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**A consultation on the interface between
the seasonal migrant workers, the formal
sector workers' movement, and oppressed
caste-based movements in India**

Proceedings of the Consultation
&
Transcripts of Papers Submitted





**Prayas Centre for Labour
Research and Action (PCLRA)**

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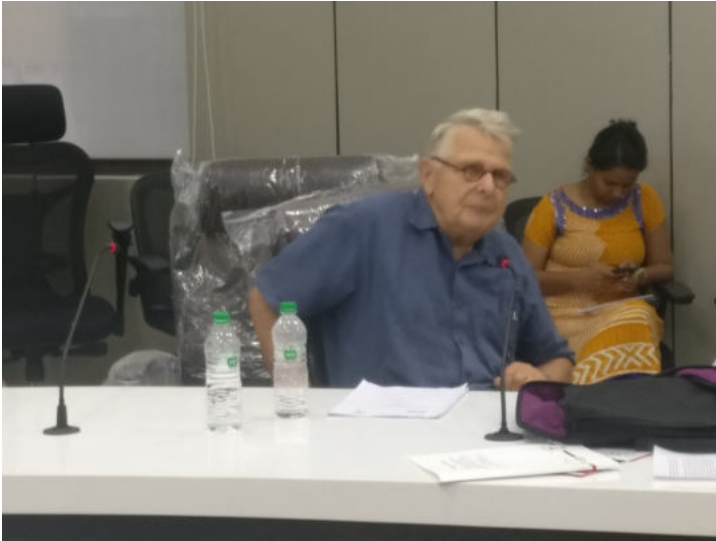
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

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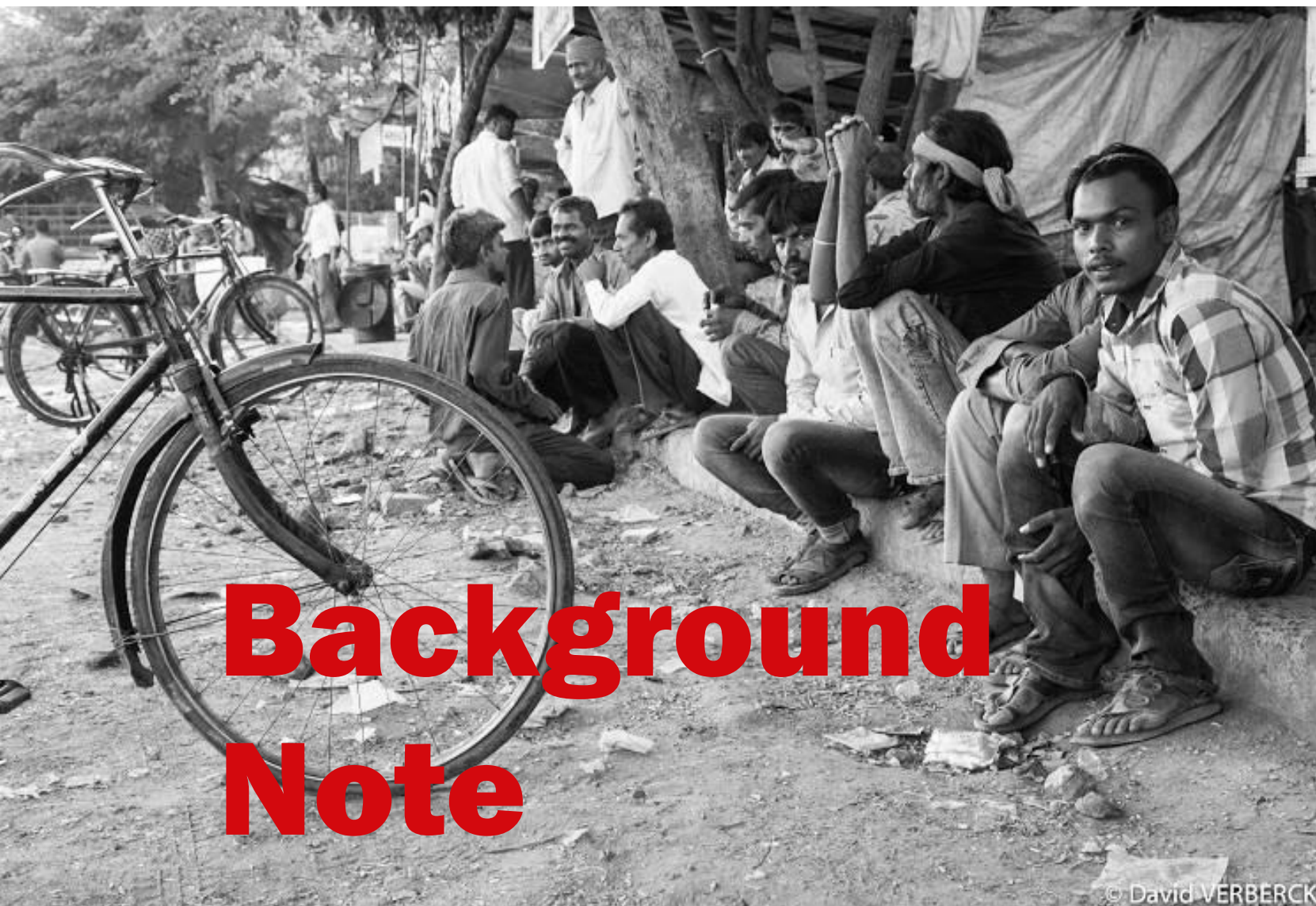


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**Any mass movement to abolish classes,
which does not engage in a direct fight
against the caste system, will not
achieve its objective.
The reverse is also true.**



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Back ground note for a consultation on the interface between the seasonal migrant workers, the formal sector workers' movement, and oppressed caste- based movements in India

*Prayas Centre for
Labour Research
and Action*

 Informal workers constituted up to 92 percent of the workforce in India in 2004-05 (NCEUS report 2004). Seasonal migration has emerged as the dominant mode of labour engagement in the informal sector in India. Workers, sometimes with their whole families, migrate from the relatively underdeveloped pockets to the developed areas for short term deployment, constituting what has been termed by a noted researcher as 'footloose labour' (Bremen 1996). Major sectors of economy, especial those requiring manual workers, are populated primarily by migrant workers. These include agriculture, brick kilns, construction, mining and large parts of the service industry. Seasonal migration is pushed not only by the differential availability of economic opportunities between the developed and the under developed regions of the country but also by a clear preference by the employers for migrant workers.

This workforce is not amenable to traditional organizing activity that focuses exclusively on work place. The work places are dispersed, deployment of workers is on a seasonal basis and migrant workers are dependent on the employers in many ways – debt, residence at the workplace, and lack of support at destination. The fact that most of the seasonal migrants come from historically deprived sections of Indian society – the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the most backward amongst the Other Backward Castes – adds another layer of vulnerability. The result is that work conditions for majority of the seasonal migrant workers resemble those prevalent in the early years of industrialization – long work hours, unsafe working conditions leading to frequent accidents both fatal and non-fatal, child labour, debt bondage, sexual harassment at work place, and trafficking. It is difficult to reconcile the work conditions with a modern democracy in the 21st century.

India has a rich history of working class movement with a number of trade unions and national level federations. However, these unions and federations represent primarily the formal sector workers. While there have been some notable attempts to organize informal sector workers in the past, these have not moved beyond a threshold level and remain few and scattered when looking at the total numbers. There are a number of reasons for this. The formal sector unions do not look upon seasonal workers as prospective long-term members because these workers keep changing every season. There is not much chance of regular membership. The local workers resent ingress of migrant labour as it lowers prevalent wage rates (Aleyamma 2017). The employers prefer to employ migrant workers as they are more pliable and willing to work longer hours. But going beyond this utilitarian rationale, there is also a class caste divide that operates between the two class of workers. The formal sector workers are likely to belong to the upper caste strata of Indian society while the migrant workers come from the bottom of the caste hierarchy (Ghandy 2011). This is a



With the emergence of a middle class in some of the larger oppressed castes, these castes have organized to challenge the hegemony of the narrow stratum of upper castes that has historically held sway for millennia.

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dichotomy that has its roots in the social structure of Indian society – the caste system. Historically manual work has been performed by the lower castes while the white-collar jobs have been the preserve of the upper castes. This caste segregation has been reproduced in the modern capitalist economy where upper castes work in the formal economy while the lower castes undertake the manual work in the informal sector.

The inability of the Indian Left to address the caste question has been the subject of numerous debates. The dichotomy referred to in the previous section lies at the heart of this historical failure. However, this historical failure is equally matched by the refusal of the caste-based/identity movements to address issues of the working class in their discourse. As referred to before, majority of the seasonal migrant workers come from historically oppressed sections of India. Democracy in India where caste remain the main transactional identity has seen a flowering of identity/ caste-based politics. Indian political parties can be described as coalitions of different caste

groupings and sometimes even a single caste, rather than expressions of different ideologies. With the emergence of a middle class in some of the larger oppressed castes, these castes have organized to challenge the hegemony of the narrow stratum of upper castes that has historically held sway for millennia. The process was led by Ambedkar who marshalled the *dalit* communities and was able to secure reservations for them even before independence. Introduction of Mandal commission report in 1989 was another watershed in Indian politics as major sections of Indian society, classified as Other Backward Castes (OBC) demanded reservations in Central Government jobs. These identity-based movements have been powerful enough to wield political power in many large states of India and even nationally for brief periods.

However, the identity based oppressed caste parties have not incorporated working class issues in their discourse with some notable exceptions. The focus has been primarily on reservation in Government jobs, assertion

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of identity, and resistance to social oppression. This is surprising considering that the first political party floated by the flag bearer of such politics, Baba Saheb Ambedkar, was Independent Labour Party. One reason that is often cited is the adversarial relations between left leaders in Mumbai and Ambedkar before independence that arose from the negation of the caste question by the mainstream left in India and Ambedkar's own moorings in a different (non-left) ideological paradigm. However, differences of almost a century before are not sufficient to explain present political practices. The inability of the caste-based movements to incorporate working class issues seems more a reflection of the class base of the leadership of these movements and political parties. The leadership comes primarily from middle classes that has emerged as a result of the reservations. There has been a class differentiation within these castes with emergence of a literate educated middle class that has been able to secure social security and access to modern living and has left behind manual work. While this class continues to mobilise along caste lines, its own class interests do not lend it to adopt a pro active stance on working class issues of manual laborers.

The political development trajectory has once again brought the country to a juncture where it seems riven by numerous caste – class conflicts. The Central Government is seeking fundamental reforms in labour laws to make employment more flexible, rationalise the myriad laws, and extend social security to sections that have been hitherto excluded. The reforms are facing entrenched opposition from the formal workers movement. However, in absence of lack of organization of informal workers, the largest chunk of the working class remains absent from this debate. At this crucial juncture, it is much needed that both these inabilities – the continued inability of the Left to

organized the seasonal migrant workers and that of the identity-based movements to factor in the manual working class issues - be discussed and addressed.

It is proposed to organize a consultation around these twin themes in the state capital of Gujarat, Ahmedabad on 20th July, 2018. It is proposed to invite both academicians and field activists from Gujarat and outside Gujarat for the consultation. The participants will represent both the Left and the identity politics perspectives. This issue has been seldom addressed in public sphere in India. It is expected that the deliberations will contribute to better understanding of the subject amongst key stakeholders and more informed ground action. Hopefully this will lead to better synergy between formal and migrant workers movements and acceptance of the seasonal migrant workers' issues as a major development challenge faced by the Indian state.

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Mythiri Prasad - Aleyamma, 2017. *The Cultural Politics of Wages – Ethnography of Construction Work in Kochi*, Contributions to Indian Sociology 51, 2 (2017): 163–193 SAGE Publications

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The inability of the caste-based movements to incorporate working class issues seems more a reflection of the class base of the leadership of these movements and political parties.



Session plan

Breakfast 0900 - 0930

Registration 0930 - 1000

Introductory session 1000-1130

Welcome delegates: (5 minutes) song by Ashwin and welcome address by Preeti Oza, PCLRA

Introduction to RLS: (5 minutes) Rajiv Kumar

The objectives of the consultation: (10 minutes) Sudhir Katiyar, PCLRA

Introduction of participants: (10 minutes)

Key note : : Jan Breman (30 minutes)

From seasonal to circular migration:
Changing character of seasonal migration in India

Open house: 30 minutes

Tea 1130-1145

Working Session 1: 1145-1330

The formal working-class movement and seasonal migrant workers

Panel presentation – 5 speakers on the interface between the organized left movement and the seasonal migrant workers – research reports and field struggles (5 panelist for 10 minutes each)

Panel chairperson: Ashok Khandelwal

Amitava Guha, CITU

Sukumar Damle AITUC

Ashim Roy NTUI

Mythiri Prasad: Cultural politics of wages: Kerala construction workers, interface between CITU and migrant workers

Open house

Lunch 1330 - 1430

Working session 2: 1430 – 1600

The identity politics and issues of manual workers

Panel Chairperson: Vijay Gudavarthy, University of Hyderabad

JD Chandrapal: BAMCEF representative

Jignesh Mevani: Dalit activist MLA Gujarat

Ashok Bharti: Chairperson NACDOR

Anand Teltumbde: Eminent commentator on Dalit / left issues

Ashok Chaudhry: Adivasi Ekta Parishad

Open house

Tea 1600-1615

Working session 3: 1615 - 1730

Bringing the two together

Consolidation of day's discussion: Vaibhav Raaj

Bringing the two together: Bharat Patankar/ Gail Omvedt

Release of Ahmedabad Declaration

Vote of thanks – Denis Macwan

Introduction of Panelists

Jan Breman: Professor Breman is a social science researcher who has done extensive research on seasonal migrant tribal workers of South Gujarat. He was one of the first academics to study seasonal migration as an increasingly important mode of labor deployment. Prof Breman continues to be engaged with the development trajectory in Gujarat.

Ashok Khandelwal: He is a senior labor researcher who worked with VV Giri National Labor Institute. What differentiates Ashok ji from normal academics is his field engagement in facilitating organizational work with informal workers through training and advocacy.

Amitava Guha: Amitava is a senior functionary with Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the trade union wing of CPIM. He is based at Delhi.

Sukumar Damle: He is a senior activist of All India Trade Union Conference (AITUC), the trade union wing of CPI. He is based at Delhi.

Ashim Roy: He is a senior trade union activist with New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), a comparatively new trade union Federation in India.

Mythri Prasad: She is a researcher with Institute of Human Development (IHD) New Delhi. Mythri has done research with migrant construction workers in Kerala.

Vijay Gudavarthy: He is Assistant Professor Economics at Central University Hyderabad. He has undertaken research on seasonal migrant brick kiln workers of Odisha who migrate to South India.

JD Chandrapal: A Dalit thinker and writer, he is active with Backward and Minority Caste Employees Federation (BAMCEF), a federation of employees belonging to backward and minority castes.

Jignesh Mevani: A young lawyer activist, Jignesh shot to fame with his leadership of the protests that engulfed Gujarat after the brutal beating of Dalit youth in Saurashtra in 2016. Currently MLA Gujarat Vadgam

Ashok Bharti: Dalit activist who set up the National Confederation of Dalit Organizations, an umbrella body of Dalit organizations from all over the country.

Anand Teltumbde: Currently professor at Goa Institute of Management, Prof Anand is a commentator on Dalit movement in the country. He has written extensively on intersection of Dalit movement with left. His articles get published regularly in influential journals.

Ashok Chowdhari: Tribal activist based in South Gujarat, heads Adivasi Ekta Parishad, a coalition of tribal groups that struggles for tribal rights.

Vaibhav Raaj: A labor researcher and activist based at Delhi. He coordinates Workers Solidarity Network, a network of labour researchers and activists.

Bharat Patankar: A social political activist based in Western Maharashtra, Bharat works with Shramik Mukti Dal.

Gail Omvedt: A senior researcher based in Maharashtra, Gail has written extensively on caste issues and its interaction with the Marxist thought.

Rajiv Kumar: Rajiv works with Rosa Lauxembourg Stiftung, the foundation of the Left party in Germany.

Sudhir Katiyar: Promoter of and works with Centre for Labor Research and Action, an NGO that researches and facilitates organization of workers in the informal sector.

Preeti Oza: She works with Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action anchoring Centre's work with settlement of tribal construction workers in Ahmedabad and Surat.

Denis Macwan: Denis is the coordinator of Prayas Centre for Labor Research and Action at Surat.

Until the **workers** become more **politicized**, and
become increasingly **aware** of their **rights**,
there will **not be any change** in present situation.
The challenge is how will this **politicization** take place?



Introductory Sessions

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Minutes of the proceedings of the consultation on the interface between the seasonal migrant workers, the formal sector workers' movement, and oppressed caste- based movements in India.

Date- July, 20th, 2018,

Venue: Circuit House,
Ahmedabad, Gujarat

The introduction to the National Consultation began with a song about the struggles of working class presented by the team members of Prayas Center for Labour Research and Action (PCLRA). This was followed by a welcome address from **Preeti Oza** of PCLRA, who welcomed the delegates and the participants to the National Consultation.

Rajiv Kumar from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) Delhi office, introduced the organization whose head office is based in Berlin. The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is a German-based foundation working in South Asia and other parts of the world on the subjects of critical social analysis and civic education. RLS India office focuses on areas such as agriculture, hunger and food sovereignty civic education, labour and migration. Last year with Prayas (CLRA), the project was on sugarcane harvesting labour in and around Surat on which Professor Jan Breman has done groundbreaking work. With a warm welcome from RLS to the eminent panelists, he hoped that the shared outlook would be constructive through the Consultation.

This was followed by a round of introduction by the participants of the National Consultation.

Sudhir Katiyar from PCLRA discussed the rationale behind the consultation. The consultation has emerged from the work done by PCLRA over the last decade in organizing informal workers. PCLRA has worked to organize informal sector labourers across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, Telengana and other states in the country. Since there are large numbers of labourers working in the unorganized sector, there needs to be a push to organize them and develop leadership among them. The issues and the concerns of the unorganized sector often go unmentioned even in the news, while workers continue to live a life of exploitation with no or little access to rights. Katiyar, shared how due to one among many of PCLRA's efforts, in 2010 - a strike by 50,000 workers in areas in and around Ahmedabad led to wage hikes and their demands were met.

Seasonal migration is the dominant mode of labour recruitment in labor intensive sectors such as construction, agriculture, brick kilns, mining that have migrant labourers working. The employers prefer recruiting migrant labourers over local labourers, as the locals would want to go back home in the evening and tend to be conscious of their rights and responsibilities. Seasonal migrant workers form a large part of the informal workforce. While Unions supported by PCLRA have been able to initiate large scale movements and interventions, the membership remains limited. This is not only because of the physical conditions of the workers, but also due to the political consciousness of the workers. Until the workers become more politicized, and become increasingly aware of their rights, there will not be any change in present situation. The challenge is how will this politicization take place? Who will do this?

The traditional formal workers movements do not have the involvement of the issues of the informal labour sector. Katiyar explained deployment of workers at work place as comprising of concentric rings. There is a small nucleus of formal workers followed by a periphery of contract labourers and there are large masses of workers who are outside this periphery, the workers who are not



The study done by Breman in 1970s had highlighted the system of migration which still continues half a century later. Some of the features had evolved, becoming more exploitative, such as the emergence of the system of middlemen in the process.

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even on the contractual basis, mostly the migrant workers. The formal workers' movement occupies power in economy and has strong movements. On the other hand, recent years have seen emergence of the Dalit and tribal movements that represent these oppressed castes in the political arena. However, these movements have not focused sufficiently on working class issues.

Coming to the design of the sessions, he said that even though there is a panel in every session, the focus will be on dialogue. Sufficient time has been budgeted for this.

Prof. **Jan Breman**, of University of Amsterdam, who has extensively worked on the issues of seasonal migrant labourers in South Gujarat- gave the keynote address. As a social science researcher, he was one of the first academics to study seasonal migration as a mode of labour deployment. He wrote the keynote address for the consultation - 'From Seasonal to Circular migration: Changing Character of Seasonal Migration in India'. He said that he will not repeat what he has already written in his keynote address taking it as read.

He began by appreciating PCLRA for bringing together a mixed batch of panelists having researchers, activists, and academics.

The state has lost interest in the issues of labour, so the organizations who work with labor movements, need to work towards a collective action and recreate solidarity. Collectivizing the workers in the unorganized sector who form 90% of the labour forces poses a challenge. There is a need of a common perspective for working with the workers. There is no definite data on the number of people who have gone footloose. The data in the World Economic Forum estimates that the total number of floating labour accounts to be 39 million in India. With the issues of the pattern of family migration, the number of footloose people would be even larger. With lack of state interest in labour issues, the appropriate data is lacking. It is important to talk about labour migration. People have predominantly stayed in villages - generations after generations and half a century ago, this pattern has altered. There has been an underestimation of the mobility of the peasant society. Peasants have been mobile for a long time, but in the last 50 years the number of footloose labour has increased. This is because commutation, infrastructure and the accessibility of the outside world increased in the villages, with which the

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mobility increased. With lack of livelihoods in the villages, the people inclined towards migration. Migration is not just rural to urban but also rural to rural, which is less researched. Seasonal migration seems to be going on for a long time. The study done by Breman in 1970s had highlighted the system of migration which still continues half a century later. Some of the features had evolved, becoming more exploitative, such as the emergence of the system of middlemen in the process. Seasonal migration is not transitional but structural, which is different from the migration in West. The migration in the West was from the rural agrarian to urban industrial. But in India, the seasonal migration is in the agrarian with fewer demands from the urban industrial sector. He gave an example of the conditions of the migrant labour in Ahmedabad who have developed in slum settlements, defining the system of urbanization. The shift in West has not materialized in India. Thus, informalization and mobility of labour go hand in hand. Seasonal migration gives a more economic perspective, more than the cultural, social and political perspectives. In case of formal labour, the seasonal migration can take place for months, years or even for a lifetime. Coming back to the villages, is not kept as an option sometimes, leaving the people at home and becoming alienated. The changes in gender relations that are caused by migration are not known. The women of the migrant men stay back in the villages restricting their mobility and livelihoods. In the contemporary times, neo bondage has found a place in the capitalized economy. In this form, workers are paid advance amounts before they start working and are not paid during the duration of the work, keeping them under bondage. Bondage takes away every freedom from the labourers due to this prepayment of wages, restricting their mobility. Workers are not free to take any decision. Bonded labour is related to

indebtedness in the Indian context, leading to the acceptance of this form of labour perpetual. There is not much work for the labourers in this mode of production, making the labourers victimized. Thus, the perpetuation of seasonal migration remains. With this, the presentation of Professor Jan Breman was concluded. This was followed by the translation of Breman's presentation into Hindi by Sudhir Katiyar from PCLRA.

Open house discussion:

This was followed by the session of open house. Professor **Indira Hirway**, from CFDA, Ahmedabad said that there was a requirement for an alliance. This is because most number of seasonal migrants comes from the categories of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, religious and gender minorities. There is overlapping of the labourers, but the alliance is important. This alliance and lobby will work against the contemporary macro development growth and development model. Migrant workers should be the partners to development. Like in China or in the Western countries, the absorption of seasonal migrants into the urban labourers should take place. The vulnerability of the destination and sources should be resolved, only then the absorption in the development can take place. There needs to be an alternative model as the contemporary development model is not enough.

This was followed by the discussion by **Bharat Patankar**, a social political activist working with Shramik Mukti Dal, mentioning that the migration mainly takes place from the drought prone areas and from the regions of de irrigation. The men were migrating and women were conducting agriculture. Currently, the family migration is taking place. Structural changes have taken place, so the movement and struggle should



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take place in accordance to these changes.

Ashok Khandelwal, a senior labour researcher working in facilitating organizational work with the informal workers, said that the freedom from the means of production has not taken place in this country. There are 50% self-employed labourers, but this is not the real scenario. They will also be part time workers with no ownership of the means of production. From organizational point of view, this is an important agenda.

Rahul Sapkal from MNLU, Mumbai mentioned about the aspect of rural to rural migration. The mode of production has changed to a large extent, as most of the migrants in the urban areas have no idea regarding their employers, making no one accountable to bear the consequences. The Interstate Migrant Workers' Act is defunct. The new form of alternative is needed, going beyond the Collective. The question was raised in the aspect of the emergence of scholars who would document the heterogeneity that exists in the context of this country.

Jan Breman said that the people have their own identities and they articulate them in their own ways. The most discrimination of the SCs and STs do take place, but the [derogation](#) on the Muslims has also taken place, which is not recognized as the citizens of this country. The separate identities of the labourers prevent collectivization, and make it difficult to move towards collective action towards the end of exploitation and victimization. The informalization of labour also prevents this collective action. Their religious and caste identities also recruit them in the labour market and set them against each other. The agrarian crisis is considered as the crisis of the farmers and not of the labourers as a whole. This leads to the suicides of the farmers, which is still understated in the discussions. Most of the agricultural lands stay uncultivated as each farmer does not have access to many lands, which are enough for the cultivation. The agrarian crises have become more structural and deeper in its context.

This is followed by the discussion by **Ashok Bharti**, Dalit activist who set up National Confederation of Dalit Organization (NACDOR), an umbrella body for the Dalit organization. The perspective of the migrant labourers has been overlooked. The State and economy have

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failed to provide resources to the migrant labourers. The leadership of the formal and informal labour movements has come from the upper privileged classes and not from the labourers for whom the movements are carried out. The issue of exploration of leadership is important in this case.

Agrarian crisis is not of the rural India but of the structure of the country. 33% of the people in this country are landless.

According to the data, the disparity of the land ownership is present. There needs to be a diluted perspective to the leadership in the movements by the upper classes, which has been strengthened by the academicians. The intellectuals from the working classes have to emerge from the ground. The work of the academicians is to theorize the ground realities. But the creation of the knowledge is created by the Universities which has to be practiced. This idea has to alter for the development to emerge.

With this the session on Introduction came to an end followed by the first working session on formal working class movement and seasonal migrant workers.

Working Session 1: The formal working class movement and seasonal migrants

The panel presented on the interface between the organized left movement and the seasonal migrant workers through research reports and field struggles. The session was chaired by **Ashok Khandelwal** who introduced the speakers and invited them to share their experiences.

To introduce the session Khandelwal began by sharing facts of the reality – wherein he compared the state of labor rights in India with that of the autocratic countries in the middle east. With five central trade unions the total membership can be estimated to be around 2.75 crore,

when the workforce is estimated to be around 30-40 crores. Of this the members of the TU are unable to access 144 schemes as accrued to them as members of labor force in India. Furthermore, as 12 hours is increasingly becoming the new norm of working, we are increasingly losing the relevance of our struggle by the workers' fight to have stipulated work hours as manifested and symbolized in 'May Day'.

Given this, Khandelwal implored the participants to think collectively of a constitutional provision to incorporate a vision – a framework to change the picture of knowledge; where we can attempt to think of a strategy to re-think social categorization. Can the dominant picture be changed – which alienates us from the reality? Which alienate the workers' identity from their social identity – with these thoughts the floor was opened to the panelists to share their presentations.

The session's first speaker was **Amitava Guha** of CITU, who began by stating that Trade Unions (TU) have always been collectives founded in class based hierarchies instead of caste based stratifications – which seemed to emerge as a consensus in the previous sessions' discussions. Thus according to him TU have always been working class movements, and to say anything else would be untrue.

By drawing attention to the global condition of the working class, he thus began his discussion by sharing the redundancy of Sustainable Development Goals that perceived that with a \$5 per day wage for poor would eradicate poverty, a phenomenon which according to him will take generations to be eradicated completely. This he felt can be seen as an attempt to dilute the disputes that arise in the rhetoric of development. Then the speaker drew attention to the picture of labor in USA, where due to innovation and technology, while productivity of the labor

Amitava Guha of CITU, by drawing attention to the global condition of the working class, began his discussion by sharing the redundancy of Sustainable Development Goals that perceived that with a \$5 per day wage for poor would eradicate poverty, a phenomenon which according to him will take generations to be eradicated completely.

Keeping surplus generation as a motive force but not the societal impact and need, new technologies are being created that would render human labor force redundant. The speaker pointed out that in such an environment all jobs would become increasingly volatile, informal, fragile and unsustainable. This is what the speaker calls Industry 4.0 – an industrial revolution driven by technological innovations aimed at replacing wage labor but with higher productivity.

has increased, the wages have certainly decreased. The difference that manifested due to rise in productivity and drop in wages was appropriated by the business owners and investors. He further added that the IT sector that had fueled India's growth, due to rise in technology as per McKinsey's report – would render nearly half of the workforce in the sector irrelevant.

Keeping surplus generation as a motive force but not the societal impact and need, new technologies are being created that would render human labor force redundant. The speaker pointed out that in such an environment all jobs would become increasingly volatile, informal, fragile and unsustainable. This is what the speaker calls Industry 4.0 – an industrial revolution driven by technological innovations aimed at replacing wage labor but with higher productivity. Therefore, he proposed that the challenge in front of us is not merely informalization but also Industry 4.0 – driven by ruthless application of automation, robotics and artificial intelligence.

Sukumar Damle (AITUC), the next speaker, presented to the forum fundamental reasons as to understand the rise in migration and therefore a need to address the phenomenon. He began first by stating how he too agreed with Guha that the divisions that appear in TUs are not due to caste based hierarchies. Instead he began his discussion about how lack of land reforms, intergenerational fragmentation of land, low productivity in the agricultural sector and lack of water conservation projects had led to an agrarian crisis that had become a prominent push factor in migration. By invoking Ambedkar – he proposed that perhaps we needed to revisit the idea of state farming as forwarded by Babasaheb in 1947.

Further big development and industrial projects have led to a large scale displacement that still awaited rehabilitation. Additionally, the developmental projects had also been unevenly distributed across the nation. For instance, in Maharashtra, the western parts of the state- Nasik, Pune, Mumbai received people from eastern part of the state due to lack of development initiatives undertaken in Eastern Maharashtra. By highlighting elimination of POSCO in Odisha, the speaker showed that if conditions can be made conducive for people to stay behind in their village, they would not migrate. One such way could be through implementation of Forest Rights Act 2006.

Ashim Roy of NTUI shared during the discussion that how the role of the TUs emerged as a responsive movement and not a leftist movement in its foundation. The objective was never to organize the entire country – something that TUs has never claimed. Rather the TUs engaged with labor markets which were not homogeneous units in themselves. Thus he emphasized on the need for a radical approach to analyze labor conditions and scenarios in India. For this he forwarded the Marxists Labor Analysis wherein he stressed on the need to revisit the concept of 'reserve army of labor' which according to the speaker is becoming stagnant. Labor markets have their own structures, where labor power takes precedence. Of course labor power cannot and should not be understood as disembodied from the labor.

Quoting Babasaheb – Roy invoked a need to understand who, how and what constitutes the labor markets. Who are the laboring people who constitute Labor markets? Further – where is the body constituted? Leftist were perhaps the first ones to think about this and how labor

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markets are constituted. Through Sukhdeo Thorats – Social Network analysis; one can begin to form an understanding about this constitution of labor markets. Further, Amit Bhaduri helps one understand how a relationship of bondage comes forth through interlinking of markets.

Given our discussions had largely revolved around migration from rural to urban, how can one attempt to understand the relationship of bondage – understand the link with the process of agency? Thus how can one organize the migrants in the informal sector? So far we know how to organize in the formal sector – where workers are condensed in an enclosed space of a firm or factory. But then how can one begin to think around organizing informal sector labor. To begin with, it is incorrect to assume apriori that the workers of informal sector are not organized. They organize themselves in ways that we cannot perceive – such as through cultural organizations and bhajan mandlis – through collectives based on regional or cultural similarities. For instance, the black movement was organized through their connection with the Church.

Our role therefore becomes to reach out to their organizational capacities and not extend and impose our ideas of how collectives should be formed. We need to recognize their organizational capacity and augment them. If I fail to organize – it is because I have failed to analyze – therefore a need for a radical approach. Secondly one needs to also understand their field of Action. He shared from his experience of how he took 15 years to learn how to organize contractual labor and their contractors. Thirdly – state's failure means that new organizations will have to be created which could be of quasi-state nature. Therefore, we need to go beyond

our own limited understanding of organizing workers – someone will have to take an initiative to unite workers in their located-ness. One cannot rely on the state to do this. One will have to develop strategies to understand where exactly one intends on striking – in other words to develop capacities to strike at the place where one intends to.

Towards the end of his presentation – Roy presented a need to create social alliances that would support labor



movements, which have not been able to gain momentum by themselves – thus a need for a global social alliance – given the level and scale of the problem where one cannot afford to deliberate from the sidelines.

The next speaker in the panel- **Mythri Prasad Alleyamma**- presented her experience of working with the construction workers in the ship building industry in Ernakulam, Kerala. Through the concept of ethnic welfare wage differentiation complex – the focus of her presentation was on the wages paid to the migrant and unionized



Malayali workers. She shared that the 80% of the unskilled work is kept for the workers associated with the Trade unions. However, the reality presented a very different picture – during the period of research the speaker found that majority of the workers employed were through contractors and the TU allowed the company to do so that the migrant workers can be employed at a low rate of Rs 120-150 per day.

Mythri shared that according to her observations it emerged that the practices of the TU ensured that non-Malayali workers were excluded from the social security benefits and welfare mechanisms since the TU membership was strictly ethnicity based. Secondly the benefits from Board of Construction workers, that accrued to migrant workers were lesser when compared to Malayali members. Thirdly, migrant workers were subjected to more police surveillance. For instance, migrant workers have been harassed and forced to return home to get a police clearance in order to be able to work in Kerala. The speaker stated that from her experience it appeared that one had to be a Malayali in order to be a worker and access worker

rights accrued to one by the virtue of worker identity.

In midst of this, she also saw solidarities being formed among Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims who would migrate together. This can prompt an exploration as to how solidarities form in the process of migration; how migration enables conditions to break feudal land relations; and how caste order operates during the process of migration - yet workers are able to move away from such hierarchies. The speaker further shared that how workers who were able to build upon local contacts and capital – in addition to stakeholdership; went on to become contractors. The speaker therefore urged the participants and the audience members to rethink the position of the contractors as well as decriminalize them – since many of the contractors often hail from subaltern communities and this social movement can be seen as bringing about transformation.

Open house discussion

Prof. **Breman** opened the discussion by pointing towards the provocative nature of Mythri's paper and her discussion on how

bridging the divide

TUs themselves were not promoting the interest of the local workers – who were now being replaced/substituted by the migrant workers. Nor migrant workers' interests were being safeguarded. Further as Mythri's study showed, the migrant workers received lower wages. She showed how grave the situation happened to be in Kochi.

Bharat Pantakar at this moment interjected - that the problem related with ethnicity or who the worker is, where he comes from or what his social background was cannot be separated from his/her livelihood. He raised the example of sweepers, manual scavengers, weight lifters or weight pullers – which often are performed by people of a certain background. He added (quite rhetorically) where employment itself happens to be caste based, can such differences be wished away? Given this reality can we then imagine everyone coming together in solidarity and forget such differences? He further added (directing his statement towards Damle) that one needs to also take into account the instances where re-habilitation had happened, where due to re-irrigation people could stop migrating. Patankar raised the concern that the panelists had not addressed the gender question within their presentations.

Responding to the concerns raised, Amitava Guha shared that the role of the TU and their process has been to organize workers, articulate their demands, mobilize them – he felt that there was no question of caste isolation that could be raised within the workings of TUs. Secondly (directed towards Mythri) one needed to closely look at why migration was being generated. If the locals can be provided with 100% employment, can one call this ethno-centricism. His experience of the migrant workers in Kerala was very different from the one shared by Mythri. His engagement

with the workers showed that there were no mentions of police harassment during their discussions amongst the other issues. Further the presentation portrayed TUs as miscreants – if that happened to be the case, then perhaps we need to reflect why.

Ashim Roy – added to the discussion for the need to look at labor through the lens of welfare rather than as labor markets – which will segregate the workers according to various social strata.

Acknowledging that TUs cannot remain unaffected by the caste politics, Vaibhav Raaj suggested that Marxist analysis of India cannot be discussed at the given platform. He added that although TUs are responsible for the welfare of their members, at times this may mean hurting and harming the interests of another constituency of worker.

At this moment **Ashok Bharti** remarked that TUs were just not ways to deal with labor markets – rather why should the laborers be organized as transformative agencies. Data from 2008-09, across India shows that about 60% of Class D workers belonged to SC, 4.5% were ST while 10% were OBC; while in 2016-17, 63% of the Class D workers were constituted by OBC, SC and ST. These numbers did not include the *safai karmacharis*, and provision of class promotion was not there. This again re-enforced the need to look at workers along with their social identities. Isolating them as only the working class subtracts their historical experiences of social oppression.

Following from the above discussion **Shantilal Meena** – raised a very pertinent question about how the Dalit movement has also failed to acknowledge the working class issues, just as the working class movements have always kept themselves away from the social and caste identities of the workers. To this **Preeti Oza** added in agreement to Shantilal Meena, that as

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practitioners when they engage with issues of non-payment of wages, they are often forced to work with the contractors – where the conflict between the workers and contractor cannot be independent of their social identities.

Bharat Patankar intervened while re-invoking the theme of the conference that seeks to bridge the divide, he added that the discussions so far had been limited to work only, while ignoring the life of the worker. Furthermore, the discussion still had not been able to delve into the domain of gender. Further, from our experience we have learnt how to handle issues of workers at the level of the factory, which was limited in its scope. Yet we know that those who appeared as strong members of nation TUs such as CITU also had strong caste loyalties. Even though identity often gets formed within a social milieu, we cannot afford to leave behind the identity so formed. Therefore, a need emerges to have interface between the broader life of the worker- which would require an engagement with the social institutions that workers are often associated with. A need to come up with creative institutions that would engage with workers' life (driving home the point earlier made by Ashim Roy where he encouraged practitioners to give up on the fixated understandings of collectives, but rather to engage with institutions that the workers were already part of).

Responding to the questions that were raised earlier Roy responded that there was a distinction that needs to be understood between trade unions as organizations and trade unions as movements. Further he

clarified that the trade unions should not be perceived as normative organizations, rather one needs to know that as trade unionists we want to engage with contradictions that constituted a workers' life. Never have trade unions claimed that they were normative organizations that were unwilling to engage



with contradictions. In the address, as Roy continued to clarify, he was addressing the problem of organizing rather than a problem of organization. The organizing as an act cannot happen unless there was an engagement with the labor markets, while organization problems would require a discussion around normative –a discussion Roy wanted to restrain from. Wages became focus and as the social questions surface, the TUs will have to engage with such questions. After all social alliances cannot be forged without understanding and engaging with the labor markets.

At this juncture Khandelwal brought the 12 point charter into the discussion – where everyone agreed that the movement needs to broaden to bring in both the issues of workers and society. As long as social and economic inequities continue to persist and prevail, democracy will be under threat. Therefore, a need for all to come together.

bridging the divide

Working Session 2: The identity politics and issues of manual labourers

The session was chaired by **Vijay Gudavarthy**, an assistant professor in Economics from the Central University of Hyderabad. He has undertaken research in the field of migrant workers who work in the brick kilns and migrate seasonally to South India from Orissa. He initiated the session by introducing the speakers of the session. The purpose of the meet is to not take account of the mistakes that have taken in the past but to move ahead, indicating on the need to synchronize the movements and ideologies for the greater good. With the proceedings of the previous session, he concluded that the blame game does not land in positive endings and there should be constructive criticism. To this, he said that the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi had stated that manual scavenging is a spiritual activity and nobody forces them to do this activity. With such statements, it indicates that the mode of labour and culture that has combined the current political domination has manifested into non-democracy. With the emergence of Dalit Movements, there have been

assertions of the Left having their modes of democratizing and thus, giving the contribution towards social

relationships. Without combining these articulations, this will lead to the historical failure of the activists. Thus, it is important to understand the need to synthesize and work towards positive change. There were the rise of debates on the basis of conceptual perspectives and organizational perspectives giving rise to the questions.

There is thus, overlapping of the debates but losing of the spirit is unnecessary. With these discussions, the chair of the session took the discussion forward.

The first speaker of this session was **JD Chadrapal**, a Dalit speaker and writer, actively working with Backward and Minority Caste Employees Federation (BAMCEF). As the name suggests, this is a federation of employees belonging to the backward and minority *caste* communities. He initiated with the concept of identity politics with initiates with birth but does not end with death. The prevalence of caste should be accepted and incorporated in the dynamics of identity politics. Due to the non-acceptance of caste, the rise of identity crisis takes place, referring a person as a Hindu when one has to cast vote but deducing the same person as a Dalit in the times when one rises in a movement. Leftist movement takes place with a perspective and hence can be identified as identity politics. Identity is an integral part of a person's life and cannot be separated from the field of politics.

The emergence of the concept of Modern Hall was discussed by the speaker, indicating that there would be no movement. Dr. B. R Ambedkar had

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mentioned that the labour system also has divisions among them but the domination of Brahminical forces is significantly prominent in the system, giving rise to dreaded inequality. The groups of labourers mostly belong from Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Classes. The labour classes do not have any

resources are dominated by the Brahminical forces, who do not want the labourers to have the resources, leading to the movement by the labourers to fight for the rights and resources. To prevent the rise of the movements, the emergence of Modern Hall took place, creating an ideal situation. But the Modern Hall, having an ideal situation is dominated by the Brahminical forces.

The labour class has two opponents, namely, the Brahmins and the Capitalists. The Marxists can struggle against the capitalists but it is equally important for the labourers for the struggle against the Brahmins. Thus, the ideologies of Jyotiba Phule have to go along with the ideologies of Karl Marx, as mentioned by Dr. B. R Ambedkar, as this issue is not contemporary times but have been going on for a prolonged time. The problem does not lay in the concept of economic accumulation and financial status, but primarily in the aspect of discrimination of the identities, thus, identity

status. In 1949, during the formulation of Constitution, Dr. B.R Ambedkar had mentioned that there was lack of social and economic freedom, but there was political freedom as all the people despite of their variant identities, had the right to vote. But in the contemporary times, the political freedom also has been lost. There was a need for separate electorate and proportionate reservation, but this did not take place. There was a constitutional concept of reservation. There was a need for a Bahujan Hall but the establishment did not take place accordingly. There is a need for change where it is important to bargain with adjustments or to transform with perspectives. In the former, we can bargain and adjust with the existing structure of the Modern Hall even though it is dominated by Brahminical forces or to transform and create a new hall with the perspectives of Phule and Ambedkar.

It is important to polarize the labourers, on the basis of common identities. When



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there was emergence of different categories within the system, it became evident that it is difficult to take the identities out of the system. Thus, it was important to eradicate caste and mobilize people on the basis of class. This mobilization of the labourers can take place on the basis of the class, thus creating a sense of brotherhood among the same class groups. Through the mobilization on the basis of the class, the caste identities can be intervened. This was the foundation of identity politics and it is not possible to move forward without identity. This was the class aspirations will enhance and there will be revolution on the basis of this. It is necessary to regain the lost rights of the classes. With this, the JD Chadrpal ended his presentation in this session.

The chair concluded that, the idea of fluidity of the modernity and the concept of Marxist perspectives of abstract labour should be focused on further. The Marxist intervention of social structure was brought

into this presentation and the synthesis is needed for the process of conceptualization.

The second speaker of the session was **Jignesh Mevani**, a Dalit activist and lawyer who was elected as a MLA. He came to leadership with the protests that engulfed Gujarat after the brutal beating of Dalit youth in Saurashtra in the year 2016. He spoke of B.C Kamble who was a lawyer and Dada Saheb Gaekwad who was an activist fighting with land struggles, the two people who inherited the mantle of RPI founded by Dr. B.R Ambedkar. There was an argument between them as to who would assume leadership of the movement after Ambedkar's demise., B.C Kamble asked Dada Saheb Gaekwad that what did he know about the work of B.R Ambedkar being not highly educated and coming from an humble background. Unfortunately, the fight that had initiated in the 1950s had not been resolved and continues even today in the contemporary



times.

The labourers who belong from the lower classes and lower castes have no idea about the discourses but they want to be free, which remains there only objective. The

concrete material issues has been lost as a result of forgetting the identity issues. Caste has altered the dimensions of the country, where 4.3 Dalit women are raped everyday and the working class Dalits are exploited to

the most extent. The struggle of class and caste should be brought together and treated as a common issue.

The third speaker of the session was

Ashok Bharti, a Dalit

The socio-economic structure has not changed since the pre-historic times significantly. The accumulation of natural resources, such as 55% of the land, the primary source of production, is in the hands of only 5% of the population.

speaker mentioned that when he took his oath in the Gujarat assembly, and came out, the workers serving in the assembly as the cleaners and liftmen, mostly belonging to the lower castes greeted him with Jai Bhim and immediately afterwards asked him to do something about the fact that they were not getting minimum wages. They had no idea about their provident fund, bonus and minimum wages. They had no idea if their provident funds get submitted and if it did where. This is the case of who are within the assembly in the state of Gujarat. It is important to delete the class perspective of the Dalit leaders in the first place. There have to be either the acceptance of the ideologies of Marx or the rejection of this [concept](#).

The speaker questioned the meaning of being an Ambedkarite. The struggle of class and caste should go hand in hand, in a context where "*Jai Bhim*" and "*Laal Salam*" should go together. This has become the struggle of the middle, intellectual classes who are Dalits and Marxists and not the struggle of the common people who belong from the lower rungs of society. He mentioned that why the Dalits cannot form the Union of their own and discard the Leftist groups and their Unions. The annihilation of caste should be the struggle of all, and not all Dalits. The struggle for the

activist who set up the National Confederation of Dalit Organization which is an umbrella body of the Dalit Organizations from all over the country. He initiated saying that Dalit is an umbrella terminology as there are Dalits who are professors, activists and leaders, labourers and manual scavengers. Dalits are development of the imagination of the Brahminical forces and Dalits are also development through the struggles of the Dalit [Panthers](#). Identity politics is a part of this Brahminical social structure that has humiliation as a fundamental character. Along with this, the graded social inequality is preached in this structure. Compartmentalization of opportunities and resources takes place which indicates that there exists domination by the higher castes in this structure from a prolonged time, which has been continuing in the contemporary times in each sector. The domination in the sector of army and paramedical forces are by the Brahminical forces. The socio-economic structure has not changed since the pre-historic times significantly. The accumulation of natural resources, such as 55% of the land, the primary source of production, is in the hands of only 5% of the population.

The Dalits in the understanding of the Brahminical forces are the poor and distorted, but the Dalits are the ones who

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fight for their rights and existence. The urban Dalits and their ideologies get reflected in the agenda of Dalit movement. In 2003, in Govind Bhallabh Pant Institute there was a closed door meeting with the Leftists and Ambedkarites with the presence of communists and Dalits. So, this should continue in the contemporary fascist nation, in which two ideologies synchronizing. The domination of the educated classes has taken more prominently in the Movements. The approach of the movements should be focusing on the dignity and self respect of the people, mobilizing the people who have been denied dignity and have felt discriminated as a result of this. Thus, reinvention of this philosophy and rethinking on the modes of movements is required. With this, he ended his presentation.

The chair concluded that Central University of Hyderabad is a classic, contemporary example of the idea preached by the speaker, in terms of rethinking the strategies for mobilization. Understanding and recognizing modes of control that do not rationalize the framework is being done in the contemporary times in HCU.

This was followed by the presentation of the fourth speaker, **Anand Teltumbde**, who is a professor at Goa Institute of Management. He is a civil rights activist, political analyst and worked on People's movements. He has written extensively on the intersection of Dalit movement with the leftist ideology and his articles get published at influential journals, newspapers and magazines. He initiated with explaining that class is economic and

caste is social and religious. Marx did not define class constructively. Lenin was the first to define class as he was actualizing Marxism in Russia.

The misunderstanding of this dichotomy of caste and class had taken place. However, what stood important was the understanding, for example he explained that Dalit is not a caste identity, but a concept that was initiated by Jyotiba Phule and carried ideologically by Ambedkar. Mahar is a caste group, which has sub castes within this caste group rose from Nagpur, which is the *karmabhumi* of Ambedkar. One group of Mahars had risen in terms of identifying themselves to be different from the main caste. This indicates that the basic characteristic of caste is to divide and is hierarchy seeking.

The challenge is to bridge this divide in this unequal economic development. The process the people constituted the State indicates that the constitution is a culprit that included matters of caste and traditions. The formulation of the Constitution took place not by Ambedkar,

Technology, which is a product of capitalists, had created social relationships. The establishment of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics are creating a different kind of social relationship, creating objective reality. The world is getting pushed out of socialism

but by the Brahminical forces. There was reference by Upendra Bakshi, who described nine types of Ambedkar.

Technology, which is a product of capitalists, had created social relationships. The establishment of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics are creating a different kind of social relationship, creating objective reality. The world is getting pushed out of socialism with the introduction of

technology and it is important to tackle the situations accordingly. With this, the presentation came to an end.

The chair concluded by saying that caste and class are not situational or definitional categories, but is political agencies in this social reality. Thus, they have to be synchronized.

The next speaker of the session was **Ashok Chowdhari** who is a tribal activist based in the region of South Gujarat. He leads an organization, Adivasi Ekta Parishad, which is a coalition of tribal groups that struggles for their rights. He initiated with the difference between caste and class and relating to the identity. The roots of communism are in the prehistoric age, where the practice of classes and castes yet to emerge, leading to the ideal societal structure. The identity politics for the tribal people is the accessibility to their natural resources. The aspirations of the working class have become the partners of this exploitative system. The Unions also aspire to become a part of this system, which is an exploitative structural system. The economic system is exploiting the natural system. The tribals have a symbiotic relationship with the nature. So the idea of development translated into the idea of destruction for the tribals. To sustain the political system, the natural resources are being distorted. 65% of the budget is going for sustaining the system. The system is genocide for the tribals, by incorporating the tribals into the framework of caste and class. The identity of labourers is not the identity of the tribals and mainstreaming them is exploiting. The tribals want space to live with freedom experiencing equality. He explained the people who discriminate as "They are people who don't kill a mosquito, but leave no stones unturned to kill a man". With this, he discussed about the legacy of the state of Jharkhand, indicating that the state is failing to protect the weak, misusing the



constitution to gain powers to become suppressors. This makes the tribals feel uncomfortable. The conditions are catastrophic, as indicated by the study of Amnesty International in the district of Bastar. The report mentions that 10,000 women were raped among which 3,000 women were minors. Another report mentions that 10 lakh tribal children from the state of Jharkhand were abducted.

He exclaimed that the Western form of Democracy was accepted. At the present times, the exploitation by technology is taking place at its extreme. Mahatma Gandhi had mentioned this in his book, Hind Swaraj, but was criticized for the saying against the emerging technology. The aspects attaining legal justice were not the only objective, but to attain the natural justice was also important. In this process, the legal norms that were supposed to be accepted were also exploitative. The natural resources were taken away from the tribal, exploiting them, taking away the identity of the tribals and indigenous people. With this, the presentation of the speaker came to an end.

The chair in this session mentioned that synthesis and synchronization provides the engine for social transformation. The conditions of the tribes need to improve and they need to be provided space.



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categories. The functioning of the parties is driven by them, such as the Congress functions with the support of the Other Backward Classes. The identity of the OBCs is defined by sub castes that incorporate the OBCs, which is the largest community among the reserved category. The right

based movements have less mention of the OBCs and thus, they are not a part of this inclusive movement. There seems to be a denial mode in the acceptance of their existence.

The question was raised regarding the identity politics in personal and professional spaces. With a labourer, belonging from SC or ST community works in the factory or in the agricultural fields does not always have to be identified with this identity and will be recognized as a worker. But in the personal structure, the identity alters. Thus, the question was raised in relation to this divide. It has been observed that with power and hierarchy, the identity alters. For example, in case of the kilns, the owners belonging to the lower castes or tribes will take the role of the oppressors, as they have power in their hands. They will practice discrimination in the kilns. This perspective questions the identity politics.

The concept of caste was introduced by the Aryans who invaded, as mentioned by Dr. B.R Ambedkar. This concept of caste was reintroduced by Marx in the form of class. If Ambedkarites and Marxists move forward together, there are chances of future conflicts as there will be the formation of Ambedkarite Marxists, Buddhist Marxists, Hindu Marxists, and other forms of religious political groups. Thus, Ambedkarite ideology can be implemented to resolve caste and untouchability.

Open house discussions:

This was followed by a series of discussions by the participants of the meeting. The discussion began with raising the question about the concept of Ambedkarite ideologies. This ideology was subjective and depends on the perspectives of the people believing in this ideology.

Prof. Breman, professor at the University of Amsterdam, commented that there was no mention about the religious minorities, especially the Muslims considering the problems that they are facing in the contemporary times. The Civil Society Organizations should primarily talk about these issues. Also, the issues of the women were not mentioned among the discussions of identity politics. Thus, the voices of the women and religious minorities should be raised by the CSOs.

Another discussion took place on the aspect that the identity of the caste is defined by the work and livelihoods. The Dalits, they lose their identity, once they migrate for the purpose of the work as they are recognized as labourers. Similarly, there was one observation that with the Dalits, once they achieve economic empowerment, they also transform as suppressors. This indicates the relationship of power and economy with identity.

The discussion took place regarding the political intervention with identity. The political drive is by the regional forces which are dominated by these reserved



the question was raised if it is about raising the slogan of *Jai Bhim* and receiving food, or it is in the context of *Jai Bhim* and getting liberation.

The discussion took place regarding the changes in the technology and the impact of technology on capitalism in the contemporary times. The development of technology is directly linked to the markets and generation of new means of production is taking place such as solar energy and sound spectrums. The question was raised whether it is linked to the caste and has its impact on identity. There was also a context linked to the aspect of gender, which is also forgotten most of the times. So the question was raised, linking to the idea of vision and the aspect of independence. With the emergence of post Independence, the question was raised in relation this struggle, that still exists.

The discussions took place in relation to the importance of caste annihilation, which is more essential than class identity. The consciousness of Ambedkarite thoughts should be seen as a Modernist thought. It is important to incorporate Marxism, but the thoughts and ideologies of Ambedkar also have to come as a part of consciousness. With Gandhian and Marxists, existing at one point of time, Ambedkar rose as a part of this subjective consciousness through Dalit Movement. The Left should also become a part of this consciousness. For the ideological changes to be incorporated in Left thoughts the willing acceptance of Ambedkarites should come, otherwise change will not be seen.

The concept of migrant labourers also poses as a challenge in terms of organizing labourers and contractors. These categories of labourers and contractors, both migrants and sometimes from the same community have shown distinct hierarchy, due to their identities. The contractors form a part of the community who are controlled and

The discussion took place over the caste in the religion politics and the question was raised in relation to the identity politics and annihilation of caste, in the context that of identity politics is going towards annihilation of caste. Also, in relation to this,

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the
divide**

bridging the divide

supervised by the owners, whereas the labourers are the ones who are exploited and dominated by the suppressors.

It was mentioned that politics will be an integral part of the identity. However, there needs to be a deep rooted understanding of the scenario and of the complexities. With one Dalit activist working for many years on their rights and writing a book on the experiences cannot be transformed into an ideology or an "ism". What is primary is the annihilation of caste.

It is important to integrate the two struggles of class and caste. There are positive ways of comprehending the two dynamics. Communists should internalize the annihilation of caste into the struggle. With caste being a tool of dividing people, it should be annihilated. Marxists should assimilate in this struggle. Identities are multiple but the identity for struggle should be determined. The perspective of science was highlighted that focuses on rationalism and does not succumb to these dynamics. In science, if there is need data, then it has to be accepted and not be fixated with the previous thoughts. With change being accelerated, it is evitable. Thus, the beliefs of the past have to be discarded and have to move forward towards this change.

With Brahmanism, that destroys the dignity of the oppressed, should evolve. Thus, the value system should be politically based and provide equal [dignity](#). With Ambedkarite ideology being a form of ideology should be utilized to establish equality and provide dignity. The concept of Modern Hall, and the entities believing in the concept where there is equality being practices is a myth. This has no relation with the Modern ideologies preached by Dr. B.R Ambedkar. The concept of the formation of Bahujan Hall was discussed which should have both

Phule and Ambedkarite perspectives. There should be inclusiveness in the Bahujan Hall with the presence of SC/ST/ OBCs and religious minorities. The identity of all should be recognized in this Hall. To annihilate, the identification is necessary. Respecting diverse cultures and understanding the importance of diversity is a necessity. Convergence will define the future of democracy.

With these discussions, the chair, **Vijay Gudavarthy**, concluded saying consciousness will emerge through synthesis. Caste and class are complicated and heterogeneous. Reality is not consolidated and both have their internal vertical heterogeneity. The compass is through the synthesis that can emerge.

With these discussions, the session two, identity politics and manual labourers came to an end with Sudhir Katiyar extending his gratitude for the successful, interactive and informative session.

Session 3: Bringing it together

To consolidate the day's discussion **Vaibhav Raaj** began by re-iterating the agenda of the conference and the reason for choosing migrants as a social category that often gets left behind the Ambedkarite and Labor movements as forwarded by the Left. He also went on to acknowledge the international solidarity shared by Prayas and RLS. Raaj further implored the participants to remember the larger vision for which everyone had gathered on the platform – bring the workers' identity and various socially embedded identities together that together constituted the life of a worker.

The session began with a discussion on how Industrial Revolution 4.0 as articulated

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by Amitava Guha presented a new threat to the working class – where technology was increasingly replacing labor and generating super-profits for business owners and investors. Were we prepared for the future driven by Artificial Intelligence? In such a climate international agencies were forwarding policies based on sustainable and millennium development goals that were hardly in touch with the crude reality of the laboring class.

Damle presented the reasons that had together pushed people into migrating from rural to urban spaces. If conducive conditions for livelihood could be ensured- perhaps people may stop undertaking migration which only made their lives precarious. One way could be through land reforms and implementation of FRA 2006.

Ashim Roy showed how the two movements can work to complement each other – while Marxist analysis would help us understand the nuances of the society, the Ambedkarites will present to us ways to counter the normative structures that ensured status quo.

Vijay Gudavarthy shared how Left has always focused to essentialize mode of production and there was a need to come out of this essentializing behavior. Further bridging of divide may not take place if we did not come together with our difference in thoughts and found ways that would complement the two movements.

JD Chandrapal discussed in great nuance how the identities got shaped and constructed in the halls of modernity. And often these very identities went on to divide and fragment the workers and the dalit movement. He added that he believed that such identities were created in the halls of

modernity so that no one can rebel – since it was the brahmanical forces that had built these very halls. These very forces want to ensure that people who form SC, ST and OBC part of the population do not get access to resources.

He rather proposed an alternative- to transform and create a separate hall that would be founded on the Ambedkar and Phule's perceptions, which would seek to bring people together in their similarities and not polarize them. Creating solidarities and Brotherhood based on commonality of issues.

Jignesh Mevani on the other hand brought together the ideas of Atma-samman and Astitva – both aspects that become integral to the life of a Dalit/Adivasi/Muslim worker. His emphasis on doing away with differences between what emerged as two ideologies – Ambedkar's and Marx's view of the world; could not be more relevant in a world that was becoming increasingly fascist.

Ashok Bharti highlighted how a dalits' identity was constructed within a brahmanical social structure that can be found to be based on humiliation, graded social inequality and society that was segregated and compartmentalized. Further he shared how a



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dalit also occupied multiple identities, worker being one such identity – therefore this presented a need to re-invent and move towards a synthesis of the two philosophies that have been the foundation of various discussions today.

Anand Teltumbde by problematizing the terms of caste and class, stressed on how these categories should not be perceived as situational categories but rather should be seen as political agencies that might lead the people found at the intersection of the two, together.

Ashok Chaudhari on the other hand provides an answer to how the synthesis might take place. He elaborated that it would be the Adivasis who will provide the compass to social transformation with a synthesis of Ambedkar and Marx.

Vaibhav closed his consolidation for the day's discussion by re-iterating Prof. Breman's concern – the need to also understand the dynamics of minority identity and the feminist thought.

Dr. Gail Omvedt and **Bharat Patankar** together helped the participants and speakers bring the two together – to bridge the divide. But before a synthesis or bridging can be discussed, Patankar shared his concern about our shared lack of analysis of what constituted the capitalist system and structure that we quickly term

liberalism. Further we have no historical understanding of caste and class. Without understanding its historicity, can we understand how caste, class, women's oppression manifest in the present day? We have collectively failed to form a primary understanding or analysis of these.

Additionally, where were we heading with our struggle, what was the interface that we were imagining, what vision were we seeking to arrive at. Phule perhaps can help us with a bridge – *stri-shudr-atishudr* – can perhaps give us a possible alliance – this could be the possible bridge – to bridge the divides.

As the day drew to a close, Sudhir Katiyar proposed that the house adopt a common declaration that can be adopted as consensus. He presented draft of such a document titled as Ahmedabad Declaration. The participants who were representing the Marxist movement, voiced their concern about a particular section (para 3) in the declaration that they found empirically inaccurate. Certain issues were raised- such as by Ashok Singh who felt that by collaborating with other progressive minority groups (Bhilistan movement being one) could offer a possible social alliance. Prof. Breman also felt that the consultation had not raised issues that concern the women and religious minority groups. These groups also formed an integral part of the identity and workers' movement.

Further other participants suggested if they could be allowed time to reflect and respond with their recommendations on the Ahmedabad Declaration before a consensus can be arrived on how it was to be taken forward.

The day ended with a vote of thanks by Denis Macwan, where he expressed gratitude on the behalf of RLS and PRAYAS for the rich discussions that took place that day.



Ahmedabad Declaration

Speaking on the verge of the promulgation of the constitution of free India, the architect of the constitution Babasaheb Ambedkar said "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions?"

Almost seventy years hence, contradictions have only sharpened further. India has a labour force of about 500 million today. Majority of which, almost to the tune of about 450 million are unprotected irrespective of the fact whether they are part of organised or unorganised sector of economy and/or employed or self-employed. The fact that the majority of our workers stand deprived of job/work security, living wage/regular adequate income, social security, maternity benefits, sickness benefits, leaves on the one hand and work on average for 12 hours, the working conditions are inhumane, no facility even of drinking water, sanitation etc. at the work places on the other is a living testimony to this. As a consequence, we have dubious distinction of reporting highest number of child labour, we continue to lag behind in human development index, our democracy index is lower than what it was at the time of emergency in 1975, the inequality is increasing and is at all time high.

However, if the sharpening contradictions have not yet led to a consolidation of the working classes into a radical political force that will change the status quo as has happened in other societies all over the world, the major blame can be laid at the division of labourers on various grounds including social discriminations like persistence of the caste system in Indian society. Historically manual work has been performed by the lower castes while the white-collar jobs have been the preserve of the upper castes. This caste segregation has been reproduced in the modern capitalist economy where upper castes dominate the formal economy while the manual work is reserved for lower castes. This dichotomy perpetuates the formal informal divide in the country and plays a key factor in keeping the large mass of workers unorganized. On the other hand, the identity-based movements that have emerged to represent the oppressed castes have not incorporated working class

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issues in their discourse with some notable exceptions.

The contemporary divergence of the movements of oppressed caste (actually Dalits) and the movements of working class has had unfortunate consequences that are visible to all. Today caste and class are intertwined and they can be barely isolated. The caste, moreover, are not the traditional caste but are replanted in the modernist soil of Indian constitution and institutions. The counterintuitive rise in caste consciousness in the era of neoliberalism across all communities is largely due to this fact. It also exposes the fundamental divisive characteristic of caste. It follows that caste are incapable of uniting people for any radical struggle and hence needs to be transcended by some other basis. However, because of the caste-blind legacy of the class politics, which is unduly amplified by the vested interests, castes are morphed into the basis of identity politics. Class remains as one of the primary ways to unite all oppressed people against the oppression. This, however, is not by ignoring the reality of caste but by determinedly fighting against them as an integral part of the class struggle.

This gathering of people belonging to diverse ideological spectrums calls upon the followers of both - the Left and the Dalit movement - to come together and forge a common bond. Unless these two streams converge, the emancipation of the Dalits as well as working class is well nigh impossible. The gathering calls for a militant anti-caste struggle along with organization of workers across all sectors. It appeals to the class based movements to factor in the role of caste and the oppressed caste based movements to promote organization of workers along class lines as the only means to bring about social and economic equality. This is the need of the hour when objective conditions seem ripe for broader unity. To realize the dream of a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity there is no alternative but joint action. We need to resolve for a coordinated joint action of all the workers, social movements and all other concerned citizenry. Only such joint action will bring together the historically exploited sections of Indian society; so aptly described by Phule as *stree, shudrati, and shudra* - the women, the untouchables, and the other backward classes. This unity is essential to achieve social and economic equality which go hand in hand and is at the base of democracy which in turn can only ensure liberty and fraternity in real sense of the term.

The shape and pace of mobility

Jan Breman

The exodus from agriculture and the countryside is a worldwide phenomenon. In South Asia the slow but steady inroads capitalism started to make from the late nineteenth century into the peasant economy gave rise to a process of dispossession in which people with little or no land to cultivate have become increasingly redundant in primary production and are written off as a huge reserve army of labour. For most rural households agriculture is no longer the mainstay of their work and income. Households stuck in poverty cannot afford to become and remain unemployed. Road construction and motorized transport have opened up the countryside and reduction in the cost of bridging distance has accelerated work driven migration on a larger scale than ever before. But attempts of these masses made mobile to settle down where they have gone for work are frustrated by the informalization of both rural and urban employment. Those who belong to these footloose armies remain outsiders at the sites to which they have been recruited on a temporary basis, and where they are treated

as transients by those who make use of their labour power. Informality and circulation together allow us to define these people as perpetual footloose. It means that instead of finding proper jobs they are contracted on a hire-fire basis which does not allow them to settle down where they have arrived. Thus, migrant labour has remained thoroughly casualized and subjected to continual circulation rather than to the permanent outmigration and resettlement of this huge workforce elsewhere.

After a phase of jobless growth in the 1990s the National Sample Survey Office reported in 2004-05 that employment in rural India had started to pick up again. However, this upswing happened to coincide with a looming agrarian malaise which led to higher rural indebtedness. The turnaround to a spurt in employment may well have been triggered by a cut back in the household budget, as Abraham has argued.

Under conditions of distress, when income levels fall below sustenance, then the normally non-working population is forced to enter the

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labour market to supplement household income. The decline of the agricultural sector has also probably created forced sectoral and regional mobility of the working population, with the non-working population complementing them (Abraham 2009)-

His conclusion was backed up by an editorial note on jobless growth in the Economic and Political Weekly which commented on the outcome of the 64th NSS round (2007-08) showing a paltry increase in waged work in the preceding years, not by far enough to keep pace with population growth. While employment generation in this period decelerated considerably in urban areas, it actually declined in rural areas. In both the rural and urban economy mainly women were hit by job loss (EPW vol. 45/39, 2010:7-8).

The accelerating footloose mobility of labour appears to have been driven by distress and the reason for this is amply substantiated by the findings of the official *Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011* belatedly made available in mid-2015 on the website (see <http://www/secc.gov.in>). Data on the caste-wise distribution were not been made public, no doubt because of the political sensitivity of these statistics. But the information provided on poverty and pauperism in the countryside should be equally disconcerting and more so because many of the households steeped in dire poverty have not been properly listed in their state of misery. It is now on public record that half of the rural households are landless, have to survive on casual labour which is locally often not available, and live therefore in stark deprivation. Drawing attention to a systematic oversight of registration provoked one commentator to the following caustic comment.

Either the definitions of deprivations are deliberately kept narrow so as to exclude a large number of people or enumerators have lived up to their past reputation of collusion with the rich. In the process a large number

of poor would be denied access to targeted programmes. Government has not been able to eliminate poverty, but it has certainly succeeded in eliminating the poor from its radar. (Saxena 2015)

In my opinion, the main bias of the data made available is the lack of information on intra-rural as well rural-to-urban labour circulation and the impact of that mobility on the socio-economic status of the investigated households. The door-to-door census referred to as above, which is supposed to have covered each and every locality in the country, tells a story of widespread and staggering rural misery. The agrarian crisis widely discussed refers to the frequent cases of farmer's suicide in several states. Quite rightly so, but such ending of life is also frequent occurrence though much less noticed in the landless milieu. In my fieldwork I used to come across such instances of ultimate despair which in the absence of sufficient employment and income are driven by the inability to keep the household going and to accept the traumatic burden of life-cycle events. In the case of debilitating health and old age among a growing number of dispossessed, starvation happens to be a common way out of life (Bremar 2013b). The agrarian crisis is not a conjunctural but a structural one and suggests a trend of growing reluctance to an outright unwillingness across all classes of the peasantry, although for very diverse reasons, to remain engaged in the production of food and non-food crops

Opinions differ on the magnitude, scale and spread of circular migration, the underlying causes why people leave home for either rural or urban destinations, their socio-economic status, what the migrants get out of their employment elsewhere, the duration and impact the spatial and sectoral shift has on economy as well as the social fabric. The canvass is too broad to deal with in much detail and my focus is on the flight of the land-poor and landless classes away from their habitat in the countryside and their

main bias of the data made available is the lack of information on intra-rural as well rural-to-urban labour circulation and the impact of that mobility on the socio-economic status of the investigated households. The door-to-door census referred to as above, which is supposed to have covered each and every locality in the country, tells a story of widespread and staggering rural misery.

Dalit women cannot decline work like tending to livestock or making cowdung cakes – dirty and lowly work that these women do in their households only. They have to seek permission of the creditor household before taking up wage labour for any other household, especially during the peak season time, and they cannot work for any household whose relations with their creditor household are strained.

attempts to gain access to a variety of rural and urban opportunities of waged work away from their habitat. In its 1991 report the National Commission on Rural Labour wrote that about 10 million rural workers left their place of origin in search of employment (Ministry of Labour 1991: vol. II, K-17). The actual figure was already then much higher than accounted for in official statistics (NSSO) or census reports. In the years that followed the number of labour migrants rose sharply and at the beginning of the twenty-first century the size of this floating workforce was supposed to hover around 30 million for the whole of India (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003). Among them, short-duration migration – going off for up to six months for employment but without including short-distance daily commuting – accounted for 15.6 million. That is, according to the NSSO 2007–8 survey which suggested that seasonal migrants were only a minor segment among the workforce leaving for other destinations. It was again a hugely understated estimate of the vast and rapidly increasing scale of short-duration migration for work. Srivastava put the magnitude falling in this category for the same year to be *at least* 40 million (Srivastava 2011a: 375). The report submitted by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) confirmed that the number of such migrants, staying away for up to one year, is much higher than acknowledged in official sources (2008: 96). My own guesstimate for what I called circular migration amounts to 50 million people by the end of the first decade of the new century. Backing up my tally I gave as reasons for incomplete coverage in the official statistics not merely absence of investigative zeal and lack of definitional rigour (for example, where commuting stops and becomes migration) but also a politically inspired reluctance leading to an outright unwillingness to take stock of what is going on in the lower echelons of economy and society (Bremar 2010: 7). It is therefore not surprising that other publications suggest an even higher volume of temporary migrants, an army of not less than 100 million at drift,

although such inflated counts remain unsubstantiated (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009: 16).

Labour migration has to a large extent remained a male prerogative or predicament. Men increasingly are prone to leave the village for shorter or longer bouts of absence in order to hunt and gather wages they do not find at home. They are pushed out to bring back badly needed income for their household. However, going off also enables these members of S.C. and S.T. communities to break away from caste-based domination which condemns them to subordinate behaviour. While males escape from the local practices of discrimination and derogation, the inferior status of their households at the bottom of the village hierarchy implies that the females who stay back have to bear the brunt of remaining exposed to a combination of class and caste exploitation. They are made to comply with what the higher-caste landowners order them to do. This is what Ishita Mehrotra found when she conducted fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh:

... these Dalit women cannot decline work like tending to livestock or making cowdung cakes – dirty and lowly work that these women do in their households only. They have to seek permission of the creditor household before taking up wage labour for any other household, especially during the peak season time, and they cannot work for any household whose relations with their creditor household are strained. When they are hired as part of a labour party, for wage labour in the creditor household's fields, they have to accept lower wages paid much after the others have been paid. These labour relations are sustained by the relations of domination and subjugation that are in-built in capitalism and not by physical force. (2017:250)

The quotation illustrates the caste-class angle and also shows that the distinction between free and unfree cannot be sharply delineated but needs to be specified as well as contextualized. The divide is gradual in terms of rigidity (running from extreme harshness to less oppressive forms of subjugation),

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length (of shorter, longer to indefinite duration) and selectivity (identity, also gender and age wise). The literature on debt bondage both in present and past has strikingly understated the gendered features of this ordeal.

Males much more than females have been portrayed as victims of such forms of dispossession as well as disempowerment. However brutal entrapment in bondage may be for men, the severe hardship faced by women exposed to similar captivity has not been highlighted in equal detail. The abuse women are made to endure is not only lack of control over labour power but over their body as well (Anandhi 2017; Still 2017). While working class women are at threat to fall prey to rape whenever and wherever, the likelihood to become victim of such predation is even higher when they are outside their own habitat. Together with males they are subjected to the exploitation of their labour power but there is the additional risk of sexual abuse to which female migrants are frequently exposed when at work away from home. In the villages of my fieldwork women from land-poor households withdrew from the circular migration to the brick kilns whenever that opportunity arose. The explanation given was the need to look after the small plot of land, to tend to the few head of cattle and to send the children to school. Women from landless households were not able to opt out and had much to complain about when I met them wherever they had gone to. Apart from the grueling pace of work and the extra household chores they are burdened with, their anxiety stems from the sexual molestation they suffer from the employer, jobber, foremen and male workers. The combination of fatigue and stress make the annual trek to an alien work site a hateful but unescapable experience. On the other hand, however, going off in search of work can also be seen as an attempt to escape from control and dependency at home and speaks of a behaviour which is both age and gender specific (Shah 2006; Picherit 2018).

Among the masses of men, women, and children involved in labour circulation, the large majority hails from households belonging to the lower castes-classes in the rural economy. Their growing livelihood deficit in the village makes them migration prone but being uneducated and without social capital they mainly qualify away from home for unskilled or at best skilled-on-the-job. As I have already earlier pointed out, the more vulnerable the social and economic status in the place of origin is the fewer and more precarious options these migrants have wherever they go (Bremar 1996). A recurrent finding is that the class differentiation as it exists in the countryside tends to be replicated and intensified in and by the process of migration, leading to a further widening of inequalities between the various categories made mobile in the overall occupational hierarchy. In his appraisal of the outcome of labour migration, Srivastava contrasts two broad segments of migrant workers, the second one subdivided into two categories. The first segment comprises permanent migrants, with physical and human capital, who are better placed in the job market, while the second segment consists of the poor semi-permanent migrants, who have few assets and mainly work in the urban informal sector, as well as the short-duration seasonal and circulatory migrants, who are principally employed as casual workers (Srivastava 2011: 378). His conclusion that nearly half of the total migrant workforce in India should be characterized as vulnerable concurs with my findings and is the point of departure in this essay. Srivastava suggests that improvement in the condition of the vulnerable segment is urgent and should be made a high policy priority. However, my contention is that the government's interference in the landscape of labour circulation tends to aggravate rather than upgrade the terms and conditions of this footloose workforce. More elaboration is required on the current shape of urbanization, the social identity of the migrants, the role of government in the shifting balance between

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The anger with which these floating workers react to their plight of exploitation and oppression shows that they are not only in search of employment far away from home but also deprived from an existence which allows for a modicum of decency and dignity.

town and countryside, the employment modalities in the various economic sectors and the absence or presence of the state in the regulation of labour practices.

Labour circulation

Recruitment of labour for a limited period, lasting no longer than one season, is in line with the time-bound nature of most operations in the rural economy which are carried out in the open air: the harvesting of crops; the quarrying of stone; the moulding of bricks or the manufacture of sea salt can only take place during the dry months of the year. The same goes for other industries, rural or urban such as construction, which depend on fair weather conditions and come to an end before the onset of the rains. The 64th NSS Round (2007-08) reported that nearly two-third of labour migration is rural-to-urban while intra-rural mobility accounts for a little less than one-third. I suggest that the unequal divide is less stark than registered but mainly because of misconceived policies on the agrarian-rural economy the swelling trend of casualized footlooseness has indeed of late gravitated more to urban growth poles. Labour circulation facilitates the informalization of economic activity and, vice versa, the informal economy puts a premium on labour mobility. Circular migration does not mean that the whole household moves out. Dependents usually remain behind although that status is a flexible one and does not always apply to young children and old aged, many of whom are forced to contribute to hunting for wages. With one or more members going off and others staying back, the household becomes multi-locational. The non-economic features of living apart are seldom discussed in the literature but the cost implied is higher than a split budget and creates frustration and tension on both sides. The circulating migrants have often to make do without decent accommodation. This goes for the powerloom workers in Surat who sleep in a packed room in the company of workmates, construction workers who arrange a sort of bivouac at the building site, brick-makers or saltpan workers who erect a

makeshift shelter, gangs of paddy harvesters allowed to cook their food and pass the night in the farmer's courtyard and the army of sugarcane cutters who camp along the roadside or in the open field in a tent of tarpaulin sheets; for the duration of the working season all of them have to make do without drinking water and toilet facilities. One cane cutter had the courage to tell a group of senior officials that had come to find out about the way they were treated by the mill management that 'even dogs are better off' (Bremar 1994). This was more than twenty years ago but the anger with which these floating workers react to their plight of exploitation and oppression shows that they are not only in search of employment far away from home but also deprived from an existence which allows for a modicum of decency and dignity. One wonders what the prospects are for realizing these ambitions which express demand for a better quality of life.

Construction in both urban and rural locales has become a booming industry in Gujarat. Although in this sector too, the use of new materials for building, road-laying, and irrigation works and the changeover to more mechanized technologies have made the industry much more capital-intensive, the sector still has a huge army of skilled and unskilled labour at its disposal which is hired and fired on the basis of informal terms and conditions. The modality of employment takes two forms. The first one entails the recruitment of work gangs by a jobber in the villages of origin. The jobber comes from the same milieu as the labourers contracted by him, usually accompanies the gang to the building site, and acts as foreman to supervise the work. He is responsible for everything going as planned on the site. The real estate developer, a builder or contractor himself, has no direct contact with the workforce and leaves it up to his agent to distribute an advance before they leave their homes in the countryside and to settle their remaining wages monthly or at the end of the dry season. The jobber is the pinnacle of the circular migration which is organized. In the

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case of brick-kiln workers and sugarcane harvesters discussed below he is the link between the employer and the members of his gang for the duration of the season. He recruits the migrants at home, brings them to the worksite, takes care of their requirements for the duration of the season (shelter, food, and water), supervises his gang at work, keeps track of the daily output and, eventually, makes arrangements for their return home which includes settling their wages. Employers hold him liable for the quantity and quality of the work done by his gang and, the other way around, the workers have to rely on the jobber's word that the employer can be trusted. Good faith on both sides is one of this middleman's major worries. It is of interest to note that in their area of recruitment the jobbers, who have usually come up from the ranks, are known to interact with each other to discuss the terms and conditions they have on offer for their catch and to avoid undue competition and friction in their midst.

In a different mode of recruitment, workers turn up on their own initiative to hire themselves out for a day or longer at one of the early morning markets, mostly to contractors or builders carrying out renovation work or smaller-scale construction projects. These labour markets, known as *naka* or *chowk*, can be found in large cities and small towns throughout the country. Those seeking employment gather at road junctions, near markets, or at bus or train stations. Supply and demand interconnect at these crowded meeting points to negotiate payment for the work to be done and other conditions. The workers who offer themselves for hire are mostly migrants and are also engaged to do a number of other jobs like pulling or pushing freight, loading and unloading trucks, or earth-moving in preparation for construction (land levelling, digging trenches, laying sewage pipes and cables, road paving, and so on). Of this huge workforce employed in the building industry 70 per cent are seasonal migrants and they invariably belong to socially and economically deprived

communities, that is, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, without much or any land at all to cultivate. Their shelter is portable and without any protection along the roadside, on the city pavement or at the work site. When they go off for work in the morning, they tie up their possessions in a plastic sheet, a heap which they leave behind. The bundle (*potalum*) is unpacked again on their return in the evening. They light a fire and use some utensils for cooking, then roll out a mat or some clothes to sleep on. Although they may have squatted for many years, it is impossible to put up a somewhat durable shack. The moment they try to do that, people from the buildings around would chase them out or pay the police or *goondas* (bullies) to remove them.

In this chapter I confine myself to studying the forced departure of the unskilled and low-paid workforce from the countryside, and their inevitable return after a short or longer period as a result of their failure to establish a permanent foothold wherever they foray for employ. In previous publications, I have criticized the lack of research on rural-to-rural labour mobility. The suggestion that outside labour is recruited to make up for local shortages seems to have lost little of its cogency, despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary. Unlike the stereotypical premise that supply and demand are mediated by the market, I have emphasized that employers prefer labour from elsewhere because migrants—often attached in a state of neo-bondage—are not only cheaper to recruit and maintain, but also easier to discipline. Recent case studies in Gujarat—of, amongst others, saltpan workers, the army of labour employed to cut sugarcane, nomads from far-off regions who come to Alang on the coast to break ships, the cruel subjugation of almost one *lakh* of children (girls and boys) from Rajasthan as cotton pickers, and the employment of men, women, and children in many hundreds of brickworks—show the massive scale of the swarms of people forced to float around the countryside in search of livelihood. The sites

Unlike the stereotypical premise that supply and demand are mediated by the market, I have emphasized that employers prefer labour from elsewhere because migrants—often attached in a state of neo-bondage—are not only cheaper to recruit and maintain, but also easier to discipline.

SEZs have become a favoured brand of economic activity kick-started with government subsidy, tax exemption and other generous facilities. Gujarat has more than any other state of these zones where labour laws and regulations do not apply nor is protection enforced against environmental degradation made mandatory.

of their temporary employment across the state, for which they are mobilized in separated circuits of recruitment, cannot be found in official statistics. Not being put on record is the result of a deliberate attempt to cover up the footloose character of the workforce at the bottom of the economy. Beyond the gaze of critical scrutiny is also the multitude of time-bound migrants recruited from all over India for employment in the Special Economic Zones contracted out to corporate business. These large-scale enclaves, alienated from the public domain, are little more than designed growth poles set up within the state but cut off from its territory and gifted to private enterprise operating with national or international capital. As part of the neoliberal policy regime, the SEZs have become a favoured brand of economic activity kick-started with government subsidy, tax exemption and other generous facilities. Gujarat has more than any other state of these zones where labour laws and regulations do not apply nor is protection enforced against environmental degradation made mandatory. Efforts to gain access to such cordoned-off bastions of crony capitalism invariably end in failure (Bremar 2016:156).

The government machinery of labour inspection is conspicuous by its absence throughout the economy. The decision not to implement the statutory laws for the security and protection of this footloose workforce trying to force its way into the urban economy is declared policy. In the official mindset, these hordes of nomads are regarded as an intolerable hindrance and they should be dealt with as trespassers of municipal law and order. On enquiring at the highest municipal level in Ahmedabad, I was given to understand that rural migrants are free to come and work in the city but on the condition that they have to arrange for their own shelter. If employers are not willing to provide accommodation or pay for the costs involved, and that rarely occurs, they have no choice but to camp under the open sky on

whatever unoccupied plots they can find. Squatting on such sites is, however, not allowed. When their presence is considered a nuisance, they have to clear out and if they fail to do so, they run the risk of being forcibly removed. This has happened to many of them, not once but repeatedly. Sometimes they have to pay protection money to a local gang for not being harassed or bribe an official to avoid eviction. My conclusion is that the government is not absent in the regimentation of labour in the informal economy, as the title of this section might suggest. The authorities are present but their interventions are not intended to enhance protection and security but to maintain or even further exacerbate the excessively weak bargaining position of this footloose workforce. The standing policy is to defuse collective action and to label brave deeds of resistance against exploitation and oppression as subversive, incompatible with enforcement of peace and order. It is not civil actors but public servants, up to the highest level, who act in contravention of what is still the law.

Neo-bondage

Labour migration has been a recurrent topic of my empirical research in Gujarat since the 1970s. The reason for discussing the influx or exodus of land-poor to landless labour in the villages of my fieldwork in this chapter is the return of debt bondage as a major feature in the mobilization of many of these workers. On receipt of an advance amount of money during the low tide of the agrarian cycle they contract themselves for employment under duress in an agreement which forces them to leave home at the command of a jobber who, acting as an agent of the ultimate employer, takes his catch of men, women and children away to a remote destination where by means of postponed wage payment they remain constrained until their labour power is no longer required. It is a modality of attachment which I have addressed in my writings on this standing practice as neo-bondage. The gist of what

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this form of an unfree labour contract entails, why and when it begins as well as how it ends (or not) is elaborated upon in the text below. The point which needs emphasis is that the commodification and bondage of labour are shown to be not mutually exclusive. The workers are engaged for production which is organized along capitalist lines. My first case study relates to landless workers whom I have traced in their exodus from the village to brick kilns since the start of my fieldwork. The second case discusses the influx of an enormous fleet of migrants for the harvesting campaign of sugarcane throughout the central plain, also in the villages of fieldwork. Although recruited and paid as agricultural labourers, their work pace as well as the management of this massive workforce is agro-industrial in character, highlighted in my account as cooperative capitalism.

The text which now follows is the reproduced verbatim version of a summing-up article on circular migration published in *International Labor and Working Class History* (2010). While my basic argument is that the type of bondage that used to exist has disappeared, in my ongoing empirical investigations in Gujarat in subsequent decades I have often found practices at the bottom of both the rural and urban informal-sector economies that restrict labor's freedom of movement. Indebtedness is invariably what causes laborers to comply with a condition of employment that keeps them entrapped at the worksite. Employers use the payment of advance wages ("earnest money") as a mechanism of attachment. The recipient has to repay the provider in labor if and when desired, for a price lower than the going market rate. The account that follows does not refer to sources other than my own writings, but the relationships I describe are, of course, also reported in many other publications that discuss ongoing practices of unfree labor in South Asia at large. Employers who recruit migrant workers for an entire season are an important source for binding labor in a relationship of indebtedness. A wide variety of economic activities that take place in the open air make use of such

"footloose labor" tied down in a cycle of production that begins at the start of the dry season and ends before the first rainfall about half a year later. The seasonal migration of labor has been a worldwide phenomenon for quite some time. The transition to a capitalist mode of production put a premium on mobility, resulting in an increase in both the scale of migration and the distances covered. However, as the transformation of Western economies progressed in the late nineteenth century, the circulation of labor declined. On the one hand, increased and more regular employment reduced the pressure to migrate temporarily to work elsewhere, while on the other hand, industrialization made it possible for rural migrants to settle down in towns and cities. The mobility of labor in India, both rural-to-urban and intra-rural, started to gather momentum in the second half of the twentieth century. The annual trek from village to distant worksites and back has resulted in being permanently afloat. Settling down elsewhere and in particular to establish a household and take up residence there is rather exceptional because most migrants remain alien to where they have gone. But also back home the bouts of absence contribute to a growing hybridity to what is at stake in the locality. The circulation of labour is going on with no end in sight, as described in case studies relating to the villages of my recurrent fieldwork in south Gujarat.

See also Jan Breman – On Pauperism in Past and Present, 2016: chapters 5 and 6.

The annual trek from village to distant worksites and back has resulted in being permanently afloat. Settling down elsewhere and in particular to establish a household and take up residence there is rather exceptional because most migrants remain alien to where they have gone

Informal Economy And New Challenges

Amitava Guha

Birth of informality inherits basic component of earning profit at any cost. This is sole purpose of creating contract labour, part time labour and self employed labor at every sector and every

stage of value chain system that maximizes exploitation. As defined by Recommendation 204 of ILO adopted in the year 2015

"For the purposes of this Recommendation, the term "informal economy": refers to all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements;" precisely indicates that 94% of workforce in India has no protection under labour laws. Therefore, what is the need of trade unions and what would be jobs of Labour Ministry both in Centre and in States? Yet the workers in the informal sectors are coming to trade unions in large number. For example CITU alone has enrolled 4.5 lakh Anganwadi workers and helpers.

In the rapidly changing manufacturing, services and new value chain system it is required to discuss the future of work. Two decades back the slogan "Jobless Growth" became a popular notion to the Capital-labour equation. Its anti-social nature in no time surfaced as a counterproductive situation leading initially to over production (glut) and then to massive inequity. Industry could understand that lack of purchasing power, unemployment and swelling of finance capital multiple folds to manufacturing capital generated great crisis. Even Keynesian concession like consumer spending + government spending + business investment + exports – imports was given away through Washington Consensus in face of huge wealth accumulation by assuming nearly whole market by few. That gave rise to crisis which the capitalist world is yet to overcome.

Certain measures to overcome crisis in the post Keynesian era could not provide tangible solution but deepened crisis. Even measures of MDG miserably failed. A modified MDG has yielded SDG which is again miserably

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unjust. For example, SDG's proclamation for eradication of poverty by lifting daily minimum earning of \$5 per day for 4.3 billion poor would take 200 years (World Economic Review). All these measures so far have failed to improve the conditions of the workers. For example, in USA well over half of the workforce used to earn \$767 a week in 1973 which declined so low that a full four decades later, a similar worker earns about \$664 a week. There has been rise in productivity and real wages of non-supervisory workers following the expected growth path up to the expectation of economists till seventies. But the graph of productivity was rising high thereafter and continued till 2011 whereas the real hourly compensation remained in plateau. This difference shows that the fruits of innovation throughout the economy are now accruing almost entirely to business owners and investors rather than to workers.

Need of Palliation: When the crisis of the capital was pushed down to people, first axe came on to workers by slashing benefits in the name of austerity measures, primarily cutting down the social security benefits. This has forced workers of the developed countries to come on the streets which they have not done after the world war-II. It was evident that a new palliation was to be created. Therefore the slogan of sustainability, not equity in real sense was too much required. Much earlier International Labour Organisation could invent 'false globalization' to feed the working class by outturning their agitation in favour of 'milder exploitation' by the giant corporate. The result is disastrous in the sense that the employer class had been encouraged to clamp more work with less wages and curbing most of the rights of the workers. Informal workforce generated by both the employers and Governments of the developing countries which has now marginalised the formal workers several times. Then ILO came out with recommendation 204 titled as 'Transforming Informality to Formal', an absurd slogan when informality is fundamentally created for

hyper profit generation, why would they give up? Therefore, without addressing the basic question of super profit and massive surplus value generation sustainability cannot be achieved. We would also discuss future of work and new methods of exploitation through digital monopoly and artificial intelligence.

Employment and Unemployment:

Based on its estimate of the number of people aged 15 and above, the World Bank's Report projects that to even maintain constant employment rates up to 2025, India will need to create at least 8 million jobs per year. We may also note that India's own official estimates of the net new entrants in the job market at the current juncture have been put between 10 to 12 million every year. On employment we have number of organizations working but none of them provide comprehensive data. In fact, it was due to the growing dissatisfaction with this major handicap that the policy makers embarked on the annual as well as quarterly Employment and Unemployment Surveys (EUS) data by the Labour Bureau since 2009-10, which continued till 2015-16 unfortunately, after which it was discontinued.

Last piece of data from Labour Bureau came in 2017 gave a serious employment situation. It showed that the job growth plummeted in key sectors to its lowest level in calendar years 2015 and 2016 at 1.55 lakh and 2.31 lakh respectively, in the background of nearly 1.5 Crore young Indians joining the rank of job seekers every year. In addition, job loss due to closure is another worrying factor. IT industry, once most growing sector contributing to 47% of export earning already started shredding workers. One of the largest retrenchment drives with seven biggest firms including Infosys, Wipro and Contingent, planned to retrench 56,000 engineers in 2017. A McKinsey & Company report said nearly half of the work force in the IT services firms would be irrelevant over the next three to four years, translating into possible retrenchment up to six lakh people.

in USA well over half of the workforce used to earn \$767 a week in 1973 which declined so low that a full four decades later, a similar worker earns about \$664 a week.... This difference shows that the fruits of innovation throughout the economy are now accruing almost entirely to business owners and investors rather than to workers.

All jobs are so volatile that every jobs will be informal, fragile and unsustainable. If this trend of absolute jobless growth continues, any economic theory is bound to admit of a runaway reaction leading to 'over production' and 'under consumption' that curtails value of surplus labour.

Future of Work: Flow of automation and workers redundancy is not new but in the past, this was relatively specialized and designed to disrupt one employment sector at a time with workers then switching to new emerging industry. Today virtually all industries in existence is likely to become very few labour employing as new technology has enabled powerful labour and time saving.

Keeping surplus generation as a motive force but not the societal impact and need, for research and development, new technologies are created. Potential danger is now embedded in the rise of robotics and artificial intelligence. Imagine the situation when Electric car company Tesla's new plant in Fremont, California, uses 160 highly flexible industrial robots to assemble about 400 cars per week; who would employ workers?

In addition, mega take over and mergers are also spreading throughout the globe causing redundancy of workers. Recent takeover of Flipcart by Wal-Mart will monopolise both procurement and sell creating duopoly market with Amazon. This will in no time grab the market of 4.5 crore retailers. The mounting data access of world's largest retailer will decide what to produce, prices for selling and buying and pattern of consumption. It will also change agricultural production patter as has happened in Ghana.

This upheaval is now attributed as Industry 4.0 or fourth industrial revolution entails to the range from companies using the internet for customer-tailored solutions to indirect service providers via platform workers or crowd workers or the "gig economy", to the use of a wide range of technologies from 3D printing (additive manufacturing), to drones, to advanced robotics in manufacturing – and much more. Indeed, in addition to digitalization, electronic information and communications.

Some argues that the new shift of means of production and services would open up vast scope of skill development rendering workforce to acquire more skill and

knowledge. But Martin Ford commented that "Much of the conventional advice offered to workers and to students who are preparing to workforce likely to be ineffective. The unfortunate reality is that a great many people will do everything right- at least in terms of pursuing higher education and acquiring skills-and yet will still fail to find a solid foothold in the new economy." (The Rise of the Robots).

Industry 4.0: New challenge: In this ambiance all jobs are so volatile that every jobs will be informal, fragile and unsustainable. If this trend of absolute jobless growth continues, any economic theory is bound to admit of a runaway reaction leading to 'over production' and 'under consumption' that curtails value of surplus labour. The feedback loop between productivity, rising wages and increasing consumer spending will collapse. We face soaring inequality not just in income but also in consumption. The top 5 percent of household are currently responsible for 40 percent of spending and this trend of increased concentration at the top are almost certain to continue. Role of job remains primary mechanism by which purchasing power gets in to the hands of the consumers. If this trend continues to prevail, we will face a few viable consumers to continue driving economic growth in the mass-market economic system, thereby the market collapses.

Therefore major issue today is not mere informalisation but the challenge of Industry 4.0 Standing on ground zero the workers need to counter this challenge-do or die. The holocaust of Industry 4.0 can only be countered by evils of technology in the hand of profit imploding corporate by opposing ruthless application of automation, robotics and artificial intelligence by counterpoising that whether Industry 4.0 is for society or reverse?

The cultural politics of wages

Ethnography of construction work in Kochi, India

Mythri Prasad- Aleyamma

Abstract

This paper argues for an understanding of wages as a cultural and spatial relation. By examining the wages of migrant workers and local unionised labour in Ernakulam in Kerala, South India, it demonstrates that 'wage' embodies practices and processes. The paper details the labour practices in a port building site and in spot labour markets for construction work. It examines skill as a social relation and non- payment of wages as an accumulation strategy. Wages of local workers and that of migrant workers differ not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of the processes and practices that surround them. These differences are viewed through the lens of cultural politics and spatial differentiation.

The focus of the paper is wages paid to migrant and unionized Malayali construction workers in the construction of Vallarpadam container terminal and attendant infrastructure in Kochi during 2006-2010. The worksites of the project were spread over Vallarpadam, Vyppin, Mulavukad, Moolampilli, Kothad and several smaller islands. There were four types of

recruitment in the building sites of the container terminal and the rail and road infrastructure: 1. Workers who were recruited through a big contracting company. An example is Sreebhadra associates which recruited thousands of workers for Afcons mainly for piece work that it has undertaken. 2. Workers who were attached to an individual contractor who had undertaken relatively small amounts of piece work and was working alongside. 3. Workers directly employed by the main contractor for example by Afcons. 4. Workers who had been recruited through trade unions. These diverse modes of recruitment complemented each other towards the creation of a coherent mode of spatial practice.

Saleem, a worker from Midnapur, who worked in the site to construct the power plant for the port, said that there were two hundred Bengali workers in that site and about one thousand in the different work sites in and around Vallarpadam. My fieldwork in 2009 when the work was at its peak in many of the sites affirmed these numbers. In Puthuvypu alone, there were around four hundred workers who were building the liquid natural gas

In the case of some of the workers recruited by individual subcontractors, an amount as high as Rs. 50 per day per worker was pocketed by the intermediaries including the subcontractors in 2008. By 2010, this had gone up to Rs.100 in many parts of Ernakulam district.

terminal. A large section of the workers under contractors were Bengali while the skilled and semiskilled workers like engineers, machine operators and supervisors who were directly employed by the company were drawn from different parts of India- Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala.

Sreebhadra Associates was a prominent labour contractor of Afcons. I met five workers, recruited by Sreebhadra from Naushehra Pannuan in Varia village in Tarn Taran district in Punjab. They were dalits who had converted to Christianity from Sikhism. They got Rs. 160 for working 8 hours per day (in the year 2009). They specialised in 'centering' and 'decentering', erecting structures and laying and taking off brackets for concreting the bridge.

Sukhwinder Singh, the one who spoke most of the time, told me that the rail bridge in Vallarpadam is Asia's longest bridge. They were living in a room in a line of tin sheds and cooked on their own. The tin shed was in a swampy land adjacent to the backwaters. The living quarters of the workers did not have basic amenities like beds and kitchens. They recounted: 'When the work was in Mulakupadam, the accommodation was civil. There was fan and light. Here it is full of mosquitoes and heat, in these tin sheds'. These workers were attached to a labour contractor who supplies them in different sites. These workers lived in tin sheds as opposed to workers recruited by smaller labour contractors who lived in rented houses.

Tayab Ali, a fitter from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh took piece contracts from Afcons. Tayab and his workers belong to the second category of recruitment, that is, a small contractor undertaking piecework along with his small set of workers. He got Rs. 150 for eight hours of work. I met him at a workshop in Vallarpadam, a makeshift shed covered with tarpaulin and tin. He was overseeing the work of making of iron girdles for the railway line. This company, Afcons has a head office in Bombay. The main contractor of ours, our *seth*, our main

malik, Motilal, goes to the head office. He has relations with *saablog*. He knows the *saablog* there. They call him and tell him "There is work there and take your labour there". That is how we came here. We are from different places and have come independently. Some are from Bihar and some from Orissa and some from Bengal. Nobody is from the same place. Wherever we get workers from, we take them. We come together and work together and make others work. Our work is going on in Bombay, Gujarat and Delhi and our workers are needed there. So we have sent some workers to those sites. We don't have any union. This is contractor work. This is no fixed company work. There is no company. We go from one place to another.

Kamal Mandal from Manik Chowk, Malda in West Bengal, a rig operator, was directly employed by Afcons in the building of railway. He belonged to the third category of recruitment, that is, workers directly employed by a company. He got 15,500 per month as salary per month for a twelve hour work day.

I learned this trade in Delhi. I did labour work for six months and then came into the trade of rig operation and learned it in worksites. I live in Vaduthala near the church. I used to work in the site in Mulavukadu. Food is brought here from the common kitchen in Vaduthala. Some workers live in Vaduthala and some in Vallarpadam. I found this work through my previous *malik*. I used to work in Delhi metro. The same *malik* has work going on in Delhi for Afcons. There are *saab log*, engineers, they know where all there are new projects. They tell me there is work here. They tell me "there is a new project in such and such place, you go there", and I have to go wherever they ask me to go.

There were long-term employees too of Afcons who were nevertheless not permanent employees but moved from one work site to another as and when projects came up. KGR Nair, foreman, has been working with Afcons for the past 29 years. He worked in Bombay, Delhi,

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and Gujarat. For the past 9 years he had been in Kerala. He worked in Kalamassery over bridge, Goshree bridges and Vallarpadam wherever Afcons got the contract. Nair said that the company has its own men as drivers, operators etc but recruits masons and unskilled workers through contractors. Nair has been attached to Afcons for a long time, and yet do not have steady employment or social security. I also met Malayali workers who were employed through trade unions. 81 per cent of the unskilled jobs were reserved for trade unions. Sukumaran, from Moolampilli Island, worked for Afcons and was employed through CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions). I examine in more detail the politics of the unionized workers in Vallarpadam in the paper.

Kannan who is a Malayali individual contractor for Afcons got Rs. 20 per day as commission from each worker and earned Rs.200-250 per day. In addition to this, he got Rs. 450 from Afcons for his supervision of workers. The Bengali worker who put him in touch with other workers, Sujay, got Rs.20 per day for each worker who went to work with him. The workers who were 'skilled' got Rs. 250 and who were 'unskilled' got Rs.180 in the masonry work for building the bridge. The Punjabi workers recruited by Sreebhadrar, the biggest recruiting agency that operated in Vallarpadam, for erection of girders for the rail bridge, were paid Rs.160. The Bengali workers recruited by Constell Consultant Private Limited (CCPL) got only Rs. 120.

The diversity of wage practices that existed in the worksite was astounding. Each of the four categories of recruitment that I had mentioned had a different wage practice associated with it. The migrant workers who were recruited by a company that got a labour subcontract or a piece contract were paid the least. The migrant workers who were recruited by an individual contractor were paid slightly higher wages. The workers directly employed by Afcons were paid higher too, but these

workers were mostly skilled workers like Kamal Mandal and hence their wages were not comparable to others. In all cases, the intermediaries were paid a commission per worker although the figures for the labour subcontracting companies were not available. In the case of some of the workers recruited by individual subcontractors, an amount as high as Rs. 50 per day per worker was pocketed by the intermediaries including the sub contractors in 2008. By 2010, this had gone up to Rs.100 in many parts of Ernakulam district.

The eclectic wage structure in the port building site reflected different trajectories and processes of bargaining within the labour market as much as the diverse conditions of production and work practices in the construction industry. In fact wages are registers of such diversities operational in the worksite. Some of the lowest wage rates were observed in the sites of big infrastructural projects planned and financed by the government with private participation. Workers received a wage of Rs. 120 in Vallarpadam when the going wage rate for an unskilled migrant worker was Rs.300 in Kaloor spot labour market a few kilometres away in 2010. In 2014, the metro construction sites in the city paid as low as Rs. 250 when the going wage rates were at least Rs 400 in the spot markets for migrant workers.

The recruitment to big infrastructural projects are undertaken through circuits that are regional and even national while the casual labour markets respond to specificities of local social history. A migrant worker in an infrastructural building site/mega project site is recruited through contractors that operate and circulate workers across multiple sites in the country that involve mobilisation of large number of workers. A small house building construction site, on the other hand, is deeply embedded in local relations of power where trade unions influence wages through everyday interventions in the casual labour market.

In the case of some of the workers recruited by individual subcontractors, an amount as high as Rs. 50 per day per worker was pocketed by the intermediaries including the sub contractors in 2008. By 2010, this had gone up to Rs.100 in many parts of Ernakulam district.

Interface

between oppressed caste movements and working class issues

Dr. Anand Teltumbde

**The castes are
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The contemporary divergence of the movements of oppressed caste (actually Dalits) and the movements of working class have unfortunate historical context of the ignorance of caste by the communists as superstructural issue and consequent alienation of the nascent Dalit movement under Babasaheb Ambedkar. This has been explicated in my introduction to "India and Communism" an incomplete book by Ambedkar published by Left Word last year. I reiterated my conviction that unless these two streams converged, the emancipation of the Dalits as well as working class is well nigh impossible. Today caste and class are intertwined and they can be barely isolated. The caste, moreover, are not the traditional caste but are replanted in the modernist soil of Indian constitution and institutions. The counterintuitive rise in caste consciousness in the era of neoliberalism across all communities is largely due to this fact. It also exposes the fundamental divisive characteristic of caste. It follows that caste are incapable of uniting people for any radical struggle and hence needs to be transcended by some other basis.

However, because of the caste-blind legacy of the class politics, which is unduly amplified by the vested interests, castes are morphed into the basis of identity politics. Class remains as the only viable way to unite

all oppressed people against the oppression. This, however, is not by ignoring the reality of caste but by determinedly fighting against them as an integral part of the class struggle. Before this realization could dawn on these movements, the advent of neoliberalism and the rise of hindutva have further disoriented them and accelerated them on divergence path. The task is arduous but the culminating crisis provides a glimmer of hope that they might realize this historical necessity.

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the
divide**

Class exploitation

Informal/ unorganised/ migrant workers, organised/ permanent workers and people's struggle

Dr. Gail Omtvedt and Dr. Bharat Patankar

So-called unorganised or migrant, informal workers form more than 95 percent of the total work force in India. These workers include porters or people who do the job of physically lifting and carrying the weight, pushing the weight on cart, rag pickers, sugarcane cutters, agricultural labourers, contract labourers in various factories etc. Though there are some kind of laws related to their rights they are far away from giving them a justice, even the wage labourers deserve. They are constantly under the threat of getting removed even from this uncertain and low-paid positions. Mostly they get employed through the labour contractors and indebted to them.

Ninety-nine percent of these workers come from ex-untouchable castes and toiling farming castes getting forced to go to the cities for livelihood. The law of the caste system applies to them on the basis of "graded inequality" and "division of labourers". Most labour intensive and 'dirty' jobs go to ex-untouchables (manual scavenging, sweeping etc.). And rest of manual work jobs go to partial ex-untouchables. No Brahmin or such caste people are found in these categories. Agricultural labourers are most ignored and unorganised. Because of the contradiction between toiling farmers and labourers, unity of agricultural labourers and poor and middle farmers becomes difficult to achieve. People struggling against the caste oppression today have very weak movement and they struggle whenever there is some extreme incident has occurred. There is no sustained and basic movement of caste annihilation in the country. Even the analysis of contemporary caste exploitation is almost absent at the theoretical level, leave aside at practical programmatic level.

Though the percentage of the so-called organised workers is minuscule, they are a crucial section of the work force which can have incisive impact on the capitalist policies and they can intervene at the level of state and central government policy making. But their organisations are self centred, limited to their establishment and they have contradictory relationship with the contract workers working for their own establishments. The gap between the wages of this category of workers and any section of the unorganised workers is tremendous. On this background it becomes a difficult task to find out the interface between these sections. Contradictions between these sections and between all these sections and the movement against caste exploitation are also very difficult to solve. Only strategy which can give a vision of alternative society which liberates all these sections from various forms of exploitations can bring them together and start the process of resolving contradictions between them.

But there is one more obstacle in this process related to the resolution of the contradiction given rise to by the women's oppression and exploitation amongst all these sections. It may belong to the work place or at home. That requires vision of alternative society requiring the aspects of women's liberation along with the elimination of caste and class exploitation. Vision of the alternative society would mean the vision of the alternative production processes, mode of production the approach of ecologically balanced decentralised socio-economic structure and hence the totality of the relations of production along with values and culture.

This vision only can give the long-term and immediate practical program for which all these sections will come together by developing processes which will resolve the contradictions between them.

Constitution, State and the Protection of Workers Rights

Broad Coalition of Labour and Social Movements is the Only Hope

Ashok Khandelwal

India has a labour force of about 500 millions today. Majority of which, almost to the tune of about 450 millions are unprotected irrespective of the fact whether they are part of organised or unorganised sector of economy and/or employed or self-employed (Table 1). The fact that the majority of our workers stand deprived of job/work security, living wage/regular adequate income, social security, maternity benefits, sickness benefits, leaves on the one hand and work on average for 12 hours, the working conditions are inhumane, no facility even of drinking water, sanitation etc. at the work places on the other is a living testimony to this. As a consequence we have dubious distinction of reporting highest number of child labour, we continue to lag behind in human development index, our democracy index is lower than what it was at the time of emergency in 1975, the inequality is increasing and is at all time high.

We as a nation are confronted with this shaming reality after 70 years of

independence and claim of good growth in last thirty years, impressive growth of last two decades and the current claim of growing at the highest rate of growth in the world and oft repeated claim of 'sabka saath and sabka vikaas'. Why so? And what is the way out? We briefly take up these two questions in the following sections II and III respectively.

II State fails to ensure constitutional rights to people and in its duties towards public policies

The core of the fundamental rights to live without discrimination and with equality and dignity for majority of the workers remains a pipe dream till date. Even the freedom of speech is under attack time and again and formation of unions is becoming increasingly difficult leading to weakening the workers power. The collective voice of the working people is perhaps at the lowest level after independence. Today, even doing a profession of one's choice appears to be a challenge. India as a nation is confronted with several challenges towards realization of

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fundamental rights of its citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

The policies and actions of State stand diametrically opposite to the provisions in the Part IV of the Constitution of India under heading "Directive Principles of State Policy". The State has failed to 'secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people'; it has not been able to direct its policies to distribute 'ownership and control of material resources of the community' 'to subserve the common good'; have miserably failed to secure 'right to work'; 'unemployment, old-age, sickness assistance'; 'just and humane conditions of work' and adequate universal 'maternity benefit'; 'living wage' to all workers and 'workers participation in management'; 'raise level of nutrition and the standard of living'.

Withering of welfare State?

The welfare aspects of the state actions seem to be receding in oblivion. For the State meaning of development seems to have changed drastically leading to ever increasing inequality with attendant ramifications for the majority of the population comprising of economically poor, socially backward, educationally deprived and with highly inadequate access to quality regular need based health facilities. The State rather than intervening for betterment of the workers increasingly taking measures that promote and perpetuate informality in employment.

The development should have led to increase in the number of workers enjoying protection. But the reality is dismal as the sectors like highly organised factories and the government sector is creating employment which is unprotected. The latest ASI data for the year 2015-16 show that out of total about 11.2 million workers in registered industries filing returns almost 36 percent of workers are contract workers. This share was only about 13 percent in 1993-94 and much less during 1980s. The share of profits in Gross Value Added on the other hand spurted sharply from 15.7 percent in 1980-81 to 44.1 in 2015-16 at the cost of the share of wage which declined from 28.5 to about 12 percent. Even

the most of the gains of productivity has been cornered by the rich and powerful owners as profit (See Table 2).

Rising income inequality is the reality of development

If India has distinction of having the richest man in Asia, several billionaires, best technology talent, it also has the dubious distinction of highest number of child labour, highest number of farmer's suicides, highest level of informal workers, low level of technical man-power and highest number of poor in the world and so on. The outcome of development is best reflected in the growing inequality in India as is captured by the latest world inequality report (See Table 3). The share of top one percent increased from six percent in 1983 to 22 % in 2014 whereas the share of bottom 50 percent declined from 24 to 12 percent during this period. In 2014 top 10 percent cornered 56 percent of total income leaving 44 percent for rest 90 percent.

Persistent caste-social-economic hierarchies

The 70 years of development broadly defies the spirit of the Constitution of India people gave themselves which is amply reflected in the preamble. We continue to lag far behind in ensuring social and economic equality, freedom and fraternity. The entire population comprising of the most poor and deprived sections of workers also belong to the educationally deprived and socially lowest in the caste hierarchy. The overwhelming majority of the migrant workers, the focus of the present consultation, belong to the lowest social groups SC and ST. The privileged high paid good jobs are cornered by a small section of high caste groups, reports a recent study on employment status of India (IHD)

The social equity movements do no account for workers rights

There are strong social movements against social discrimination. However they have rarely taken into account the issues related to rights of the workers despite the fact that the majority of the workers are also from the groups who are socially

We continue to lag far behind in ensuring social and economic equality, freedom and fraternity. The entire population comprising of the most poor and deprived sections of workers also belong to the educationally deprived and socially lowest in the caste hierarchy.

Dr Ambedkar began with the Indian Labour Party in 1936 to realise "State sponsored industrialisation; strong labour laws to protect factory workers and to provide remunerative wages, to fix maximum hours of work, leave with pay and a sanitary dwelling at reasonable amount...

discriminated. The fact is that unless there is economic empowerment social discrimination would continue. For the success of the social parity movements it is essential the rights of the workers are realised. .

Low organisability with strong barriers and least outside support

For protection of rights of workers, the most powerful instrument is workers collective action. The workers in question are confronted with several obstacles in organising effectively. In the first place there are several structural issues like recruitment through contractors, advances, scattered work places, lack of local support at work places, irregular work, long work hours, lack of awareness about rights, etc. Moreover there is total lack of support from the existing labour unions to the majority of the workers. The hiatus between organised sector workers and migrant workers in unorganised sector is well known.

III Way Forward

Labour is an essential condition of human existence. We cannot think of life without labour. Think about the contribution of a worker - of an agricultural worker, a construction worker, a brick maker, a factory worker, a head loader, a service provider, a domestic worker, a salt pane worker, a sugarcane cutter and so on. Among all these are the migrant workers. The fact of life is that we cannot survive even for a day without the products of labour. No wonder that Ambedkar began with the Indian Labour Party in 1936 to realise "State sponsored industrialisation; strong labour laws to protect factory workers and to provide remunerative wages, to fix maximum hours of work, leave with pay and a sanitary dwelling at reasonable amount; abolition of the Jagirdari system (land reforms); extensive programme for the improvement of educational facility in technical institutes; inclusion of Dalits in the lucrative jobs in industries". All these objectives are equally relevant and important today as mass of workers continue to be deprived of the same even today .

The outcome of constitution depends

on people and the political parties

Despite the importance of the labour and clear provisions in the Constitution we find labour denied their rights. The reason can be located in what the architect of Constitution B.R. Ambedkar stated on 25th November 1949, on the eve of promulgation of Constitution of India, in his final address to Constituent Assembly. To quote,

"Because I feel, however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. The working of a Constitution does not depend wholly upon the nature of the Constitution. The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depends are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics." (Emphasis added).

Thus if Constitutional rights are to be ensured both people and the political parties will have to work for that. The people of India believed in political parties and they did what they wanted to do. The onus now is on the people of India, the workers of India. Unless the workers will rise united, the rights will remain confined to the pages of Constitution.

Social and economic inequality is a threat to democracy

Ambedkar had also stated in the same speech that the Constitution has only given us the political equality on 26th of January 1950 but social and economic inequality will continue which we cannot deny for long but at the cost of political democracy. So we need to rise in unison to ensure rights of the workers and save our democracy. Ambedkar said:

"On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in

Table :1: Distribution of Workforce by Nature of Employment as Percent of Total Workforce(number of workers in millions)

	Informal	Formal	Total	
1. Own Account Workers-self employed	32.3(152.8)	0.5 (2.4)	32.8(155.2)	
1a. Family Workers-unpaid workers	17.9(84.7)	0.1(0.47)	18.0(85.2)	
2. Employees/paid workers	40.4(191.1)	7.4 (35)	47.8(226.1)	
2.1. Out of total employees-casual workers	-	-	29.9(141.4)	That is 62.55 (88.4) percent of total wage/employee are casual workers Only part of these regular workers enjoy job-security, social security and other benefits.
2.2. Out of total employees Regular wage-worker/employee	-	-	17.9(84.7)	
Employers	1.3(6.1)	0.1(0.47)	1.4(6.6)	
Total	91.9(434.7)	8.1(38.3)	100(473)	

Notes: In brackets are numbers of workers in millions

D: Reality of Employment

Share of contract labour in organized sector increased from 15.6 percent in 1990s to 34.7 in 2011-12 and 35.55 in 2015-16 (As per latest ASI data).

79% Non-agriculture wage workers had no written contracts

76.2 percent workers did not have any social security

17.9% workers were regular wage or salary workers

Total child labour more than one crores and 4.27 crore children were out of school (2011)

Source: Indian Labour Market Update, ILO Country Office for India, July 2017

Table: 2A : Share of wages and profit in Gross Value Added

Year	Share of Wages	Share of Profits
1980-81	28.5	15.7
1990-91	21.4	18.5
2000-01	15.5	20.0
2012-13	11.0	44.1

2B: Growth of labour productivity and real average earnings per employee

Period	Growth in labour productivity	Growth of real earnings per employee
1980-81 to 1990-91	7.5	3.5
1990-91 to 2000-01	5.1	1.0
2000-01 to 2012-13	5.7	2.4
1980-81 to 2012-13	6.1	2.3

Source: Source: Declining Wage Share in India's organized Manufacturing Sector: Trends, Patterns and Determinants by Vinoy Abraham and S.K. Sasikumar, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, December 2017.

Table: 3 : Showing Distribution of Income of a particular year among Different set of Population					
YEAR	0.01 % OF POPULA- TION	0.1% OF POP- ULTION	TOP 1% POPULA- TION	TOP 10%	BOTTOM 50%
1983	0.5	2	6	30	24
1990	-	-	-	34	22
2000	-	-	15	40	20
2014	5	10	23	56	12
SITUATION BE- FORE 1983	After independence income inequality declined. The share of top one percent people was 21 per- cent before WW II which declined to 10-12% during 1950s and 1960s and further to six percent by 1983. This happened due to Progressive Taxation; Equal access to education and equal paying jobs; Global financial register of financial ownership.,				
Source: World Economic Report 2018, World Inequality Lab, Paris School of Economics by Thomas Picketty, Facundo Alverdo, Lucas Chennel, Emmnuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman					

social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which is Assembly has to laboriously built up.”

Liberty, equality and fraternity form a union of trinity

Ambedkar unambiguously stated that the question of social and economic equality which he termed as social democracy is at the base of political democracy. And social and political democracy is a prerequisite for liberty and fraternity. They all are the way of life and constitute principles of life. To Quote,

The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social

democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many.

Conclusion

I am conscious of the fact that there is nothing new I have talked about. It is a small effort to recount the reality in order to arrive at a common understanding and underline the need for concerted collective action. This is the need of the hour. To realize the dream of a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity there is no alternative but joint action. We need to resolve for a coordinated joint action of all the workers, social movements and all other concerned citizenry.

True homage to Ambedkar will only be in working tirelessly for social and economic equality which go hand in hand and is at the base of democracy which in turn can only ensure liberty and fraternity in real sense of the term.

Odisha brick kiln workers movement around Hyderabad

Role of organized left

Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action

Majority of the workers in brick kilns of South India are seasonal migrant workers from Western Odisha. The workers are trafficked through a network of contractors. While brick kiln workers all over India work under bondage conditions, the condition of Odisha brick kiln workers can easily be described as the worst of the lot. There is no concept of wages. The workers take an advance and then have to work through the season when they are paid only food expenses. There is no proper settlement at the end as is the case in other parts of the country. The employers try to prolong the season and extract maximum work from workers. The workers are woken up at 3 AM in the morning and forced to start working. The work conditions have been the subject of numerous reports in print and visual media. The plight is illustrated by the incident in the year 2013 when hands of two workers were chopped off by the traffickers when the workers tried to avoid going to work in brick kilns.

Civil society organizations have been working with this migration stream for more than a decade. The engagement comprised of (i) education interventions that sought to ensure schooling for children of brick kiln workers in both source and destination areas (ii) release of workers under the Bonded

Labour Act in cases of extreme exploitation and violence. In the year 2011, an activist group with extensive experience in organizing brick kiln workers in Gujarat stated work with brick kiln workers around Hyderabad. The group had prior experience with the workers in its source area of Western Odisha. The group set up base in Dundigal village in Qutbullapur mandal, Ranga Reddy district, the largest hub of brick kilns with around 100 inta bhattis and almost 10,000 Odisha migrant workers in nearby areas.

Telengana has been a historical stronghold of left. All the major left groupings are present in Hyderabad. The Dundigal village has significant CPM presence. A major CITU leader, who was also a dora (landed gentry), lived in the village. The party has a flag post along with Congress and TDP at the village square. The organisers met the CITU leader who promised support to workers' movement. However, the local CITU unit was led by an inta bhatti owner, who was naturally not well disposed towards brick kiln workers' movement. At the city level, a Solidarity Committee was formed under the leadership of a human rights group. It had representation from NGOs, academicians, and sections of left. Among the left, Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) played a lead role. An IFTU functionary was nominated as the Working President of the proposed union of brick kiln workers.

The modus operandi of organizational work in brick kilns revolves around stoppage of work in the middle of the season to demand fixation of wages for the season. While this was the first attempt to mobilize workers, the workers responded very well to

against Odisha workers from the dais itself saying that they take advance and then run away.

The group has continued to be active in the area. Subsequently many more meetings have been organized in the area. The wages have shown an upward swing. A main issue that the group has faced is of finding local support base in the rural areas where inta bhattis are located. The organized left – both CPM and IFTU – have strong local presence and could have provided this local support, but have not done so. The national level CITU leader who lives in the village has not attended a single meeting where he has been invited. Mention has been made of the fact that the local CITU head is an inta bhatti owner and openly castigates Odisha brick kiln workers. Another fact that has sociological significance is that most of the inta bhatti owners in Telengana are Kammas from coastal Andhra, who also happen to be strongly represented in CPM. The organizers also met top CITU leadership to seek support, but that did not prove useful.

IFTU's role has been equally perplexing. While it has been offered leadership role in the proposed Union and its representative was appointed the Working President designate in a proposed Union of brick kiln workers. He is totally opposed to release of workers under the Bonded Labour Act. In fact, this became a flash point within the Solidarity Committee also where prominent members opposed the release of workers on the ground that it would ruin the owners. The local IFTU representative is on good terms with the kiln owners.

the demand. There was a big meeting on 18th March 2012 following which worker stopped working. However, by the evening, the inta bhatti owners from all over the district gathered in large number at the local police station. The organizers were called to the police station and told in no uncertain terms to leave the area immediately. The group had to shut up office in Dundigal and team members evacuated with police escort. The workers stopped work the next day as well. However, there was no leadership and the strike was over.

The group then organized a meeting on May 1 in collaboration with CITU. This meeting was well attended by CITU cadre. It was actually held like a CITU meeting where Odisha brick kiln workers participated. The national level local CITU leader also came for the meeting. However, the village CITU head who is an inta Bhatti owner started talking



Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action

PrayasCentre for Labour Research and Action (PCLRA) promotes workers' rights in the vast informal sector economy of India. It undertakes research to document work conditions in the informal sector followed by policy advocacy with the state so that workers receive their due entitlements. The Centre has done pioneering work in documenting the seasonal migration streams that feed labour to labour intensive industries like agriculture, brick kilns, and construction. Its work has facilitated development of an alternative paradigm of organizing workers that factors in the constant movement of workers, the critical role of middlemen, the nature of production process, and the socio-economic profile of workers.

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is a German-based foundation working in South Asia and other parts of the world on the subjects of critical social analysis and civic education. It promotes a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic social order, and aims to present members of society and decision-makers with alternative approaches to such an order. Research organisations, groups working for social emancipation, and social activists are supported in their initiatives to develop models that have the potential to deliver social and economic justice.

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