserted, is not giving them rights that workers in other industries can claim via their unions, or at least try to do so. Instead, they are seen as people to be viewed merely with sympathy, as their *sacrifice* is inevitable if the 'we' are not to fall behind in the global rat race.

It would be wrong to assume that the IT workers themselves are any different in their attitude. Largely, they share the animosity towards unions and apathy towards politics. And it is here that the victory of the hegemonising role of the wants and desires generated by globalisation are most marked.

In the new structure of wants, and the concomitant one of careers, engineering (leading to IT) ranks with the top. Thus, the very cream, or at least part of that, comes to this.² And, the pay and the social prestige of the sector makes it seem worthwhile to them to risk the complete loss of social life, of burn-outs (which is common by the age of forty five), the lack of labour rights and so much else. So much, I said, but perhaps, so little, in the new scheme of things.



Another curious thing is the proliferation of people active in student politics in the sector in Calcutta. And these people are mostly from those who have practiced politics outside the *mainstream*. In 2005, for instance, there was a major student agitation in the Engineering Faculty of Jadavpur University. That year, there was a virtual headhunt by those in charge of 'campus recruitment' for the leaders of the agitation.³ One can easily jump to the conclusion that this is an obvious conspiracy on part of the capitalists to lure into their fold, and thereby neutralise, potential threats. But that would be reading too much into what old industry hands regard merely as a policy to recruit the people most likely to be of a creative disposition, to think out innovative solutions disregarding conventions and to handle pressure.

The danger is however greater, simply because of the debilitating hegemony of inertia that it generates. Socially generated elitism legitimises actions and mores that would be seen as unacceptable in others. It gives self-justification to erstwhile radicals. It breeds suspicion of, and distrust in unions. This last is only furthered when the first moves at creating unions come from groups or individuals already under the scanner. Of the two earliest attempts in this direction, one was by the extreme right wing Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, which is the largest Trade Union on the basis of its affiliation to the RSS ideology that is regarded as *Communal Fascism*. The other, by the CITU, the trade union affiliated to the *reforming* mandarins of globalisation in Bengal. The latest report of the Central Labour Commis-

sion shows that the CITU has gone from third to fifth among trade unions in India, while the two other Marxist Trade Unions, AITUC and AICCTU have both bettered their position substantially.⁴ The variegated stand of the CPI (M), to which the CITU is affiliated to, is blamed for this. Moreover, the person put in charge of CITU operations in the sector is one regarded as responsible for bringing ruin to the state-owned IT concern, WEBEL.

There is then a widespread perception that these unions would not really take up the cause of the workers if it came to a crunch. That the companies have volunteered to take up the tab for these unions, of course, does not enhance credibility on this count. Instead, it raises fears about the role of these unions if and when attempts are made to bring down the pay scale. That might finally provide an occasion of discord. But what that would mean, without any practice of either rights or of trade unions, is a difficult one to answer.

At the start, I mentioned that Topshe has nothing more to add to the exploits of Pheluda. But that does not mean an end to the Pheluda saga.⁵ There have continued to be films based on the novels. And, in a way, they are new. Or, at least, Pheluda is new. He no longer smokes cheap, unfiltered Charminars, but costlier, more posh filtered cigarettes. He has grown out of the old world charm of *The Statesman*. He now reads *The Telegraph*, a more upmarket, (and currently) more pro-capital newspaper. The new Pheluda has also discarded his old maxim of the need of walking through a city to know it. Car rides do fine for him today. Unlike Holmes, Pheluda's filmic representation has not been as a period piece. He has changed with the times, and represents the cultural mores of the post-liberalisation upwardly mobile middle class in India. But these changes have not hampered his ability to solve crime.

The same has generated the need for a distinctive industry to be showcased as an arena of success, for this can be used to paper over farmers suicides and deaths due to hunger all over the country. It is all the better if that distinction can be used to curb such uncomfortable and profit-lessening question of labour rights. In the end, then, the industries might be new and globalisation might be new, but there are still striking similarities with the strategies of state and capital of old.

² Where the 'cream' of the country's students go and what they do also has another view. Some time back, at an address at one of the super-elite Indian Institute of Managements, the speaker made the now famous quip of the students claiming to be the cream desiring to be trained to sell cold cream!

³ Curiously, the first ever protest march in Sector V was also during this movement, when former students of JU brought out a rally to protest police atrocities against students on a hunger strike. That this was allowed shows several things, the attitude of the state towards an elite (as practically none of these protesters would not have been 'menials' or 'blue collar' workers) group of protesters, being merely one of them.

⁴ *The Hindu*, 1 December 2006.

⁵ There was also a novel involving the Pheluda characters written by a leading sports journalist immediately after Ray's death. But the novel had little success and no broader implications.

Contemporary South

Empowering Women across South Asia



Paromita Das Gupta

Paromita has completed her Masters in History from Calcutta University in 2006. She is keenly interested in History of Medicine. She is extremely shy to admit her talent in Indian Classical Music in which she has been awarded the title of Sangeet Visharad.

One common business all human beings share is the pursuit of happiness, which is impossible in an environment of conflict. Lasting peace cannot be achieved if billions live in devastating poverty, a global menace. It was perhaps this awareness that led Muhammad Yunus to lay the cornerstone of a 'village bank' that looked not to the rich, but to the poor. He thereby turned conventional economic theories about credit and creditworthiness on their head. The poor, he claimed, and especially the women among them were eminently credit-worthy. Not only did credit transform their lives, it gave new meaning and definition to the business of lending and borrowing. Yunus was right. And he walked a long and hard road to show it to the world, implementing his popular model of micro-credit, the Grameen Bank, in about 70,000 villages of Bangladesh, since its inception in 1983. The bank lent to the very poorest in Bangladesh, particularly women, helping them start small business enterprises without collateral.



Grameen Bank payphone lady

Returning from a Fulbright scholarship in the U.S., Yunus was traumatised by the 1974 famine that gripped Bangladesh and headed out into the villages to see what he could do. As a professor of economics, he was astonished to learn that women in nearby villages making bamboo stools were in severe debt to moneylenders. His initial aim was to alleviate poverty not through charity but business, which involved women. It altered the conventional notion that the men were the primary agents of production, the breadwinners and the permanent income earners. Yunus believes that economic growth and political democracy cannot achieve their full potential unless the female half of humanity participates on an equal footing with the male. Women in the villages were given small-scale loans without any financial security to buy their own raw

materials and cut out the middlemen. The workers could now sell their products in the open market at a fair price, which was enough to clear the debt and sustain their family. Today the Grameen Bank has 1084 branches, serving nearly 6.6 million borrowers, of them 97 per cent are women and over 98 per cent loans are repaid, a recovery rate higher than any other banking system. Grameen Foundation works to reach the world's poorest people across the continents. From the U.S. to Uganda, over 100 million people are now enrolled in various micro-credit schemes. Yunus once said, "In Bangladesh, where nothing works and there's no electricity, micro-credit functions like clockwork". Grameen's success is not just for providing credit to the poor, but also creating institutional arrangements, which provide them with access to other information and technologies, to markets, to social justice and so on. In this context one can highlight the 'telephone ladies'. There are nearly 300,000 of them funded to buy mobile phones, which they deploy as pay phones. Thereby they are able to offer phone services to nearby half of Bangladesh villages where earlier no service existed. It is heartening to find that nearly 16 per cent of the bank's revenue comes from the 'telephone ladies'.

Muhammad Yunus dubbed as the 'Poor Man's Banker', has shown how the poorest of the poor, so far positioned at the receiving end of the economic hierarchy, can also contribute to the economic development and the progress of a nation.

Yunus and his Grameen Bank's noble contribution to Bangladesh and the force behind the movement was recognised by the international community on 13 October 2006, with the award of the *Nobel Peace Prize* for creating economic and social developments from below.

Yunus is the first businessman ever to win the Nobel Prize for Peace. He is also the third Bengalee to have bagged this prestigious award. Interestingly there is a striking link between the first Bengalee Nobel winner, Rabindranath Tagore and the latest. Even the poet had invested Rs. 1,00,000 in a venture similar to that of Yunus's, naming it the 'Krishi Bank'. It was perhaps, the same humanitarian approach that animated Yunus's endeavours.

Yunus has recently pointed out that

Bangladesh has been reducing poverty by 2 per cent a year since the turn of the millennium. He remarked, "At the rate we're heading, we'll halve total poverty by 2015". Yunus received India's *Gandhi Peace Prize* in 2000. Although the Nobel is a breathtaking achievement, yet Yunus's aspirations are loftier. Yunus said, he would use the 10 million Swedish Kronor prize money to "find more innovative ways" to help the unfortunate.

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html



Md. Yunus

Working towards the same end, Ruth Manorama, an Indian activist who has championed the cause of Dalit women, has been awarded the 2006 Right Livelihood Award, better known as the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize. Manorama is the eleventh Indian to receive this prestigious award since its inception in 1980. Other Indian laureates include Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (1991), Baba Amte of the Chipko Movement (1987) and Swami Agnivesh, the most recent Indian winner, in 2004.

Jakob von Uexkull, founder of the awards said, "The jury honours Manorama, a dalit herself, for her commitment over decades in achieving equality for dalit women, building effective women's organizations and working for their rights at national and international levels."

Born into a large Dalit Christian family in Chennai, Manorama experienced the pain of being a Dalit. "The greatness of Ruth," says compatriot Jyoti, "has been to change the pain of Dalits to power." Manorama herself heads the National Alliance of Women that monitors the government's performance in protecting the rights of women. She also works with many other organisations like the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, the Karnataka Slum Dwellers Federation, the National Labour Centre and the National Federation of Dalit Women.

Comtemporary South

So far, the public sector was the largest employer of Dalits but they are losing employment with increased privatisation. Manorama held, "MNCs and the corporate sector have become the biggest land grabbers in the country today. They are ruining the environment and depriving us of water and forest cover. Therefore we plan to intensify our struggle for land". As a member of the task force on gender in the Eleventh Five Year Plan she raised

her voice for two acres of wetland or five acres of dry land from the government to poor families throughout the country. "That would not only provide security to the poor but also protect our national wealth from the forces of globalization," she says. Manorama also plans to initiate a movement to end the evils of manual scavenging and the devdasi system.

Manorama intends to expand the scope of her activities by utilising the

prize money worth \$ 275,000 (Rs. 45 lakhs) in building a resource centre for women in Bangalore, where one of her organisations- the *Karnataka State Slum-Dwellers Organisation*- had bought land. Dedicating the award to the millions of deprived Indian women, Manorama said the international recognition would strengthen her resolve to fight for empowering women.



Ruth Manorama

Across the South

Labour Legislations across South Countries



Kashshaf Ghani

Kashshaf has completed his M.A. in History from Calcutta University. Currently he is engaged in a project to write the one hundred and fifty years' history of the University. His own research interests are in the field of medieval Islam and its career in India. Kashshaf spends a significant proportion of his week in Arabic and Persian lessons.

He is unusual among historians in his interest in technology. He is quite a wizard with software and hardware and an invaluable member of the e-Magazine team.

16 October, Krishnagar: A teenager, who started frequenting a gambling den after the newly-introduced child labour ban prevented him from working at his father's shop, has shot dead another boy similarly unemployed.¹

22 November, Calcutta: Thirteen boys barely 10 years old are squeezed into a 50 sq. ft. room, in 26/2C, G. J. Khan Road, Topsia, with hammers, cutters, fittings and adhesives. Once the day's work is done, the door slams shut on them at 1 am. They are locked in for the night so they cannot run away or escape.²

Yet, child labour is prohibited in most sectors. Despite much discussion on the need to enforce legislation against child labour, nothing seems to have changed for the better. The young continue to slog in the proliferating sweat shops or serving the road side tea stalls. To them it is more a matter of survival rather than 'exploitation'. Authorities, even when they may be intent on the execution and implementation of legal prohibition of child labour, are stymied by the paradox of the 'exploiter' seeking to protect and perpetuate their exploitation. Providing freedom along with the right to study, play and enjoy the beauties of a childhood life is a noble idea no doubt, but is it possible if the withdrawal of a child's labour pushes the family to the brink of starvation? For most children, work is not a voluntary decision, but a compulsion forced upon them; by parents, by near and dear ones and above all a grumbling stomach.

The vulnerability of the poor cheapens child labour. They are lured into work in return for a few pennies, two square meals a day and at times a tattered garment. Abolishing child labour and freeing these hapless ones from the clutches of bondage requires the government to explore alternative modes of sustenance for their family. Since child labour is the responsibility of the labour department alone, the education department is not involved in rehabilitation. The biggest problem therefore is ensuring quality education for those rescued. A lack of coordina-

tion between departments makes the entire effort futile.

In the sweatshops of Calcutta, children, majority below the age of fourteen, labour for 15 to 18 hours a day, all for three square meals a day and no pay. The more skilled ones earn Rs. 1000-1500 a month

According to a recent report by the International Labour Organization, child labour thrives in situations where adults are unemployed, families are large, and there is a lack of land and other resources and backwardness in terms of literacy and skills. In such cases children are forced to work mainly to augment family income.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 bans the employment of children below 14 years of age in specified occupations and processes which are considered unsafe and harmful to child workers and regulates the conditions of work of children in employments where they are not prohibited from working. It applies to all establishments (shop, commercial establishment, workshop, farm, residential hotel, and restaurant, eating house, theatre or other place of public amusement or entertainment) and workshops wherein any industrial process is carried on (excluding one covered under section 67 of the Factories Act, 1948).

It also lays down penalties for employment of children in violation of the provisions of this Act, and other Acts which forbid the employment of children. For violating provisions of the Act, it further provides for punishment with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than three months but which may extend to one year or with fine which shall not be less than Rs. 10,000 but which may extend to Rs. 20,000 or with both.

In other South countries too child labour regulations are a raging issue. According to the Syrian Commission for Democratic Freedom and Human Rights sixty five percent of working children in the Syrian countryside are less than fifteen years, while in the

cities it is less than thirty six percent. Seventy percent of the children work for free within their families, while the remaining thirty percent work for third parties earning a small wage. Among this latter category, the majority are girls. Ten percent of working children have accidents or fall sick. Syria signed the Declaration of Children Rights in 1993 and an international agreement in 2002 on children's trade, their involvement in immoral activities and their participation in armed conflicts. But as the statistics reveal, the venture has been quite a failure.

Recently there have been two study reports, revealing both internal and external child trafficking in The Gambia. Children, between fourteen to twenty years, are internally trafficked from rural to urban areas and engaged in work, begging, street vending and domestic service. External trafficking of children is mainly for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced domestic and commercial labour. In their efforts to combat child trafficking the government of The Gambia has agreed to sign a multilateral agreement to combat child trafficking in West Africa with the Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Togo.



A child labourer works at a garment-maker's illegal unit in Howrah

In spite of signing the International Treaty on the Worst types of Child Labour, the Guatemalan government still lacks a policy to protect its approximately million-and-a-half minors. Six out of every ten children in Guatemala work in industries considered to have the worst labour conditions. In Latin America, Guatemala ranks second in child exploitation. Boys and girls between five and seventeen

Illustrations courtesy of The Telegraph.

¹ The Telegraph

² The Telegraph

Across the South

years of age work in stonemasonry, mining, horticulture, fireworks production, prostitution, agriculture, fishing, and the production of construction materials. Others are engaged in selling items on street corners and at traffic lights, cleaning shoes, or juggling. Enactment of the Law of Full Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA) is one of the first steps towards eradicating this plague.

According to a study by the International Labour Organization, Ecuador employs thirty percent of its children; Guatemala employs twenty-five percent; Brazil twenty percent; Peru and Colombia, sixteen percent respectively; El Salvador and Costa Rica, twelve percent respectively; and Chile two percent.

By the end of World War I, the focus had shifted from regulating child labour to a welfarist approach. With the removal of children from the formal sector, state policy developed a blind spot towards child labour. Economic compulsions still forced children into labour, but they were forced into unregulated and informal sectors where they faced even greater exploitation. The designation of women and children as 'special' in the 1930s further marginalised them in the labour market.



An illegal sweatshop in Howrah

Recently there have been some cases of 'celebrities' from the North adopting disprivileged children from the South. This clearly evokes the inequalities between the 'developed' North, where women (and men) have opted not to have children as evidenced in spiraling concerns over falling birth rates in many of these countries, and the poor of the South, who have neither access to nor proper information about birth control and are unable to feed and rear their own children according to the evolving standards of childcare in the North. This adds a political complexion to the seemingly benevolent gesture of North celebrities accumulating 'rainbow' families from different parts of the South. Exploitation here is not only of the children but also of their parents.

From UN goodwill ambassadors to pop singers, adoption seems to interest everybody. So much so that millions of dollars are forked out to dodge obligations related to law.

Human rights activists have accused pop diva Madonna of ignoring legal procedures while adopting the thirteen month old David Banda from the impoverished African country of Malawi. Malawi law normally requires prospective parents eager to adopt children to stay in Malawi for twelve months to check their suitability. More importantly foreigners are barred from applying. However critics are of the opinion that Madonna's 3 million dollar gift "to the children of Malawi" may have persuaded authorities to short-circuit the adoption rules. Discrepancies came to the fore once David's father Yohane Banda said that he agreed on the adoption of his son only till David became old enough to return to his family. Yohane is quoted as saying: "Had they told us that Madonna wanted to adopt my son and make him her own son, we would not have agreed to that. It would have been better for him to continue staying at the orphanage because I see no reason why my child should be given away forever when I can feed him."

Buying and selling of labour is not only restricted to factories and workplaces alone but has become a part of ones everyday life. The subtler the forms and methods of exploitation, the more it is easier to evade the eyes of law. Such is the case with surrogate motherhood or more popularly the selling of the womb. Third world countries like India have become a busy business point for both the womb donor and the recipient. For some it is an easier way to motherhood, for others it is a difficult way to procure livelihood. But it is the struggle for survival that at the end of the day makes every act of exploitation look justified.

As we turn the clock back to pre-modern societies of the South, the picture does not reflect anything better. In the Indian subcontinent the caste hierarchy was based exclusively on the concept of labour. Occupations determined to a large extent individuals belonging to a caste or a sub-caste. As a natural consequence mobility between the ranks of the caste structure was also largely dependent on occupational categories and the adjustments one could carry within that structure. Therefore in the subcontinent both the urban and the rural labour were based on the pattern of caste system prevailing in that area. Exceptions although rare were nonetheless found. However with the coming of the British more strict regulations came to be imposed on the occupational groups. Although local traditions and regulations were given precedence, certain exceptions are also seen. In 1675 when the British started regulating the production of local goldsmiths and silversmiths in Bombay, the regulations were 'framed on the model of those of the corre-

sponding guilds in London'.

In about 1620 blacksmiths, goldsmiths and other similar artisans got 3 pence (approximately 8.4 to 9.6 pice) a day. Their helpers got 1 penny (2.8 to 3.2 pice) or less. In 1675-76 the British raised the wages of labourers to 2.5 to 6 pice due to the rise in cost of living.

Although division of labor in the Indian context was mainly based on caste differentiation, exceptions were also there. In the urban industries where more complex patterns of organisation were followed, caste division received less importance. Rules of taxation were levied on the basis of workshops involved in the production process. In south India in 1525 new rules of taxation implied that, "If ten looms are kept by a single family, only nine are to be taxed". Reference to caste structure with relation to labour regulations therefore finds little reference in the weaving industry. However mention of forced labour is found in the eighteenth century accounts of the Maratha government. Artisans of different kinds were used as forced labour in the construction of government buildings. Also necessary labour through forced service was acquired from the districts for periods of fifteen days to over two months at length. The forced labour were sometimes paid small amounts of cash or grain. Nominal wage rates were the norm rather than the exception during this period. Wages if increased, due to natural disasters or rise in cost of living, lasted only for a short span of time before sliding back to its former self.

There has never been a 'free market' in labour. In sixteenth century India, caste was one social instrument for controlling labour. In pre-industrial Europe, a host of regulations, including draconian apprenticeship laws operated. Today, in an era of globalisation, when borders and states are supposed to be poised at the brink of disappearance, when mobility of capital is celebrated in all fora, including erstwhile communist states and parties, in Kolkata, tens of thousands of children are locked into dark cells to produce goods for expanding global markets. Such dark cells are reported from every country. There are not only sweatshops in Indonesia, but also garment sheds in east London. Bondage and globalisation fit together quite well after all. 'Free' labour remains, as observers knew from the moment of its invention, a mythical construct. The reality is unending exploitation of labourer, from pre modern systems to modern day 'welfare' societies.

Across the South

Snippets from the World of Labour

Jishnu Dasgupta

The First Labour Strike

When was the first strike recorded in history? That is a question which would leave many flummoxed. And, if the location is the question, people would, normally come up with some Northern country or the other. But in reality, it was in Egypt, in the reign of Ramesses III, the last great Pharaoh (1182/3 BC to 1152/1151 BC). But, during his reign, there occurred the invasion of the 'Sea People' and two Libyan invasions between the sixth and eleventh regnal years.



Ramesses now, taking a walk



Deir el-Medina



Temple of Ramesses III

Though these were put down, the heavy cost of these battles slowly exhausted Egypt's treasury and contributed to the gradual decline of the Egyptian Empire in Asia. The severity of these difficulties is stressed by the fact that the first known labour strike in recorded history occurred during Year 29 of Ramesses' reign, when the food rations for the favoured royal tomb-builders in the village of *Set Maat her imenty Waset* (now known as Deir el Medina), could not be provisioned. The main reason for this deficiency was due to the massive and extended 1159 BC to 1140 BC eruption of the Hekla III volcano in Iceland, which expelled large amounts of smoke and rock into the atmosphere thereby causing large-scale failures of the crop harvest. The presence of significant quantities of volcanic soot in the air prevented much sunlight from reaching the ground and also arrested global tree growth for almost two full decades until 1140 BC. The result in Egypt was a substantial inflation in grain prices under the later reigns of Ramesses VI-VII whereas the prices for fowl and slaves remained constant. The eruption, hence, affected Ramesses III's final years and impaired his ability to provide a constant supply of grain rations to the workmen of Deir el-Medina community. This discovery has caused a severe dent in the long-held theory of the great Egyptian works being built by slave labour.

However, there is another, even more interesting snippet. Some recent works have suggested that the strike was actually against the lack of kohl for their eyes. While this might seem frivolous, that is because we are unaware that for them kohl was not merely a fashion accessory. Historians suggest that in the deserts of ancient Egypt, people needed it to work in the conditions.

Singapore, 1955

On April 23, 1955, workers from the Hock Lee Amalgamated Bus Company and some Chinese students began to go on strike. They were members of the Singapore Bus Workers' Union (SBWU) and were protesting against poor working conditions, long work hours and low pay. They also felt threatened by a rival union which was supported by the bus company to counter any labour action by SBWU.



The strike was rumored to be instigated by pro-communists. However, it was more likely to have been fanned by anti-colonial sentiments. Singapore had just held a Legislative Assembly Election in April, and the Labour Front led by David Marshall formed a minority government after winning a narrow victory. Fong Swee Suan and Lim Chin Siong, two anti-colonial leaders of SBWU, felt that the labour front was still controlled by the British. Violent as it was, the riots were an opportunity to fight for independence and self government.

12 May 1955 is still remembered as Black Friday. On that day, police used water cannon & tear gas on a mass of 2000 students & workers. In the retaliatory riots two policemen died, as well as a student a scribe. Later, Hock Lee Bus Company and the SBWU signed a ruling issued by the Court of Inquiry. Still later, the Chief Minister, David Marshall, expelled two students & closed down the two schools from where most strikers came. But, the students remained defiant. On 16 May, 2000 students forced their way into the two schools & entrenched themselves. The government was ultimately forced to give in.

Across the South

The Copperbelt Strike

The Copperbelt strike in May 1935 was a great strike action by African mineworkers in the Copperbelt (then in Northern Rhodesia, today called Zambia) to protest against unfair taxes imposed by the British colonial authorities. The strike involved three of the four great copper mines of the province, namely those of Mufulira, Nkana and Roan Antelope. Near the latter mine the strike ended in tragedy, where six protesters were killed by the police. After this the mineworkers decided to recall the strike, even if they had failed to obtain what they had protested for. Nevertheless, this action remains important as the first organised industrial agitation in Northern Rhodesia and is viewed by some as the first overt action against the colonial rule.



Miners in the 1950s

All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)

On 1 May 1925, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) was officially founded. With 134 million members it is the largest trade union in the world. However, many, such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, maintain the position that the ACFTU is not an independent trade union organisation due to its relations with the government.



Stamp Commemorating 80 years of the ACFTU

South Korea

In December 1996 and January 1997, South Korea experienced the largest organised strike in its history, when workers in the automotive and shipbuilding industries refused to work in protest against a law which was to make firing employees easier for employers and curtail labour organising rights.

Among other things, the Korean government intended to postpone the legal recognition of the recently established Korean Confederation of Trade Unions until the year 2000. The officially recognised Federation of Korean Trade Unions then called upon its 1.2 million members to go on strike on December 26. This was its first call for a general strike since the union's founding in 1962.

After a single day, the strikes started spreading to other sectors including hospitals. On December 28, South Korean riot police turned violent against the strikers, using tear gas to dispel crowds. Strikers responded by throwing bricks.

In late January of 1997, the strike ended after the labour laws were repealed by the government.



Rally of the KCTU in 2003

Bordaberry's Coup

In 1973 a coup was declared in Uruguay by the president, Juan María Bordaberry, who closed parliament and imposed direct rule from a junta of military generals. The official reason was to crush the Tupamaros, a Marxist urban guerrilla movement. The leftist trade union federations called a general strike and occupations of factories. The strike lasted just over two weeks. It was ended with most of the trade union leaders in jail, dead, or exiled to Argentina. As part of the coup all associations including trade unions were declared illegal and banned.

Unions and political parties remained illegal until 24 general strikes in 1984 forced the military to accept civilian rule and the restoration of democracy.



Juan María Bordaberry

Across the South

Labour History Research: A Reflection of Changing Times



Bidisha Dhar

Bidisha is a Ph.D scholar in the Centre for Historical Studies, J.N.U pursuing research in modern Indian history.

The international conference on *Towards Global Labour History: New Comparisons* was held from 10 to 12 November 2005. It was organised by the Association of Indian Labour Historians, New Delhi and the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA under the aegis of SEPHIS Programme and International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Research in Labour History has a dialectical relationship with changing times. The 1960s and the 1970s were times of student and worker movements all over the world. In India, in the post-Emergency period workers were organising themselves in the hope of achieving sympathetic labour policies from the newly elected government. Strikes, often spontaneous, initiated by the workers themselves outside the established trade unions, formed the popular mode of protest. Labour History writings in the 1960s and 1970s highlighted these events.

By the 1980s, labour movements were on a decline the world over. The breakdown of Soviet Russia in 1990s was one of the turning moments in world history, which also witnessed a growing industrial crisis, large scale closure of mills and retrenchment of workers. Globalisation led to massive economic restructurings with the world of the industrial working class facing effacement with the emergence of global subcontracting and the retreat of the state.

The Conference roughly identified two periods of labour history research: The first phase till 1970 and the second phase from 1990 onwards. The dominance of the Western academia in the first phase of research in the 1960s and the 1970s shifted to the Southern countries by the second phase in the 1990s. This shift was perhaps complementary to the nature of crisis the labouring poor were facing in the latter phase. Globalisation and sub-contracting in the 1990s blurred the dominant image of the male, wage earning factory worker which had been in the writings of the earlier phase. The world of the labouring class now included unorganised home-based workers, casual labourers, self-employed artisans.

The theme of the Conference was located in these shifts in the world of labour which opened up new avenues trying to transcend the implicit binaries of comparisons— the West and the rest of the world, the factory and the workshop, the urban and the rural, the pre-modern and the modern/contemporary, the employer and the em-

ployee— giving way to comparisons with a focus on sites, forms and relations of labour. It is important here to mention that the most important aspect in labour history research is to identify the agency of the labourer.

One of the ways to locate the workers' agency is to look into acts of resistance by labouring groups against various labour regimes. In her paper *'Rethinking the Indian Indentureship system in Trinidad and British Guiana: Politics of Resistance'*, Radica Mahase attempted to recover the agency of indentured labour groups in Trinidad and British Guiana through the acts of resistance against their surroundings and the colonial authority. These resistances were sporadic and largely unorganised in the initial phase and more organised in the latter phase of the twentieth century. Often these acts of resistances were articulated in the private realm in the form of cultural lifestyles and in the everyday activities of popular culture.

Colonialism also played an important role in convict labour history. In the Andamans, which marked the highest standards of penal discipline for the colonial state, an extremely demanding and repressive labour regime was adopted. The convicts played no role in the labour exchange relation nor did they have any legal right to appeal against any excesses. However, the coercion did not obliterate the process of negotiation, bargaining, contestation and differentiation. On the other hand these factors conditioned the working of the state and also empowered the convicts giving them the power to negotiate labour relations which was otherwise denied to them as criminals. Aparna Vaidik's paper *'The Labour regimes in Colonial Andamans (1858-1921)'* discussed such issues and addressed two broad issues of whether the convict labour regime in the Andamans which started receiving convicts in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857 was a part of 'global system of forced migration' and second, was it an unremittingly coercive labour regime? Her analysis considered the character and organisation of the island's convict workforce and the methods and issues involved in the management of the labour works which gave a glimpse of the convict labourer's life on the island under the coercive and unfree labour regime from the description of the labouring tasks allocated to these convicts which were based, apart from their qualifications, also on certain

stereotypes.

Since the mid-twentieth century in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka and Assam there was a great competition for better performance in the Global Tea Market. Kalyan Das analysed the conditions of labour in such 'changing accumulation regimes via a comparative analysis of the tea plantations in Assam and Sri Lanka' in his article *Placing Labour in Changing Accumulation regimes: Legalities, Regulations and Wellbeing in the Tea Plantation Labour Market of Sri Lanka and Assam in India since Independence*. One of the ways adopted to overcome incompetiveness, which is often blamed on the high labour cost, is to delegate the production to small, vertically disintegrated farms. It placed the labouring community at a disadvantageous position by reducing the scope for regulations, trade unionism and collective bargaining and the welfare of the labourers becomes dependent on their individual effort and capacity to bargain. To cope with the highly dominant trade unions, the new production regimes bargain for tax concessions and withdrawal of many duties and surcharges as were prevalent in the erstwhile production structures. The state on its part gave support to these small, unorganised production sectors through various policies and promotion measures overlooking the welfare provisions for workers. Thus, the competitiveness achieved was at the cost of labour welfare.



Chitra Joshi and Emma Alexander

The Assam Tea Plantation was one of the largest private capitalist enterprises in colonial India. It employed a large labour force— nearly half a million labour in 1942— at the lowest wages. Labour troubles, an appalling record of labour relations and fluctuating international tea prices never hampered the production procedure. Rana Behal in *'Power Structure, Discipline and Labour in Assam Plantations during the Colonial Rule'* suggests that this was due to the nature of its power structure as also the hierarchies

Across the South

this connection to prevent legal impediments against the use of extra legal and coercive forms of labour control in the plantations. The key strategy used by the authorities to control labour in the plantation was through immobilising labour within the plantation complex after their arrival there by curbing their contact with the outside world. The planters also developed strategies to dominate, discipline and control labour both at the work place and their living spaces through legal and extra legal methods. The paper tries to trace the evolution of this power structure in the Assam tea plantations.

In the fifteenth century, one of the agendas of the colonial state for the maintenance of Portuguese power structure in Africa was spreading a simplified form of Portuguese amongst the native Africans. Claudio Costa Pinheiro's *'Spreading the Two Slavery and the Subsume of Multiple Labor Identities'* explains that both native Africans and Portuguese convicts who were left along the African coast were employed by the colonial state through the 'immersion method in the language of the other'. This led to the consolidation of a simplified, pidgin Portuguese as the *lingua franca* along the western African coast and more specifically in the vast stretch of the Indian Ocean (African and Asian coasts) and in Southeast Asia. Sometimes for a closer understanding of the subaltern politics, the analysis of strikes can be useful. Nitin Sinha's *'Forms of Worker's Protest amidst Dilemmas of Contesting Mobilizations: the Jamalpur Strike of 1919 and 1928'* and Charity Angya's *'Women and Trade Unionism in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of Changing Gender Roles in Labour Unions of Selected Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria'* discussed the role of strikes in worker's politics in India and Africa respectively. Jamalpur, one of the oldest railway workshops of India witnessed two strikes in 1919 and 1928. In the 1919 strike, the workers initiated the unrest and determined the nature and course of the strike. About three to four thousand workers, organised under their own leaders, placed their grievances before the manager. The absence of trade unions in the strike, Nitin explains, reflected the autonomy of the 'subaltern' in practicing their politics without the initiative of any 'outsiders'. On the other hand, in the 1928 strike, trade union politics played an important role. Talking the language of capital and labour, they set the agenda and called for a strike but the workers refused to strike, thus, once again asserting their 'autonomy'.

In the 1919 strike, *sadhus* played an important role in the mobilisation of the workers when the trade unions had failed to mobilise them. Workers' politics was not always shaped and conceptualised within the framework of capital and labour as trade unions would have liked them to do. These

present within the production regime which were operative at two levels. The power structure was strengthened by the industry's social and political connections with the colonial authority. The apex body, the Indian Tea Association, with its head quarters in the United Kingdom and managing agents in Calcutta, lobbied for the industry and was also a planner and implementer of its strategies of production organisation and labour policies in the tea plantations. It used These contestations challenge the assumptions of the traditional Marxist-Nationalist accounts where the political consciousness of the worker is directly proportional to the number of strikes organised by the trade unions with an implicit assumption that the 'outsiders' make the worker 'political'.



Jan Breman

Charity Angya looked at the reasons behind lesser participation of women in one of the main teachers' unions in Nigeria, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU). In spite of their tremendous involvement in the formal wage labour sector, there is far less participation of women in trade unionism. Along with this, even those women who play an active role in the union never get elected into positions of leadership within the union.

The gender roles within the union and also the organisation of the union itself are determined by the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society which constructs certain gender stereotypes crucial in maintaining the existing socio-economic structure. For example, the political sphere is constructed as a male domain while the home is a woman's domain. This is apparent in the women's perception of trade unionism in Nigeria that the trade unionism is to be avoided as it is not only confrontational but also in conflict with the demands of the home. Her argument is that if more women begin to participate in the functioning of the union, the whole character of the union itself will change. It will become less confrontational and more interactive. This argument was contested by a number of participants on the ground that it implicitly assumes women to be less militant than men and thus undermines women's agency of protest.

S.B. Upadhyaya's *Meaning of Labour in Dalit Autobiographies* explores the meaning of labour in pre-modern and modern societies, both Indian and western. The Greeks and Romans saw work negatively. Work,

which is the absence of leisure, is only meant for the slaves. Hebrews saw work as having resulted from a curse, thus it was demeaning, but also necessary for redeeming sin. In contrast, Islam and Protestantism had a positive concept of work and abolished the hierarchy of work, giving dignity to it. In India caste system imposed hierarchy and gradation of work. Colonialism did not change the basic tenets of the caste structure. In fact it allied with the native elite and imposed the traditional Brahminical social hierarchy more vehemently. But as the inheritors of the Protestant ethics, the British created some space, especially in urban arena where some sort of a legal equality could be claimed. However, this in turn also led to a sharpening of the rural-urban contradiction.

Based on the analysis of some Dalit autobiographies, Upadhyaya concludes that most Dalits detested their traditional work as it lacked dignity and offered no economic remuneration. They aspired for white collar jobs and an urban, middle class lifestyle. For them the urban areas held more attraction than the villages. But even here the public spaces were relatively more open than the homes and private spaces were not. Thus, Dalits shared the traditional view on labour, which was negative.

If the caste system prevalent in the Indian society led the Dalits to despise manual labour, in the Chilean society, the figure of the poor, drunk male was considered the source of all vices for the illustrated sections of the Chilean society. Drunkenness became synonymous to criminal, crazy, sick and degenerate. Marcos Fernandez Labbe in his paper *'Labour, Popular Sociability, and Social Representation: Immoderate Drinking among the Working Class as a Historical Problem in Chile, 1870-1930'* analysed the complexities of such a homogenisation. According to the notions prevalent in the upper echelons of the Chilean society the poor, drunk male would spend a major part of his salary on drinking and therefore neglect his family. This notion served as an entry point for the newly created social services which would enter the ambit of the poor families after 1920. These representations of the Chilean worker were linked to the scarcity of labour that affected the Chilean industries after the war with Peru and Bolivia and the annexation of the nitrate provinces in the mid-1880s.

Drunkenness amongst coolies became an issue in the Assam plantations in the 1880s, at a time when the planters were acquiring almost ninety percent of the rum imports into Assam exclusively for the coolies. Nitin Varma in *'For the Drink of the Nation: Drink, Labour, Plantation Capitalism in the Colonial Tea Gardens of Assam in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century'* argues that one of the major reasons for this was

Across the South

the changing nature of the plantation industry during the turn of the century and the contested meanings of drink and drinking in such a context. In the late nineteenth century, the colonial state claiming to work under the policy of 'maximum revenue from minimum consumption' asserted its right of taxing the home brewed drink of the 'coolie' and offering them with opportunities to buy the 'legal liquor' instead. The so called 'legal liquor' was made easily available to the coolies by the setting up of liquor shops at the gates of every tea garden. The planters, however, were unhappy with the colonial state on this matter because the state was involved in a process of morally and physically corrupting the coolies.



Musical session after the conference

Problems faced by the miners in the coal industry was discussed in Peter Alexander's *'Women and coal mining in India and South Africa, c. 1900-1945'* and Dheeraj Kumar Nite's *'Displaced Gangs and the Politics of Work and Wages'*. Alexander compared the features of women's participation in coal mining industries in India and South Africa from 1890s to 1930s. His main objective was to problematise the 'naturalness' of women not working in the South African coal mining industries vis-à-vis the women workers in the coal mines of India and highlight the several similarities and the critical differences in the two colonial labour regimes. This comparative framework facilitated a better understanding of the relation between gender and labour in both colonial India and South Africa. In India, the percentage of adivasi women working in the coal mines declined in the late 1920s and the 1930s. The Indian trade union movement inadequately represented the issue of re-employing the women workers. In the South African case, mechanisation pushed women towards auxiliary work like coal sorting, coal washing etc within the coal industry. Availability of labour in South Africa was comparatively less due to a sparse population. Both the colonies had a very dissimilar history of legislations for the coal industry. In India, women were allowed to work in the mines while it was banned in South Africa.

In the Jharia Coalfields in India, Dheeraj Kumar Nite suggested that the instabilities in the family life of the mining classes were caused by a shift within the regime of accumulation and the organisation of production. The

paper analysed the adaptation strategies and struggles of the mining people to fulfill their production tasks and the reproduction obligations in the 'second stage of mining development'. It examined the inter relationship between the individual miner, the mining class' families, larger mining and non-mining communities, employers, trade unions and the state.

In the colonial discourse, the categorisation of women and children as the special classes of labour renders them doubly marginalised. Emma Alexander's *'The "Special Classes" of Labour: Women and Children Doubly Marginalized'* analysed how children, for instance, separately negotiated their relationship with employers as industrial workers. The first part of her paper looked at work patterns in different village industries where the family was considered a unit of production till the late nineteenth century and children's labour was recognised as well. Colonialism altered this traditional basis of organised industry, and work. Women's work came to be characterised as 'assistance'. In the cotton industry for instance, there is very little information about how women and children were recruited. Very little was written about the jobber though he was a very important figure. Children and women would have experienced the jobbers' authority differently from men – for children the jobber represented a higher, non traditional form of authority, whereas the women could have been sexually vulnerable.

Even in the formal sector, it is important to study the shifts in the labour history research which have questioned the earlier presuppositions and teleologies to give new meaning to the older frames of enquiry. The objective of Aditya Sarkar's *'The Work of Law: Three Factory Narratives from Bombay Presidency, 1881-1884'* is to rethink the history of the factory which can no longer be situated within a teleological narrative to symbolise either industrial modernity as it was once conceived nor towards necessary and inevitable socialist emancipation. And in this rethinking, questions once considered unimportant, or explained away within settled and secure narratives may well be productively re-articulated.

Li Minghuan and Papa Demba Fall both discussed the issue of migrant labourers. The general awareness about Israel as a country began only with the death of two migrant Chinese workers in Israel. China and Israel have a very long history of contact from as early as third century. Between 1956 and 1985 diplomatic relations between the two countries were suspended when China condemned the invasion of Israel into Egypt. Diplomatic relationships were re-established in 1992. The first labour contract was signed in 1992. Till 1992 most migrant workers in

Israel were Palestinians. After 1992 other foreign migrants became important and after 1995 there was an increase in Chinese migrant workers.

The main reason behind this was the existence of workers on the border of legality and illegality. For instance, according to the rules, the migrants required a working visa. This was issued by the company (which earlier charged 40,000 Chinese dollars but now 100,000). But if the worker quits the company he would lose his working visa and thus become an illegal migrant. Workers often quit their jobs due to lack of work or non-payment of wages by the company. For remittances, sending it directly through legal channels meant a high rate of commission had to be paid. So the workers tried to send it from Palestine or through local agents which was again illegal.

Papa Demba Fall studied the case of the Soninke country in North- East Senegal, which is the first and the most important region with respect to international labour migration in Senegal. The initial migration took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the 1950s Senegalese migrants headed towards France following that country's call for foreign labour. Today one can find Soninke immigrants all over the world— USA, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. The paper examines the reasons for this exceptional mobilisation of Senegalese migrants. Groups from the same village relied on each other, creating group banks (*caisses villageoises*) for the specific purpose of helping their fellow migrants with any financial problem at home or in the host country. The main features of this first phase of immigration to France were the reproduction of the village hierarchies in France as well and the absence of interactions with the French population.



Participants viewing the NLI Labour Archives on the website

The deteriorating economic situation both in France and in Senegal led to the adoption of new migration strategies. But migration remained the only alternative for the Soninke people. It was a circular phenomenon, about fifty per cent being within Africa and was linked to the agricultural cycle. Senegal was also a host country for migration. Groundnut growing region in central Senegal attracted seasonal workers. A number of families were dependent on remittances which were often not enough. Recently community

Across the South

development projects have been started in Senegal as social initiatives taken by the emigrants. As a consequence of this there is now less pressure on the meagre resources.

In his "On the Move : Circulating Labor in Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial", Ian Kerr proposed an analytical framework for the study of circulating labor in the third world countries based on the study of the existing researches and the archival materials on migratory labour. In his critique of the European literature on the migratory labour he pointed out that such studies would have to do away with their predisposition with fragmentation, link it up with the social, economic and cultural histories, incorporate in their study itinerant or travelling labour and avoid concepts like 'state-centrism' (migration across state border), 'modernization-centrism' (study of migrant labour in the process of industrialisation) and 'Euro or Atlanto-centrism' (migration in Europe and across Atlantic).

One of the important groups of circulation labour that he dealt with in some detail was construction workers who could be found in almost every part of India from the pre-colonial to the present day India. They were known in different names in different parts of the country. In regions in Mysore they were known as *Wudders* whose lifestyle resemble closely that of Banjaras who could be found in large number of places and doing the work of constructions. These itinerant construction workers adapted easily to the needs and the conditions of work during the Mughal days and later during the colonial period. They became enmeshed in the relationships of capitalism in the colonial days e.g. railway constructions and continued to do so in post-independent India. In the process the nature of their work and their living conditions and their culture underwent substantial changes. Prof. Kerr described the process of change in terms of the Marxian concept of formal subsumption of labour under capitalism.

Rafiu Ahmed's, "Mobility, Marginality and Development: The Musahars of Middle Gangetic Plain" discussed the different trajectories of mobility within a socially marginalised community in Bihar and the different aspects which criss-cross to influence the patterns of mobility. The time period of the paper ranges from the colonial to the post-colonial period. The Musahars have, historically, never enjoyed the ownership of land or material entitlements and in the contemporary times they have become agricultural labourers.

As a result of the changes in agriculture the long-standing *kamiuti* ties got dissolved and were replaced by capitalist-agrarian relations, resulting in the loss of land for cultivation. The constant pushing of the Musahars to the marginal land as a consequence of confrontation with the upper castes made them migrate to

other areas for work. In the post-colonial period the expansion of the informal sector outside the region has contributed to the possibility of out-migration of the surplus labour from areas like South Bihar. However, debt-bondage has become a widespread phenomenon, producing marginality and in turn migration. With the emergence of mass migration as a social phenomenon, there has risen a social class—the labour contractor, whose composition is mixed. The long distance migration for work has led the male population to the exploitative labour market whereas there is also a simultaneous phenomenon of feminisation of the workforce in the villages.



Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Marcel van der Linden

Gijs Kessler in his "The Rise and Fall of Russia's Peasant-Proletarian, 1880s-1930s" made an attempt to develop a global labour history approach towards the study of the role and significance of urban workers' rural allegiances. He dissected the Russian case into building blocks for such comparisons and to arrive at some hypotheses concerning the mechanisms under-girding the existence and disappearance of urban workers rural ties which could subsequently be tested against the experiences of other times and places. Central to his approach is the adoption of a time frame which covers both the appearance and the disappearance of the specific pattern of the migratory behavior of the "peasant-proletarian". Kessler tries to systematically trace the subsequent evolution of this migratory pattern during the early twentieth century. He attempted to study the split household of the peasant worker at both sides of the divide marked by the revolution of 1917, from its rise during Russian industrialisation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to its demise during the Stalinist industrialisation in the 1930s.

Samita Sen's paper "Informalising labour recruitment: The garden *sardar* in Assam tea plantations" focused on the debates over the relative merits of the garden *sardars* vis-à-vis professional contractors as recruiting agents. The story of formalisation of Assam recruitment went hand in hand with a constant emphasis on informal modes of recruitment of the agency of garden *sardar* as the more desirable mode. Central to this debate was the *sardar*, a non-market agent, using networks of caste, kin and village relationships and

the contractor, a commercial agent who traded in labour for profit.

The paper explored the interaction and the overlapping of the three levels of relationships in the context of the disputes over recruitment. The first is the informal relations of kin, caste and community. The second constitutes the recruiters who operated at several levels by exploiting their own community links or by commercial operations involving advances and abductions. The third element is the state which through repeated administrative and legislative interventions sought to reconstitute processes of labour mobilisation. These relationships are explored through a chronological narrative of Assam legislation focusing on the disputes regarding the role of the garden *sardar*.

The discussants highlighted the benefits of a comparative framework for a comprehensive analysis of various labour issues and recognised the agency of the worker strongly. Also the need to look at sources other than colonial, for instance, ethnographic, travel writings, literary sources, and take into cognisance other kinds of studies like cultural analysis of issues like slavery and social history of law was stressed upon. It was important, as Hiranmay Dhar very clearly mentioned, to provide a strong critique of colonial constructions of India and other suppressed nations and communities of the world which depict these countries and communities as unchanging, sedentary and essentially different from the West. Jan Bremen in his valedictory lecture emphasised on the need to develop a strong critique of colonialism and also incorporate this critique in to the history of labour. While on one hand reports of brutal atrocities committed on the coolies were hidden away, on the other hand the labour regime was tightened with penal sanctions and other legislations. Even those colonial officials who talked of and passed welfare policies were not opposed to passing new ordinances and laws that would serve the interests of the planters. Racism beyond economic rationality was inherent in the colonial system. For instance, the hands of the rubber collectors in Congo were chopped off under the rule of King Leopold as part of punishment measures. Infliction of violence on coolies are often understood as incidents that stand on their own, without showing how it was part of the way in which the colonial system itself operated. There is a need for labour historians to locate the history of the labouring people within the systemic character of colonialism.

Ian Kerr's comments on Aditya Sarkar's paper pointed out that at times micro-narratives effectively illustrate broader issues. Chitra Joshi in the context of Marcos Labbe's paper suggested the importance of broader debates on issues like drinking which can be forms of resistance but can

Across the South

also be used by capital to exercise control on workers. One cannot afford to overlook the fact that spaces of leisure are predominantly masculine. Samita Sen however mentioned that in pre-industrial Britain drinking spaces were not entirely male. In Portugal, Jan Bremen mentioned, drinking is not connected with social functions but it is lumpenism. Addiction to drinking starts at a very young age and destroys families. One needs to consider the darker side of drinking as well as be sensitive, as Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff mentioned, towards the social composition of the consumers and the sellers of the drinks.

An important factor— political crisis— was missed out by Kalyan Das, Li Minguan and Papa Dempa Fall. Prabhu Mohapatra mentioned that on one hand, the labourer's wages in the

Assam tea plantations were low and stagnant. On the other hand, the prevailing political crisis in Assam have resulted in the emergence of new and hidden costs due to the high maintenance expenditure on private security to keep militant groups at bay. Similarly, analysis of the effect of the terrorist attacks like that of 11 September on the World Trade Centre and the French riots on the movements of migrant labourers is important for anyone dealing with the migration patterns of the Chinese or African or any other migrant community.

Lastly, Shankar Ramaswamy's paper which dealt with *Mazaak* in the everyday language used by workers in the work place, the factory, during work hours or tea or other kinds of leisure breaks asserts a certain tension between the two types of

representations— the worker's representation and the ethnographer's representation. *Mazaak* has been described as quite disturbing in content, a lot of it involving obscene language and horseplay. The author sees it as having a role to play in bringing about *talmel*. But at the same time it reveals potential hostility. It is important for the survival of workers— *mazaak as man ka ilaaj* which has been hurt by capitalism and *kaliyug*. The workers recreate themselves through *mazaak*. It gives the worker space in the serving as his entertainment form in the age of machine and capital. The paper generated interest as well as scepticism. It successfully raised questions about labour and the society at large and tries to provide more complete understanding of a worker's life.