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Aspects of Work and Life in India  
In the Early Part of the  
Twenty First Century**

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# **Primitive Accumulation and Some Aspects of Work and Life in India In the Early Part of the Twenty First Century**

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## **Is Primitive Labour a Thing of Past?**

Let me begin with a caution from the late Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu wrote while concluding his massive exercise on the social structure of habits and tastes,

All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice. The network of oppositions between...is the matrix of all the common places which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order...

The seemingly most formal oppositions within this social mythology always derive their ideological strength from the fact that they refer back, more or less discreetly, to the most fundamental oppositions within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated, which is inscribed in the division of labour, and the opposition, rooted in the division of the labour of domination, between two principles of domination, two powers, dominant and dominated, temporal and spiritual, material and intellectual etc. It follows that the map of social space previously put forward can also be read as a strict table of the historically constituted and acquired categories which organize the idea of the social world in the minds of all the subjects belonging to that world and shaped by it. The same classificatory schemes (and the oppositions in which they are expressed) can function, by being specified, in fields organized around polar positions, whether in the field of the dominant class, organized around an opposition homologous to the opposition constituting the field of the social classes, or in the field of cultural production, which is itself organized around oppositions which reproduce the structure of the dominant class and are homologous to it...So the fundamental opposition constantly supports second, third or nth rank oppositions (those which underlie the 'purest' ethical or aesthetic judgements, with their high or low sentiments, their facile or difficult notions of beauty, their light or heavy styles etc.), while euphemizing itself to the point of misrecognizability.<sup>1</sup>

Today, in the context of globalization and amassment of new riches, there is once again the argument that work has transformed in many areas, and work is directly producing wealth to the worker. We can also listen to the slowly emerging,

half sure voices of economists that after all division of labour is not so much of a reality, that it is giving way to discrete forms of labour – labour that transgresses boundaries of different forms, regimes, structures, etc. In this new euphoria, whose source can be perhaps traced to a kind of repressed anxiety about the persistence of “low” and “crude” forms of labour and a desire to escape this world of vulgar labour, we can witness the appearance of an anthropological economics, which deduces economic truths from a limited anthropological, particularly ethnographic work. The high (pure economic) tales and the low (limited ethnographic research) tales of economics have met each other today – the meeting point is, how to explain away labour at this time, in the early years of this new century? Or, to put more accurately, how is work to be represented today?

Bourdieu in fact ended the book with these words that “goods are converted into distinctive signs, which may be signs of distinction but also of vulgarity, as soon as they are perceived relationally, to see that the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality. A class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*...The individual or collective classification struggles aimed at transforming the categories of perception and appreciation of the social world and, through this, the social world itself, are indeed a forgotten dimension of the class struggle...”<sup>2</sup> Therefore we need not be astonished that the debate over how to perceive work has renewed today, reminding us of the situation of hundred and fifty to two hundred years back when new forms of production and work raised the same kind of commotion in human thinking. One more sign that the world is now entering a period of turbulence.

We are of course discussing this amidst the shouts going on all around us, that the space of gainful manual work is shrinking, almost to the point of vanishing; that everywhere we find only white collar labour and digitalised work, and therefore it is now pointless to keep on talking of quality of work, its degradation, etc. And precisely when we hear that the world of labour is not relevant any more, we hear at that same time the talk of abolishing labour protection laws because these laws prevent production, they are stumbling blocks to progress, and union power needs to be curbed severely. On the other hand trade union acts have suddenly become bones of contention. The trade union verification carried out by the Ministry of Labour tells that trade union membership has increased significantly. Trade unions have not depoliticised.<sup>3</sup> Organised trade unions and the new forms of labour organisations around unorganised labour – both are more and more representing the unorganised workers. With labour market flexibilisation, the nature of bargaining is also changing. More than ever, suddenly taken direct actions by workers are combining today with old style bargaining. All these show that the preponderant form of work has deep influence over the politics of work also now.

This is not an essay on political economy, also not an essay on some section of the labouring people in India. It is only a brief commentary on the persistence of what is called as degraded labour, unorganised labour, un-clarified labour process, whose existence defeats the loud claims of globalisation, reforms, filtered growth, all round development of society, wealth of nations, etc. Hopefully, at the end of this purely ordinary description of some forms of work in India we shall be able to reflect

on the ongoing debates on labour and accumulation today. We shall be also able to see the broader significance of the existence of this kind of labour in terms of accumulation, capital's logic, and the social separations or divisions (of work and property, labour and wealth, producer and the product, etc.), and therefore relations, which capital as an embodiment of accumulation represents. In this way we shall be able to find an answer to the question: Whither India in this early part of the twenty first century? How can we characterise work and life – at least one part of it – from the point of labour? When shall we realise that the eternal fate of labour is to keep on struggling to come out of the representations forced on it by the regime of capital?

### **Who are India's Most of the Workers Today?**

Who are India's workers today? At the close of the last century little more than 90 per cent workers was in the unorganised sector. This percentage increased still more – by another one per cent in the next five years. Though expectedly agricultural labour accounted for a large proportion of this workforce, non-agricultural labour accounted for about 40 per cent. Of this about 38 per cent of this labour is in the formal sector. In other words we have a discernible increase in formal sector employment (about 16 per cent) – but this employment remain informal, that is bound by utterly temporary contract or casual arrangements, and lacking in any social security provisions for the workers. But this nesting of the informal within the formal is not the only feature of work and employment today; the percentage of wage labour among various forms of labour also is noticeable. Wageworkers in the unorganised sector account for about 36 per cent of the total workforce there; and the percentages in the agricultural and non-agricultural fields are roughly the same (basically one-third). This figure may conceal the reality to some extent, as many domestic “self-employed” workers may be tied to outsourcing networks of large formalised industries in textiles, leather products, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Casual wage labourers in both rural and urban sectors occupy the bottom of income distribution. Dependent on wage earnings, 16 per cent of the wageworkers are landless and 64 per cent have sub-marginal landholdings, in other words holdings of no more than half hectare. When the stipulated national minimum wage in 2004-5 was Rs. 66, in agriculture the average daily earning was Rs. 42.48 (for male Rs. 47.48 and for female Rs. 33.15), in manufacturing 57.59, and in case of all casual workers it was Rs. 48.49 – thus the percentage deficit of the national minimum wage level being respectively 90.46, 71.37, and 83.72.<sup>5</sup> By all means this is a range of staggering deficit indicating the massive extent the actual daily earnings fell behind the official expectation and the line. If one calculates the inflation, the story is grimmer.

Low wage level combined in this period with poor working conditions reinforced by marked heterogeneity of labour. Units with market power and modern technology has absorbed the pressure of minimum wage, while small, less productive enterprises have either gone out of the market scenario, or have gone up in the scale of informal conditions. The *2007 Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector* (hereafter *RUS*) in this context refers to the

loss of limbs and amputation, perishing in fire, and absence of any official compensation for work related injuries, occupational diseases, poor housing and lack of sanitation, and long hours of work and the duration of workday.<sup>6</sup> In one instance (in beedi workers) only 3 percent of the workers had any housing facility given to them. In fish processing industry, employing women in large numbers, women have lived in barrack like makeshift housing, and being far away from their own community they have remained regularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

In this situation has the government's mandatory promise of providing 100 days' work and wage under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) worked? Simply, it has not worked at all. In 2006-7 in terms of employment provided, that is number of person-days per household, some states like West Bengal (14.3 per cent), Meghalaya (2.5), Mizoram (15.4), Kerala (20.7), Tamil Nadu (26.7), and Uttar Pradesh (31.9) fared worst (Table 1). While considering this Table (see below), which gives us the full picture, we have to keep in mind the fact mentioned earlier, namely that even in these cases the minimum wage norm may not have been observed. In case of agriculture the average wage level fell 90.46 per cent below the national minimum wage of Rs. 66; in manufacturing it has been 71.37 per cent below the national minimum, in construction it has been 61.91 per cent below the minimum, and all casual workers taken together, the fall from the national minimum wage is of the tune of 83.72 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Workers belonging to socially backward and minority communities within the unorganised sector are more vulnerable. The poverty ratio of Muslim OBC workers is close to that of the Hindu OBC workers. Poverty ratio among Hindu scheduled castes was 26.2 per cent in 2004-05, and among Muslim OBCs the ratio was 21.5 per cent. Our analysis of the national level data clearly brings out the fact that the absence of any meaningful educational endowment determines adversely the quality of employment and the ability to secure reasonable wages.<sup>9</sup> In any case we have to remember that even now the Minimum Wages Act (1948) is the only available statutory legislation to ensure minimum wages of agricultural workers. The National Commission for Rural Labour (NCRL) had proposed Rs. 49 as the minimum wage for rural labour. At the turn of the last century, as the Rural Labour Enquiry (1999-2000) showed men got Rs. 41 (combining cash and kind) as the daily average earning; women got Rs. 29, and children Rs. 25.

**Table 1: Wage Rates in Rural India, NREGA Wage Rates & Number of Person Days**

Sl. No.	States	Average Daily Wages Rates in Agricultural Occupations in Rural India, 2004-05 (Rs)		NREGA Wages Rates (Rs)	Employment Provided Number of Person days per Household	
		Men	Women		2006-07	2007-08
1.	Andhra Pradesh	36.61	27.83	80.00	31.4	27.8
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	-	-	66.00	26.8	0
3.	Assam	30.23	15.52	66.00	72.3	23.5
4.	Bihar	45.06	26.24	77.00	35.3	18.3
5.	Gujarat	55.48	30.14	50.000	44.4	31.6

6.	Haryana	57.83	23.35	99.21	47.5	35.7
7.	Himachal Pradesh	12.95	-	75.00	47.1	25.3
8.	Jammu & Kashmir	31.82	-	70.00	26.6	20.2
9.	Karnataka	49.00	27.85	74.00	40.7	41.20
10.	Kerala	55.89	27.99	125.00	20.7	21
11.	Madhya Pradesh	40.61	26.54	67.00	68.8	42.6
12.	Maharashtra	52.97	31.90	69.00	41.2	55.9
13.	Manipur	38.66	19.79	81.40	100	11
14.	Meghalaya	21.44	9.77	70.00	2.5	33.6
15.	Mizoram	-	-	91.00	15.4	41.9
16.	Nagaland	-	-	100.00	46.9	4.9
17.	Orissa	44.86	14.02	70.00	57.3	34.9
18.	Punjab	32.01	-	94.48	49.2	41.7
19.	Rajasthan	44.16	9.45	73.00	84.9	52.5
20.	Sikkim	-	-	85.00	58.9	6.4
21.	Tamil Nadu	60.79	31.23	80.00	26.7	61.1
22.	Tripura	38.18	0	60.00	67.4	21.4
23.	Uttar Pradesh	47.79	26.09	100.00	31.9	14.9
24.	West Bengal	44.58	32.35	70.00	14.3	11.8
25.	Chhattisgarh	-	-	66.70	55.7	44.6
26.	Jharkhand	-	-	76.68	37.3	32.6
27.	Uttarakhand	-	-	73.00	30.2	27.4
	All India	61.23	44.59			

Source: Prepared by Santosh Merhotra, Planning Commission of India, cited in D. Bandopadhyay, "Mayhem at Dinhat", The Statesman, 14 February 2008, p. 7

The same Rural Labour Enquiry also found out that employment days for agricultural labourers were still characterised by a great degree of uncertainty due to weather and seasonality of associated manual operations, such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc. But there was a secular decline in the number of wage-days for agricultural labourers – from 245 in 1993-94 to 235 in 1999-2000, and in 2004-05 to 227. Health hazards and occupational safety issues have remained acute. Pesticide sprayers, mixers, loaders, thrashers, sugarcane crushers, chaff cutters are exposed to violent accidents. They account for 70 per cent of all farm accidents.<sup>10</sup> The NCRL report suggests a high degree of distress migration also. It tells of the propensity of the agricultural labourers and poor peasants to move to distant areas in search of work, but they go without any substantive bargaining power. The 1991 census (1991 Census Migration, Table D2) had already indicated that about 44 per cent of the agricultural labourers migrate seasonally, while the percentage among the farmers (mostly poor peasants) is about 37 per cent. Women form majority of the agricultural labour migrants, while male migrants are mostly non-agricultural workers. The *RUS* tells us of the hazards of travel, deplorable living conditions, lower wages, irregular payment, long hours of work, alien work conditions, absence of occupational health and safety provisions, and vulnerability to the recruiting agents.<sup>11</sup> It is worth recalling in the context Dharma Kumar's comment that the fortunes of agricultural labourers are a good index of changes in the entire agrarian economy; movement in the number

of agricultural labourers and in their wages reflect the growth of population, the extension of cultivation, the rate of industrialisation, and the effects of integration in the world economy. But it is equally worth noting following the studies that have been done till date that except in few parts of the country, the conditions of the agricultural labourers have remained depressed, and the picture is dismal. One expert has concluded, that the condition even of the body has remained “depressingly constant”.<sup>12</sup>

Can we make any guess about the magnitude of the migration of the village poor? One study suggested the figure to be about half a million in peak season from the rice belt of one state alone, West Bengal. The NCRL apprehends that the conditions are similar to those of bonded labour. Tables 2 and 3 tell us the current situation. Debt bondage is the most prevalent form of bondage. Debt bondage is often the ground of unfavourable wage contract, adverse control of labour and labour conditions, and law makes little sense in this case in terms of ensuring freedom and mobility.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2: Number of Bonded Labour Identified, Released and Rehabilitated by the Centrally Sponsored Scheme during 2005-2006**

States	Identified and Released up to 31-3-05	Rehabilitated Up to 31-3-05	Central Assistance Provided in Rs. Lakh Up to 31-3-05
Andhra Pradesh	37,988	31,534	850
Bihar	13,651	12,974	389.28
Karnataka	63,437	57,185	1578.18
Madhya Pradesh	13,087	12,200	163.26
Orissa	50,029	46,901	903.34
Rajasthan	7,488	6,331	72.42
Tamil Nadu	65,573	65,573	1661.94
Maharashtra	1,398	1,325	9.55
Uttar Pradesh	28,236	28,236	577.07
Kerala	823	710	15.56
Haryana	551	49	0.93
Gujarat	64	64	1.01
Arunachal Pradesh	3526	2,992	568.48
Chhattisgarh	124	124	12.4
Punjab	69	69	6.9
Uttaranchal	5	5	0.5
Jharkhand	196	196	19.6
West Bengal	5	5	0.5
Total	2,86,245	2,66,283	6830.42

Source: Annual Report - 2004-2005, Ministry of Labour; Government of India

**Table 3: Incidence of Bonded Labour Reported**

Year	Incidence of Bonded Labour Reported (Number)	Year	Incidence of Bonded Labour Reported (Number)
1999-98	6000	2002-03	2198
1998-99	5960	2003-04	2465
1999-00	8195	2004-05	866
2000-01	5256	2005-06	304
2001-02	3929		

Source: Annual Report - 2004-2005, Ministry of Labour; Government of India

Added to that there is a growing demand for child labour in the wake of liberalisation, and an overwhelming percentage of India's 9 million child labourers work in agriculture. Here too the relevant Act, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) is not much effective. Table 4 is eloquent on this.

**Table 4: States with High Incidence of Child Labour and Out-of-School Children [Labour Pool] [5-14 Years] [Percentage] 2004-2005**

State	Male	Female	Total
	<b>Child Labour</b>		
Andhra Pradesh	6.1	7.1	6.6
Orissa	5.3	4.6	5.0
Rajasthan	3.8	5.9	4.8
Meghalaya	5.8	3.3	4.6
Karnataka	4.3	4.8	4.6
Chhattisgarh	3.6	5.5	4.5
Uttar Pradesh	4.7	3.4	4.1
West Bengal •	4.3	3.2	3.7
Maharashtra	3.2	3.7	3.5
All India	3.5	3.3	3.4
	<b>Out-of-School Children</b>		
Bihar	29.9	40.1	34.4
Jharkhand	20.0	27.4	23.4
Uttar Pradesh	20.3	25.7	22.8
Rajasthan	15.6	29.2	22.2
Arunachal Pradesh	19.7	24.1	21.7
Madhya Pradesh	17.3	26.4	21.5
Orissa	17.3	23.7	20.4
Chhattisgarh	14.0	23.0	18.6
All India	15.4	20.8	17.9

Source: NSS 61<sup>st</sup> Round 2004-2005, Employment Unemployment Survey Computed.

- On 12 June 2008, the Secretary, Department of Industries, West Bengal Government admitted that in West Bengal the number of child labour stands at 8 lakhs, mostly employed in tea stalls, tanneries, small leather goods factories, brick fields and kilns, shrimp cleaning units, garbage clearance work, and self employed jobs. – *The Statesman*, 13 June 2008

Finally where do women stand in this scenario? We of course know the issues in conceptualising women's work – the double burden of work, the invisibility of women's work in the current patriarchal exercise of mapping of work, conditions of women's work, and finally the discrimination the work entails. The following table (Table 5) gives us the relevant fundamental characteristics of women workers.

**Table 5: Select Characteristics of Women Workers 2004-2005**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Rural Female</b>	<b>Rural Female SCs/STs</b>
Total Workers (Usual principal and subsidiary status / in million)	309.4	148.0	124.0	44.9
Labour Force Participation Rate	56.0	39.0	33.3	37.9
Work Force Participation Rate	54.7	28.3	32.7	37.5
Percentage of Regular Workers in Total Workforce	18.2	8.9	3.7	3.1
Percentage of Self-employed in Total Workforce	54.2	61.1	63.7	51.1
Percentage of Casual Labour in Total Workforce	27.5	30.0	32.6	45.8
Percentage of Unorganised Workers in Total Workforce	90.7	95.9	98.0	98.6
Percentage of Unorganised Sector Workers in Total Workforce	84.0	91.3	94.5	95.0
Percentage of Workers in Agriculture & Allied Activities	48.9	72.8	83.34	86.2
Percentage of Out of School Children in Relevant Age Group (5-14 years)	15.5	20.7	23.5	28.5
Mean Years of Schooling (all workers)	5.4	2.5	1.9	1.2
Mean Years of Schooling (Unorganised Non-agr. Workers)	6.1	3.7	2.9	2.0
Mean Years of Schooling (Rural Unorganised Agr. Workers)	3.7	NA	1.6	1.1
Percentage of All Workers Up to Primary Education (including Illiterates)	55.6	80.7	85.0	90.7
Percentage of Unorganised Non-agr. Workers Up to Primary Education (including Illiterates)	49.2	70.8	77.1	84.7
Percentage of Unorganised Agricultural Workers Up to Primary Education (including Illiterates)	68.8	87.8	88.0	92.2
Percentage of Workers with only Subsidiary Work	1.9	24.9	26.1	23.5
Wage Rate of Rural Agricultural Labourers (Rs. per manday)	47.	NA	33.1	33.1
Wage Rate of Rural Non-agricultural Labourers (Rs. per manday)	67.5	NA	44.0	45.8
Percentage of Casual Labourers (Rural) not Getting	78.0	NA	95.6	95.4

National Minimum Wage of Rs.66				
Percentage of Casual Labourers (Rural) not Getting NCRL Minimum Wage of Rs.49	40.9	NA	80.9	80.7

Source: NSS 61<sup>st</sup> Round, 2004-2005

We can note here some of the related more significant factors: for instance, while in the total male workforce the percentage of male unorganised workers is nearly 91 per cent, this ratio is 96 percent with regard to women. The corresponding figures in the case of the unorganised sector as a whole, is respectively 84 percent and 91 percent. We can also the wage difference. The daily wage of casual male worker in urban areas is Rs. 74.3, for female worker it is Rs. 43.6; in rural areas for men the wage is Rs. 54.6, for female worker it is 44.0, and for dalit and indigenous women it is even less – 34.7 (Table 5.2 of the *RUS*, p. 77; table drawn on the basis of NSS 61<sup>st</sup> round, 2004-05). Notwithstanding the economic progress of the country, the double burden of work tells upon women workers in terms of lower levels of health, mortality, and morbidity pattern. The same NSS data show that more than one third of the women working at home are willing to engage in productive (marketable product) activities if such work is available within the confines of their homes, and a quarter of them are willing to work full time outside also. Besides the availability of work, the non-conventional place of her work also adversely affects her wage and mobility. Only one third of the women non-agricultural workers have designated work places, either of their own or belonging to their employees. Lack of clear-cut employment, employer-employee relationship, designated work place, and clarity as to what would constitute self-employment contributes to the invisibility of women's work. In all these we shall have to keep in mind the girl child workers in the country today. Formally they form only 2.6 per cent of the total women workforce, but this figure conceals much of the work the girl child is called upon to perform at different times. They in fact symbolise the farthest extent of labour flexibilisation we can imagine at the beginning of this new century – flexibilisation brought in not by technology (at least directly) but by the structure of labour market and the entire political economy.<sup>14</sup> Added to this is the fact of growth in the number of female workers in the subsidiary status category, particularly in urban areas, which speaks of erosion of full time jobs and a corresponding increase in part time informal jobs. All these have reinforced today the sexual division of labour. The case of garment industry is the most well known in this respect. Operating within sub-contracting supply chains (as in the tannery industry in Kolkata<sup>15</sup>) labour superintendence, gradation of labour, and stages in the labour process – such as, cleaning, stitching, embroidery, finishing, tagging, packaging – tell us the position female labour occupies. Besides, there is occupational segregation. Once again, these features are being reinforced today instead of being weakened in the wake of globalisation and export-driven growth.

If we decide to call it the feminisation of labour, what is its exact reflection in agriculture? We can quote the *RUS* on this:

...There was no feminisation of agriculture till 2000; however the share of women workers in agriculture in 2004-05 showed an increase. The obverse is observed for

the process of casualisation of female workforce in agriculture, that is proportion of agricultural labourers among female workers in agriculture. Casualisation of the workforce in agriculture occurred from 1983 to 2000 for men and women and in 2004-05 when the feminisation of the workforce seemed to have occurred, there was no further casualisation of workforce. Therefore the recent increase in self-employed workers in 2004-05 in agriculture was true for women workers as well, with the proportion of women cultivators on the rise.<sup>16</sup>

The implications of this observation are still not clear; possibly total work in agriculture in terms of total man-days is on decline; possibly men are moving more towards casual jobs in despair, and possibly women are managing and engaging in cultivation in greater number particularly in rice growing areas. But whatever be the case, all the above-mentioned features of women's work reflect significantly on the issue of constituting the reserve army of labour. We may say that the reserve is on the rise.

There are two indications of this trend: (a) first the phenomenon of swelling migration of which we have talked a little, and (b) second, the growth of the self-employed sector.

On the first indication: Labour brokers, reminding us of the recruiting agents in the last part of the nineteenth century who used to stalk the countryside of Eastern India, now fill the construction sites, quarries, and brick-kilns with destitute labour. The Census of 2001 (Census Table D 5) tells us that about 20 per cent of the migrants move due to reasons of employment, 2 per cent on business, 24 per cent move with households, 2 per cent for education, and 27 per cent on marriage. Census and NSS figures however underestimate seasonal and short-term migration – a characteristic of the presence of a reserve army of labour. Yet what we get from the census conducted in the new millennium's beginning is significant (Census of India, 2001, Census Table D 3). In forty-five per cent of cases the migrants' duration of stay is below 10 years. Now if we recall that marriage was the single biggest factor (we can assume that marriage contributes most heavily to the other fifty per cent whose duration of stay was 10 years or more in 2001), we can get the significance of migration in terms of political economy and class relation. The following table (Table 6) gives us the details.

**Table 6: Percentage, Distribution of Migration by Duration of Stay 2001**

Duration of Residence		Total Migrants			Migrants who Stated Work/Employment as the Reason for Migration		
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Less than 1 year	Total	2.8	4.5	2.1	7	6.1	13.7
	Rural	2.9	6.2	2	15.3	13.8	21
	Urban	2.7	3	2.5	3.3	3.1	5.6
1-4 years	Total	15	17.8	13.9	23.5	23.1	26.7
	Rural	13.8	17.2	12.9	28.1	28.4	27

	Urban	17.6	18.3	17	21.5	21	26.4
5-9 years	Total	13.4	13	13.6	17.7	18	16
	Rural	12.7	11.3	13.1	16.6	17.2	14.1
	Urban	14.7	14.5	14.9	18.2	18.3	18
1-9 years	Total	28.4	30.8	27.4	41.3	41.1	42.7
	Rural	26.5	28.5	26	44.6	45.6	41.1
	Urban	32.3	32.7	31.9	39.7	39.3	44.4
10 years –above	Total	54.2	39.2	60.6	51.6	52.8	43.5
	Rural	57.5	32.7	64	40	40.6	37.8
	Urban	47.7	45	50.1	56.9	57.6	49.9

Source: Census of India 2001, Table D-3

In any case both Census and NSS figures indicate that the rate of migration has increased, and according to 2001 Census the total migrant population in the country is little above 30 crores (315 million). About one crore workers migrate for 2 to 6 months. According to one survey on women and migration Orissa, based on studies of two districts, Bolangir and Noapada, and conducted in 2006-07, it was found out that women migrated to mostly Andhra Pradesh, Surat, and Raipur; and dalit and indigenous women accounted for 64 per cent of total women migrants. Landless and poor peasant women (up to 2 acres) accounted for 88 per cent of the migrants.<sup>17</sup> In one city, Mumbai, about 80 per cent of workers constituting low income households are migrants. They are mostly illiterate and unskilled. They have very little bargaining power, and many do not enjoy urban services such as, water, electricity, water, sewerage, and transport. They do not have regulated working hours, they are victims of the “wrath of local elements”, and suffer from harsh working or living conditions, and as if this is not enough, they are also objects of threats from militants, security forces, toughs, touts, administration, judiciary, and xenophobic rabble rousers against “outsiders”. Here is a report in the wake of Jaipur blast in May 2008 that symbolises what is in store of migrant labourers in cities of India today:

The Vasundhara Raje government has woken up to the problem of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in the state after stumbling upon footprints of Bangladesh-based terror organization Hujl in the Jaipur blasts. It has ordered their identification, which if taken to the logical conclusion, may lead to deportation. Evidence allegedly linking some of the migrants to the recent blasts has a disturbing aspect. It tells us that tentacles of terrorists, depending on support of these poor and mostly illiterate migrants, have now spread across the length and breadth of India – from Delhi to Mumbai and from Assam to Rajasthan.

These migrants, taking up menial jobs in the cities, mostly keep mum even if paid poorly and treated badly. For, protesting means identification and deportation to the place from where they have fled in search of two square meals a day. Prolonged abuse and exploitation fuels their animosity and anger towards the locals... Some of

these illegal migrants evolve as live bombs, ready to carry out any order from terror masterminds.

If the Rajasthan government woke up now to the problem of illegal migrants, the Centre and Assam government have repeatedly ignored tell-late warning signals from the Supreme Court. Both had even stepped around a 2005 order of the apex court asking them to speed up detection of illegal Bangladesh migrants...

When petitioner Sarbanand Sonowal pointed out that the problem of illegal migration from the neighbouring country had assumed dangerous proportions, the Centre and the Assam government tried their best to deflect the issue telling the apex court that border fencing work was on and determination of illegal migrants through tribunals was working well. The ground reality was something totally different. A shocked Supreme Court castigated the Centre for ignoring the virtual "external aggression" unleashed on Assam because of rapid influx of Bangladeshi migrants, and pulled up the state government for allowing them to stay on...

A notification was issued on February 10, 2006, to step around the 2005 judgment of the apex court scraping the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act.

"Though we would normally desist from commenting, when the security of the nation is the issue as highlighted in the 2005 judgment, we have to say that the bona fide of the action leaves something to be desired," a three-judge bench had said. A few days after quashing the illegal migrant-friendly notification, the apex court to its horror noticed that there was not even a single tribunal under Foreigners Act in Delhi for detection of illegal migrants.

When such stinging rebukes and repeated warnings from the highest court of the land go unnoticed or are side-stepped by the ruling parties, one wonders whether a diligent policeman's painstakingly collected intelligence input about an impending terror attack would ever be taken seriously by those who take orders from the same ruling classes.<sup>18</sup>

*The political economy around urban migrant workers has more implications in terms of accumulation. Studies have noted, how with an overwhelming majority of urban migrant workers engaged in construction industry including clearing of lands, and renewal industry including garbage clearance, the local in the figurative sense of the term becomes the site of accumulation. Involving huge amounts of cash transaction such a site of labour becomes an "autonomous" local economy by itself, influencing local politics, and predicating the grid of national politics and the overall accumulation of wealth and capital. Laws do not hold much validity in these zones, these are like the frontier regions but situated within the heart of a city, at times on city's periphery, but integrated with the urban economy. These zones have their own internal protection and taxation systems. They prove Tilly's wisdom by turning it upside down. Tilly said, states function like mafia gangs, rackets of extortion; in these zones the mafia gangs work like states. They raise levies; impose protection duties; protect property rights with this service of protection being attached with price tags of course, allow and patronize unions or disallow unionization, maintain policing and administrative staff, arbitrate over disputes in their respective areas, appear as patron saints of the area, institute credit markets, and become vital links to external world, indeed to survival prospects. These economies are the restructuring agents of capital and the urban space.<sup>19</sup> But it is still not enough that migrant labourers have to bear either the cross of being terrorists or be the pawns of local*

*chieftains of a city. We have to add to this scenario, what the series of episodes around the Bombay bar dancers showed, namely the combined phenomena of labour trafficking and sex trafficking. The bar dancers' case is well known in terms of demonstrating the link between the two forms of trafficking.<sup>20</sup> But here is another report, titled, "Lack of Employment and Intense Poverty Drive Many Women from the Tea Gardens and Fringe Areas of the Darjeeling Hills into the Flesh Trade", equally illuminating:*

The economic conditions at her home in Nagari near Darjeeling forced 22-year-old Reshma (name changed) to leave her family when she was just nine. She was taken to New Delhi, where she worked as a domestic help. As a teenager, she worked in a bar, and in 2004, got married to a man in Delhi. She has two children from her first husband. Five months ago, when Reshma went for a pregnancy test did she realize that she is HIV positive. Now, she's back in Darjeeling. Holding her 14-days-old child, Reshma said, "I was compelled to leave my home at a tender age. But once I'm cured. I'll lend my support to save the lives of those suffering like me."

Doma (name changed), a mother of two, visits Darjeeling town as and when she gets calls from clients. Doma's husband is an alcoholic who works in a tea garden in Darjeeling.

Like Reshma and Doma, there are several women from the tea gardens and the fringe areas who have become commercial sex workers so that they can take care of their families and provide education to their children. Lack of employment opportunities and intense poverty, especially in and around the tea estates in Darjeeling hills, have forced many into the flesh trade. Young boys and girls from these areas venture into towns and cities for employment. Boys either find some work in hotels, or they move to cities to find semi-skilled or skilled labour. Heart-wrenchingly, families are unaware that their girls are engaged in the flesh trade. Experts point out that the porous border along Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan is one of the reasons for their increasing numbers.

"Several girls from the tea gardens, especially the less education, end up as sex workers," said Bharati P Rai, Secretary, Federation of Society for Environmental Protection (FOSEP), an NGO based in Darjeeling. He said, "The network between sex workers and pimps is managed in a clandestine manner." He cites a FOSEP survey in 2006: "I asked a sex worker from the tea gardens why she'd chosen to do this. She said her father was ill and she had to look after her four siblings who are studying." The report has been submitted to the West Bengal AIDS Control and Prevention Society.

In January 2007, FOSEP did a project on HIV/AIDS Targetted Intervention on Flying Sex Workers in Darjeeling. The age group of these workers was between 18 to 30 years. Rai said, "Tea gardens are for the owners, not for us. The condition of the workers is as it was century ago. Their daily wage is not even Rs.100." The standard wage of a tea garden worker is Rs.53.90 per day." He adds, "Feudalism is still practiced in the tea industry and we are proud of it. If tea garden workers were to depend only on the industry, it would be a hand-to-mouth existence and their savings nil." He said due to the absence of brothels in the hills, they are nicknamed 'flying-commercial sex workers', of which 60% are from the tea estates and the remaining 40% are from the town and fringe areas. Strangely, some have opted for such work to raise money to keep up with the latest trends in fashion.

According to the assessment conducted by FOSEP, nearly 65% of the target group lacked knowledge about HIV/AIDS, STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection) and

condom usage. Rai said that in each group 34 FCSW (Flying Commercial Sex Workers) participated in the study. Of that, 94.12% belong to the age group of 18-35 years, while 29.41% of the respondents were married and the rest were unmarried, said Rai. The assessment was based on knowledge, attitude, behaviour and practice. However, secretary of the Darjeeling Tea Association Sandeep Mukherjee denies the existence of sex workers from tea estates. He said that flying sex workers are a social problem, not the sole problem of the gardens. "There could be some stray cases, I don't know. But the majority of workers in the gardens are women. Nearly 70% of the women are employed in the tea industry. I see no such possibility arising. When the women are employed in tea plantation, why will they opt for such a profession?" he said.

Programme officer of Darjeeling Prerna, another NGO, Roshan Rai says that while there may be flying sex workers, human trafficking from tea gardens and rural areas is quite prevalent. He pointed out that HIV/AIDS has entered the tea estates due to the unsafe migration of people.

Roshan said, "The condition of the tea garden workers is not good. They are not acknowledged at all. Till date, none of them have been a part of decision making. The benefits are not given as per the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. The workers do not have any ownership of the land. This itself is an indication that there has been no dramatic change in the tea industry of this region." (K P. Malla, Darjeeling Red Cross Society)

Pointing out that the fate of the people in the tea gardens is at stake with several being closed down, honorary secretary of the Darjeeling Red Cross Society Maj. (retd.) K.P. Malla says, "The number of sex workers from the tea gardens and fringe areas has increased over the years. Several tea gardens have closed. On an average, if the population of each tea garden is 5,000 about 500 are employed, who will the rest do?" (Roshan Rai, Programme Officer, Prerna) he asked Malla said that a holistic and approach is required to improve the lot of workers.

Darjeeling, Queen of the Hills and a popular tourist destination, desperately needs facelift in all aspects. Have there been better source of income, opportunities and an alternative means of living their girls like Reshma and Doma wouldn't had to lie their families – just to support them.<sup>21</sup>

I am leaving out from this bare narration the way this primeval labour wants to reach the frontier areas of capitalism, the way they die on mid-sea, in the belly of the ships and aeroplanes, or perish in tunnels, or suffer the rest of life as low paid discriminated worker - precisely the condition they wanted to escape. I have written elsewhere on this. But at least one has to note the connection between trafficking in labour and sex and globalisation. On this consider this severely abridged report:

The movement of people from one country to another is an inevitable outcome of globalisation. According to the 2005 report of the UNFPA titled *State of World Population*, the number of international migrants was estimated at 17.5 crores. The major problem connected with this migration is human trafficking and smuggling. Human trafficking is a lucrative criminal activity. According to the International Labour Organisation, it can generate up to \$31 billion a year, most of it from forced labour and exploitation. The trafficking and smuggling protocols, generally referred to as the Palermo protocols, came into force on 23 December 2003 and 28 January 2004, respectively. By definition, trafficking denotes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or "receipt of persons" by threat, force, coercion, abduction and

fraud. Exploitation can involve prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or slavery...

Between 800,000 and 1.2 million women and children are victims of trafficking the world over. Human trafficking is the world's third largest illegal business, generating \$9.5 billion in revenue each year... West Bengal, along with Bihar, accounts for the maximum numbers of girls who have been trafficked into the country from abroad simply for prostitution. According to figures available till 2005, this so-called "importation of girls" has increased by nearly 67.4 per cent... Statistics reveal that the highest number of pending cases of violence against women is of importation... While many of the victims are rescued and the offenders arrested, many cases go unreported. Most of the girls come from poor families and are lured into the trap with the promise of a lucrative job. The major factors behind human trafficking are poverty, political instability, unexpected changes in economic or political condition, natural and man-made disasters, poor governance, advance in communication and transportation, easy profits made from exploitation, marginalisation of the poor, and lack of information about the realities and dangers of trafficking and smuggling. The administration shows little concern to tackle it seriously, allowing operators to indulge in a part-time or whole-time illegal profession with inter-state and international ramifications. Even so-called men of position are involved. For instance, the BJP MP, Babubhai Katara, was arrested for trying to smuggle a woman and a teenager to Canada. West Bengal has emerged as a major hub over the last 10 years, with 15,750 girls and women having been abducted and kidnapped in 2005. The procuring of minor girls shot up from 2.7 per cent to 13.8 per cent in 2005, and the number of girls sold to prostitution rose from 26.7 to 88 per cent. Bengal serves as a source, transit and destination for trafficking in women and children. The state's border with Bangladesh, Bhutan and 14 major points with Nepal in North Bengal have made it a vulnerable location. Its common boundaries with Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Sikkim have made it a safe haven for traffickers. The problem of child trafficking is endemic in the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Murshidabad, North and South Dinajpur, Malda, Midnapore, Nadia, North and South 24-Parganas. Kolkata is also a nerve centre with 21 large brothels acting as active links with numerous "flying sex zones" across the country. Nearly 10 per cent of the sex workers in the city have come from Bangladesh and Nepal. The city accounts for 45.5 per cent of minor girls brought into the state. The Bengal-Bangladesh border is a key entry point. There are 14 such points from Nepal to North Bengal. The two dangerous dens in Murshidabad are located in Jalangi and Domkol. The trafficked girls are confined to the prostitution centres of North Bengal, Nadia, South 24-Parganas and Kolkata before being sent to Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Pune, and even places in Kashmir, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. More than 45.5 per cent girls are trafficked through Kolkata. According to the National Human Rights Commission report, Bengal is fourth in terms of trafficking. A large number of missing cases are not reported. The children leave their homes with the knowledge of their parents. Therefore, no complaints are filed with the police. Initially, the parents don't realise that their children are being trafficked as they are taken away with the promise of either jobs or marriage. In most of the cases those who lure these children away happen to be their own relatives or someone known to them...<sup>22</sup>On an average the traffickers earn Rs 25,000-30,000 on each transaction...

But now on the second indication: The growth of self-employed workers is a fuzzy phenomenon. It conceals more than it reveals. Almost 57 per cent of the

workforce is in this sector. Casual workers account for 28 per cent and regular workers 15 per cent. The *RUS* comments that if we take the unorganised sector as a whole, the self-employed sector will probably account for more.<sup>23</sup> The presence of this huge sector demonstrates the linkages between workers, business enterprises, and the self-employed. The employment status also remains fuzzy: they can be own-account workers, or workers under employers, or unpaid (or contributing) family workers. Again self-employment can be of low-income category, closer to or marginally above casual workers; or of high-income category, closer to or higher than regular workers. In the former we may place the handloom weavers, street vendors, rickshaw pullers, embroidery (*chikan*) workers, food processors, rag pickers, beedi rollers, potters, incense stick makers, bamboo product makers, and others. In the latter category there can be independent professionals, shop owners in cities, rice mill owners, commission agents, small hoteliers and restaurant owners, and workshop owners. Majority of self-employed workers are owner operators or family labourers. Eternally they try to cross the critical threshold whence they can become self-employed in the second category. Often family members of next generation switch over to the work of wage labourers. In the final analysis, in today's India the self-employed workers besides contributing to national wealth serve two important functions. They are the vital link between a graded labour process and valorisation process on one hand, and the market in general on the other. They also make the entire reserve army of labour ready for being marshalled in the interest of the capitalist market including the labour market.

### **How is Most of the Labour Governed Today?**

How is this labour being governed today? We are referring to, it is clear by now, only one section of workers, the unorganised workers. To be true, the descriptions in the preceding pages already give us a fair idea of how labour is governed in the country. One may call this *structural governance*, that is to say, the way in which conditions of labour are structured and regulated. In fact even a cursory reading of the available material on primary labour would tell us the strength of the structural factors in regulating labour. And thus the question: Why does the labour regime need the various legal and administrative forms of governing labour? Why is so much talk of labour welfare? Once again, this invites a big discussion, which we cannot afford to enter here. But at least this much we should note: bourgeois society (and capitalist production) requires labour as free subject that is free to enter or refuse contract, free to change jobs, free to meet the conditions of capital. It means the reproduction of the economic category of *worker* as the juridical category of *citizen*. But what happens if this process of reproduction stops or advances only in a very slow way? What happens when the bare existence of labour makes the life of capital murky? How to clothe this bare existence, which is always at the root of bio-politics, and how to facilitate the bourgeois mode of production, which means capitalism, civility, equality, and freedom? We must therefore consider even if briefly the labour regulation regime in the unorganised sector, while keeping in mind the international humanitarian and labour regulatory measures (for instance ILO conventions on

frontier workers, migrant workers, indigenous people, etc.) that are there to reinforce the conditions of unorganised labour. In the context of our discussion it is also important to recognise the fact that while these mechanisms regulating *conditions of production* have remained in place for years, the government has been inclined more and more to adopt relevant measures in the *sphere of living, the non-production sphere*, through administrative, semi-legal, and in some cases legal guarantees for instituting select social security measures (such as compensation, insurance, loan waivers, rehabilitation schemes, etc.). The significance of these aspects of governing labour will be clearer before we have concluded.

One of the reasons of the particular way this labour is governed has of course got to do with the bourgeois mode in which labour is comprehended. Thus, the government sticks diligently to the ephemeral divisions in which unorganised labour appears, namely wage labourer, home-worker, and the self-employed, little realising that these divisions are not strict, that labourers often pass from one category to another, that the overwhelming majority of them are in one way or another related to agriculture, and that together they are the physical site of the primitive accumulation of capital, and together they constitute the reserve army of labour to be used at will whenever the need for labour in an expanded economy (nationally or globally) arises. The conditions of work of these countless numbers of labourers thus depend, as we can see, on the way the employers, contractors, suppliers, and other institutions of the market make them (conditions) available to the labourers. What does a regulatory framework mean in this context?

The answer has already been suggested. The attempt is to legalise the conditions of work in a manner so that the unorganised worker can emerge as an *equal* citizen with *equal* freedom to access protection mechanisms related to unorganised enterprises - in short the unorganised worker has to emerge as a *citizen*. Here we can discern the purpose of daily rules of governing labour.

The game of course began with from the time of constitution making. Articles 13-14 prohibit the exploitation of labour in form of forced labour and child labour factories, mines, and in hazardous occupations. Articles 15-16 guarantee non-discrimination by the State, and equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 19 assures the right to form associations and unions. Article 21 gives the right to life. These fundamental rights are reinforced with standards set in the Directive Principles of State Policy. Securing for the citizen the right to work is a directive. Likewise securing provisions of just and humane conditions of work, maternity relief, living wage, conditions of work suitable for a decent standard of life are directives. The State has to enact suitable legislations and other measures for all workers – agricultural, industrial, or otherwise. Labour is on the concurrent list in the Indian Constitution, and flow from List III of the 7<sup>th</sup> Schedule (entries 22-24). India has also ratified a number of ILO Conventions (41) and of them those relating to minimum wages concern unorganised work. But, notwithstanding all these, almost all labour laws are limited in their coverage (for instance, type of employment relationship, size and character of establishment), and thus we have hardly any law applicable to all workers. This factor above all affects the workers in unorganised enterprises most.

Again most laws concerning unorganised labour do not touch the self-employed labour. The Equal Remunerations Act (1976) and the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976) apply to all; however Acts on minimum wages (1948)<sup>24</sup>, child labour (1986), dangerous machines (1983), motor transport workers (1961), inter-state migrant workmen (1979), or manual scavengers (1993) touch only some sections of unorganised work. To take just one instance in this context, the Inter-state Migrant Workmen's Act does not provide protection to migrant women "since they migrate on their own volition".<sup>25</sup> There are still other laws, which can be extended, such as on beedi and cigar workers, or payment of wages (1936), construction workers (1996), maternity benefit (1961), contract labour (1970), workmen's compensation (1923), and weekly holidays (1942). Factors taken into account in framing labour laws such as physical conditions, duration and timing, remuneration, employment relations, conditions of disadvantages workers, and others – have a great need to be revisited and reformulated in terms of applicability criteria in order to become relevant for unorganised work today so that they can address the main question, namely, *what would help labour in facing the persistent conditions of primitive accumulation, rapacious exploitation, absence of work-place democracy, market stranglehold, and the threat of extinction?* We can also include in these Acts, mentioned previously in this paragraph, applicable to all sections of unorganised work, such as those concerning equal remuneration and abolition of bonded labour. Some of these such as the Minimum Wages Act relate to agricultural work also. Besides there are others such as the Plantation Labour Act (1951) in order to ensure certain basic facilities for plantation workers. There are also state laws, most known of these being the Shops and Establishments Act.

We can cite in this context the international and national legislation on fish-workers, one of the most unorganised sectors of labour in India, in fact throughout the world, at the same time the site of workers' utmost efforts towards unionisation. On 14 June 2007, innovative new labour standards designed to improve the conditions for roughly 30 million men and women working in the fishing sector worldwide were adopted at the 96th annual conference of the International Labour Organization. Yet, the question arose as one commentator put it, "Convention on Work in Fishing: Are We Expecting Too Much?" The standards laid down by the Convention are applicable to both marine and inland fishing, except for subsistence and recreational fishers. Although "subsistence fishing" was not defined, it can be assumed that those fishing in traditional craft for their livelihood, without the help of any mechanical means of propulsion, and fishing trips lasting a few hours of a day would fall under subsistence fishing. The Convention, therefore, was not meant to benefit the vast number of marine and inland fishers in countries like India country, involved in fishing near the shores in seas, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, etc., because most of them are subsistence fishers working in non-mechanised country craft. Thus while the ILO convention helped labour employed in mechanised fishing sector, the largest part working in informal conditions was left out. It is true that for a huge number of fish-workers this was like as one European union leader put it, "the dawn of improved labour standards for fishers", as he reminded, "Work in the fishing sector has many characteristics that set it apart from work in other sectors. The harvesting of

fish, of marine resources, takes place in the often-challenging marine environment. When the weather conditions are harsh, as they often are, or when the catch itself presents a risk, the rate of accidents and event fatalities can be quite high. In fact, in many countries, fishing is the most hazardous occupation. In case of accident or illness, a fisher may be far from professional medical care, and must rely on others on board to take care of him, or her, until brought ashore.” At the same time hundreds and thousands of local fish-workers were left out, and noticeably women. Again one commentator, Nalini Nayak, pointed out, “A New Convention: But What is there in it for women? Over 2,37,000 women, in total, make a direct livelihood from the fishing in their local communities. All data were gathered directly in the fishing communities. Hence, it does not include the women involved in fish-related activities from outside the fishing areas per se. Moreover, this does not cover the coastline of the whole country. All these women face health and safety problems as well as problems of the right to access fish for vending and to financial resources” And further, “Traditional small-scale aquaculture and fisheries are pursued as avenues for livelihood by coastal and rural communities. Local and national elite, and the multinational investors, totally unconnected to those traditionally involved in aquaculture and fisheries, largely own industrial aquaculture. These new investors have greater access to the knowledge and capital necessary to adopt new technologies. They also have political clout and access to institutional financial resources, which are normally out of reach of those traditionally involved... The boundaries of women's work (meanwhile) have gradually been expanding from child rearing and household chores to agriculture, animal husbandry, and dairy. Development increased needs and, in turn, work, which was willingly shared by woman. She crossed the threshold unknowingly and joined the work force as vegetable vendor, construction or 'beedi' worker; industrial worker, fish-worker, etc., to supplement the family income. A large number of women work in these professions, but remain marginalised.”<sup>26</sup> One can see thus how reforms and marginalisation go hand in hand.

In this context we have to also remember the various loopholes in these legislative measures (I am returning here to the issue of national legislations), the universally evident difficulty in their implementation (such as the almost total absence of labour inspection arrangements at the block level), and the “lack of awareness” of these measures in unorganised labour. Also let us recall the fact that most of them do not apply to small units of 5-7 workers and the vast numbers of the self-employed. The Second National Commission on Labour (2002) pointed out in this context factors like inadequate logistical support, training, and infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> The question then arises in the backdrop of the incongruity of the condition of unorganised labour and the plethora of laws existing for several decades, as to what purpose these laws serve. The purpose in raising this question is not to deny altogether any positive impact of these measures (which there is), but in pointing out how these measures finally contribute to a certain regime of superintendence of unorganised labour. Large unions only lately have taken up the issue of unionisation of unorganised labour – an extremely difficult enterprise by any standard, because in many cases there is hardly any capitalist to fight directly, there is the overwhelming

presence of the wily contractor, and the distant and the illusory existence of the main guarantor of social security provisions, that is the State. In order to stabilise this sort of labour regime, besides the legislative provisions just mentioned there are now various kinds of governmental (including inter-governmental, such as the World Bank) and non-governmental loan guarantee and waiver schemes, self-help facilities, rural asset formation schemes, income plans, all of which aim to stabilise the condition of unorganised labour.

The unorganised workers therefore in this environment of all round informalisation opt for social movement initiatives, which urge labour to combine traditional union demands (of wage increase and permanence of employment) with campaigns and discourses of social security and cooperatives (such as, forming cooperatives, setting up hospitals for workers and their family members, schools - Bandhua Mukti Morcha being one of the early initiatives). Accordingly the unrest in the ranks of unorganised labour does not always take the form of traditional trade union activism, but expresses itself also in sudden bursts of collective violence, aligning with direct efforts of waging war against the State, and new institution building through novel ways.

In such condition existing at the beginning of the new century I think the critical point to note will be: Is there any necessary connection between this permanently informal condition of labour (that is informal condition of work, of regulation of work, reproduction of work, reproduction of labour power, which includes the informal condition of labour market institutions) and the maintenance of a reserve army of labour that capitalist production always needs? We may ask taking one extra step: Is there any necessary connection between the existence of such a reserve army of labour and the process of primitive accumulation? The important thing here is to understand the connection between the three phenomena – unorganised labour, formation of a reserve army of labour, and primitive accumulation – and thus the two processes.

I have already shown how unorganised labour acts as a double existence – that of the worker in the unorganised sector and a member of the reserve army of labour ready to be drafted in the required sectors of production and circulation. Inter-state migration of worker under condition of forced displacement, boom in construction industry, permanent existence of deep pockets of malnutrition, distress, hunger, starvation and stress deaths, and the creation of city within city, region within region, and centres within centres – all these confirm the double existence we are speaking of. In the next section I want to address probably the more significant question relating to the link between the unorganised labour and primitive accumulation. I shall argue that not only the link is structural, but that there is a necessary connection between corporatisation of capital and accumulation of capital in primitive form/s.

### **The Illusion of Capital without Pain**

The illusion of capital without pain and capital without labour in primitive conditions is, of course, several centuries old by now. Marx called it sarcastically the story of “original sin”. He wrote,

This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race... In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential... Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work... In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part. In the tender annals of Political Economy, the idyllic reigns from time immemorial. Right and "labour" were from all time the sole means of enrichment, the present year of course always excepting. As a matter of fact, the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic.

In themselves money and commodities are no more capital than are the means of production and of subsistence. They want transforming into capital. But this transformation itself can only take place under certain circumstances that centre in this, viz., that two very different kinds of commodity--possessors must come face to face, and into contact; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to increase the sum of values they possess, by buying other people's labour-power; on the other hand, free labourers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour. Free labourers, in the double sense that neither they themselves form part and parcel of the means of production, as in the case of slaves, bondsmen, &c., nor do the means of production belong to them, as in the case of peasant-proprietors; they are, therefore, free from, unencumbered by any means of, production of their own. With this polarisation of the market for commodities, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are given... The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as primitive, because it forms the pre-historic stage of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it... To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he finds a market, he must further have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and the impediments of their labour regulations. Hence, the historical movement, which changes the producers into wageworkers, appears on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.<sup>28</sup>

This "theological story of original sin" still continues. Even though efforts are on to attach unorganised labour (rooted out from land and lacking entitlements derived from permanence of employment) to various forms of small property and asset ownership, we have to note that the product of labour working in unorganised conditions, that is conditions of dispossession and expropriation, is realisable only

through the capitalist market conditions, which “is written in letters of blood and fire”. In fact unorganised labour in this sense truly stands free in the double sense Marx speaks of – dispossessed, and thus free, of attachments and free as a juridical person to accept any condition offered to him/her. And again, it is in this sense, s/he stands as a member of a vast (reserve) army waiting to be drafted into the lines of industrial production. Globalisation has only hastened the process of expropriation by turning large numbers of peasant proprietors into unorganised labour. Though some prefers to call it “primitive globalisation”,<sup>29</sup> all past phases of globalisation had this feature of displacement and expropriation of petty property holders, and the present phase is not an exception. Therefore when Marx spoke of a historical process of expropriation as the basis of accumulation, he was not speaking of “an original sin”, indeed he was suggesting that there was no original sin; each phase, each stage, each site of accumulation has and had as its other, the “primitive”. Industrial sociologists have demonstrated how even in a modern chemical plant there can be processes dark with mud and sweat. In my earlier work on tanner industry in Kolkata I showed how informal and at times beastly conditions functioned as the basis of a sophisticated leather goods manufacturing industry headed by giants such as the Bata, Adidas, Gucci, and other fashion products manufacturers.<sup>30</sup> More significantly that study showed the blurred line of distinction between formal and informal conditions of labour, their deep links, and the possible ways in which today’s organised labour can become tomorrow’s unorganised, or the unorganised of the past can be the organised labour of tomorrow. This mutually alterable condition can be seen in the ways the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are emerging in India today and absorbing labour in them.

We can note the process of primitive accumulation in India in the first decade of the twenty first century – a process aided and facilitated by the existence of surplus labour and the administrative strategy of creating the special economic zones as spaces of exception to the “normal” process of capitalist accumulation and development. In this differential use of space for accumulation, we have one more secret of the durability of the unorganised state of labour. This durability is made possible through techniques of state and governance for differential administration of localities in the interest of accumulation, and these techniques are made possible precisely because of globalisation within a national context. Neo-liberal globalisation brings back the process of separation or bifurcation of social producers and the social means of production, a process noted by Marx, and this is possible only by creating new borders at the same time transgressing other borders. The discussion of primitive accumulation in Marx’s *Capital* is thus full with suggestive readings of the histories of borders, enmeshed in these histories being the histories of enclosures and global flows of bodies, commodities, and capital. Borders thus represent unstable linkages, which actually demonstrate the interplay of the local and global in the process of accumulation, the primitive form of accumulation representing the specifically local, historical, immediate; and the developed form representing the whole, global, and the extended scenario. This division of the process of reproduction of capital operates even within developed capitalist countries, where the migrant labour operating under “primitive” or “unorganised condition” represents the boundaries (and their

transgression) of national territory, race, ethnicity, geography, sex, and culture. Even the phenomenon of disaster reproduces this division, whereby a disaster zone becomes the site of primitive accumulation.<sup>31</sup> Capitalism thus remains eternally transitional (and by that token the issue of transition remains only partly relevant) – from primitive to developed, local to global, unorganised to organised, and surplus labour to full employment...

In as much slave trade, colonial wars, plunders, unequal treaties and transfers, enclosures, and consequent displacement of the peasants served as instances for Marx to substantiate his argument on the “so-called” (that is how he put it in the content page of *Capital*) primitive accumulation of capital, today disaster management, creation of special economic zones, widely prevalent unorganised state of production, and massive displacement of peasantry provide us with instances of the ways in which primitive accumulation is going on in India and in many other parts of the world. The discovery of land to be seized today reminds us of the discovery of gold and silver mines centuries ago and the commercial wars that Marx spoke of. In fact when we study the phenomenon of displacements through construction of special zones, we can understand the way this process contributes to the overall processes of primitive accumulation. Viewed from a wider perspective of neo-liberal capitalist expansion, one can see how this is facilitated through the dismantling of customary relations to land, forest and water. And these are the places in which existing populations hold legally tenuous relations to the environment, while in contrast the existing laws and planning policies related to dam developments are based on a worldview marked with utilitarian logic, legal belief in private property, and a vacuous idea about space and the environment.<sup>32</sup> In the present context of discussion we have thus all the elements crucial to the process of primitive accumulation, namely: (a) the dissociation of the labourers from the means of labour (in some cases the dissociation is hidden) through various forms of displacements and consequent forced migration; (b) the extra-economic or the violent and other coercive ways of administration (including taxation) to effect this dissociation; (c) the production of the “critical mass” that turns into capital through this process; (d) production of colonial relations through this dynamics of violent exploitation (within national territories too, known as internal colonialism); (e) the unorganised state of production where labour regulatory laws make little sense; and finally (e) the emergence of the labourer as the free agent, and let us remember, free in double sense: free from the means of labour and property as attachments, and free to enter into contracts with capitalists.

Today the phenomenon of Special Economic Zones in India presents us in a congealed form all these features. As one would think of the phenomenon of unorganised labour within a broader regime of regulation of labour, these zones can be termed as special “economies” within a national economy. These other economies are special because these are specially administered; their exchange mechanisms, production processes, and production relations are again distinguishable from the general economy, where the regulating rules are supposed to correspond with labour rights, social security entitlements, and the fundamental political requirements of the democracy and the nation-state. These enclosed spaces are not only specially marked

out basins from where cheap labour will be secured for work in industries and services, these spaces also present the most recent innovation in techniques of extracting surplus labour through a combination of the violent and the economic. SEZ is the zone of pure *capital*, the most *advanced form*, based on a combination of rent extraction, labour extraction, and super profit extraction. An SEZ one can say therefore is grounded in a combination of older forms accumulation and accumulation's newer forms – hence is its close relation with dispossession and demobilisation of labour.

The other thing to note of this situation is the way agriculture is viewed in terms of its source of accumulation. Too impatient of the slowness of the pace in which surplus can be extracted from agriculture - a scenario where all crops including cereals become viable cash crops, requiring agricultural machinery produced out of capital intensive machine industry, the ready availability of storage and preservative industry, processing industry, and the just-in-time supply and distribution chains - capital often goes for a faster track, often for the sake of realty industry, thus destroying the vary basis of human subsistence, when indeed we realise why capitalist countries must need the so-called primary goods suppliers (that is suppliers of rice, sugar, tea, wheat, coffee, water, meat, fish, minerals, fruits, leaves, and other items), in the world market. In this sense the vast unorganised sector in the form of the great source of primitive accumulation presents for capital its inescapable contradiction, which wounds the latter deeply and permanently. Enclosures (which the SEZs finally are) symbolise this contradiction between the neo-modern primitive capital and the displaced and dispossessed labour representing the ghost of a destroyed and dead agriculture. Meanwhile old centres of industry die. They as anyone who knows of famous industrial belts of the past, such as Durgapur-Asansol-Ranigunge, Ghaziabad-Aligarh, Old Bombay or the Ahmedabad textile mill areas, and the steel plant and wagon building colonies spread now desolately throughout the country, will understand how the process of healthy industries transforming into sunset industries is linked to the process of primitive accumulation even in a developed capitalist framework.<sup>33</sup>

I shall argue that events in Singur or Nandigram in West Bengal in India indicate the extent to which capitalist accumulation through land grab and eviction of rural population is ready to proceed. In this neo-liberal enterprise these two are not names of isolated events. In West Bengal alone, the process of land grab can be noted in at least three different locations - Kharagpur in West Medinipur district (where vast amount of farmland is being taken over for a Tata vehicle factory), in Nandigram in East Medinipur district where a chemical industries hub was to be set up on a 10,000-acre area; but the process failed due to peasant resistance, and in North Bengal (where a Videocon Special Economic Zone will come up in the near future). In all these attempts as in Orissa and elsewhere in the country we witness ruthless invocation of force and legislation, once again reminding us of Marx's comment on "bloody legislation" (Marx also mentioned the "parliamentary form of robbery") to facilitate accumulation.<sup>34</sup> And, once again in the process - and this we notice less - with the increase of relative surplus population, real wages are depressed and there is consequently an increase in rate of profit on each unit of invested capital. Both these

features mark the relentless informalisation of labour process, at the same time the corporatisation of capital.

We may ask of course, and quite legitimately, what is this phenomenon of the corporate? Does it belong to classical capitalism? Is it only another name of the old word, monopoly? Without going into detailed discussion here, we can note at certain features pertinent to present discussion. In this age of late capitalism corporate capital can act as a corporation only by a combination of non-economic and economic means, which yields for it super profit (in common language “windfall”); it controls and manipulates administrative-publicity-market-punitive strings in order to earn that super profit; it embodies measures and an organizational style whose sole purpose is to defeat the periodic adverse impact of the laws of division of labour and unequal growth of capitalism on the corporate sector. To gain that windfall it wants all kinds of subsidies from the state while claiming that the state cannot give subsidy to the working population and petty producers and even the minimum of welfare measures characteristic of developed capitalism; it also demands that all population be tuned into surplus except the labouring numbers it needs; it turns the state into a *market state*, by which I do not mean that state facilitates the market procedures but that the state views itself in the mirror not of a public instrument but of a market, where publicly decided juridical-legislative-administrative rules are not the guiding instruments, but the rules of a rapacious market full with bargaining, profiteering, and fluctuating fortunes of the stock. It is this situation, which must have as its other *the unorganised*, of whom Jan Breman wrote, “Mobilization of casual labour, hired and fired according to the needs of the moment, and transported for the duration of the job to destinations far distant from the home village, is characteristic of the capitalist regime presently dominating in South Asia”.<sup>35</sup> Labour has to be thus turned into floating commodity, and we cannot help noticing that in particular the land of the indigenous population in the country, as in Orissa, Chhattisgarh or Andhra Pradesh, is now up for grab and loot, whence labour again would become casual, ready for transportation to new areas of work, including work in the SEZs, the *el dorado* today, promised to be the destination of about USD 85 billion of promised investments, mostly in steel and iron plants, and mining projects, bringing of course no improvement in the conditions of the uprooted population there. These will be the new enclosures, in whose story we have two lives written into each other – the life of corporate capital and that of the unorganised labour.

There is thus no natural evolution of capital, no pre-historic stage that the history of capital has overcome. The various attempts to stabilise the unorganised and informal state of labour by reforms, anti-poverty legislations, and measures to turn labour into petty proprietor only temporarily succeed. At best they are another example of “countervailing tendency” (like the one to the falling rate of profit), while the relentless march of capital towards acquiring corporate form remains secular. Yet, why is capital seen primarily as an embodiment of economic relation and not social relation? Marx wrote further, “A great deal of capital, which appears today in the United States without any birth-certificate, was yesterday, in England, the capitalized blood of children”, and “capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt”<sup>36</sup> The continuing history of primitive accumulation carrying

through to this day on the basis of a process of destruction of peasant and small commodity production, and keeping a large chunk of production informal and unorganized is possible because this division between the formal and informal sectors, the organized and unorganized, and the primitive and modern is finally a social division with huge implications for the life of capital and the bourgeois society.<sup>37</sup>

In short, the continued existence of primitive forms of labour (which unorganized labour primarily is) and the destruction of the peasant economies through creation of special zones of enclosures has significance for our understanding of the process of primitive accumulation, and its implications for a politics of democracy. The events of economy are never pure economic movements, and as Karl Polanyi would have said, they represent double movements, in the sense that when the market has historical movement, at times threatening the society itself within which it moves, the society also moves at the same time.<sup>38</sup> The division is thus to repeat social – a fact that the neo-liberal orthodoxy wants us to forget. Though the modern forms of primitive accumulation occur in quite different contexts different from the earlier ones, yet for labour the democratic agenda remains the same, namely, remembering, retaining, and winning anew the hard gains in form of socio-economic rights and entitlements, often the result of past battles. These entitlements and rights institutionalised by welfare states are like forms of social commons, now targeted by the neo-liberal project. We can now see the political implications of our blindness or awareness to the fact of primitive accumulation. It is neither purely an originary historical process giving birth to the conditions of capitalist mode of production, nor it is purely a continuous phenomenon running through the history of mankind. It is historical and continuous – springing from the locale in concrete historical conditions and shedding light today on current neo-liberal projects. Paradoxically this is where its universality lies, in as much neo-liberal orthodoxy also spreads worldwide – from cuts in social spending in United Kingdom to destruction of land and property in Iraq by the United States, to massive privatization in countries like Russia, structural reforms in South Africa, to building up of enclosures in India. The common social character cannot be ignored in all of these, and these countries are all new sites of primitive accumulation.

Each of these episodes of primitive accumulation produces separation of the labourer from the means of labour, and once again consumption loans are unable to change this fundamental trend (which finally all anti-poverty programmes turn out to be) and further accumulation only reproduces this separation. Thus, Marx again had to stress that proper accumulation was nothing else than primitive accumulation,<sup>39</sup> and that accumulation reproduced the separation and the independent existence of material wealth as against labour on an ever-increasing scale.<sup>40</sup>

Here we can realise the gravely adverse role that representations play in our ability to see the truth of exploitation. Let us see what Marx actually wrote in *Grundrisse*,

Once production founded on capital is presupposed -- money has become transformed into capital actually only at the *end of the first production* process, which resulted in its reproduction and in the new production of surplus capital I;

surplus capital I, however, is itself *posited*, realized as surplus capital, only when it has produced surplus capital II, i.e. as soon as those presuppositions of money, while it is in the process of passing over into capital, which still lie outside the movement of *real* capital have vanished, and when capital has therefore itself posited, and posited in accordance with its immanent essence, the conditions which form its point of departure in production -- [then] the condition that the capitalist, in order to posit himself as capital, must bring values into circulation which he created with his own labour -- or by some other means, excepting only already available, previous wage labour -- belongs among the antediluvian conditions of capital, belongs to its *historic presuppositions*, which, precisely as such *historic* presuppositions, are past and gone, and hence belong to the *history of its formation*, but in no way to its *contemporary* history, i.e. not to the real system of the mode of production ruled by it. While e.g. the flight of serfs to the cities is one of the *historic* conditions and presuppositions of urbanism, it is not a *condition*, not a moment of the reality of developed cities, but belongs rather to their *past* presuppositions, to the presuppositions of their becoming which are suspended in their being. The conditions and presuppositions of the *becoming*, of the *arising*, of capital presuppose precisely that it is not yet in being but merely in *becoming*; they therefore disappear as real capital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for its realization. Thus e.g. while the process in which money or value for-itself originally becomes capital presupposes on the part of the capitalist an accumulation -- perhaps by means of savings garnered from products and values created by his own labour etc., which he has undertaken as a *not-capitalist*, i.e. while the presuppositions under which money becomes capital appear as given, external *presuppositions* for the arising of capital- [nevertheless,] as soon as capital has become capital as such, it creates its own presuppositions, i.e. the possession of the real conditions of the creation of new values *without exchange* -- by means of its own production process. These presuppositions, which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming -- and hence could not spring from its *action as capital* -- now appear as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it* -- *not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence.*<sup>41</sup>

In short, behind the creation of each capital we have the original dirt and blood, which vanishes the moment this dirt and blood has transformed through two cycles into capital that starts functioning “independently”. The original is gone, “passes into history”, is “antediluvian”, “belonging to the history of formation” and not “contemporary history”. One thus never directly sees capital (in its advanced form) in its historical shape; it always belongs to the pure present. Likewise one never sees unorganised primitive labour directly in its historic connection with capital in its most developed form. The burden of representations proves too much. Capital is represented as independent, and so too is the case with primitive labour...

For democracy and politics of justice, what are then the political and social implications of this question? Briefly, the contradiction is not between other forms of property and the corporate form of capital; the contradiction is between capital and the masses of expropriated labour and the unorganised labouring poor of the country. The contradiction is between extreme privatisation of wealth and of public services on one hand, and on the other hand the democratic requirement for providing justice and public protection for those who need it most from immiserisation and destitution because their entire labour is treated as surplus. The contradiction is also between a

welfare-based approach and rights-based approach. The contradiction is finally between an economics whose ugliness is clothed by the representations of reality on one hand and on the other hand the social linkages and conflicts that this economics finally want to hide.

A further important question may be raised: How are we to arrive at an understanding of the significance of these contradictions? The answer is that in order to understand the role of these contradictions we must grasp the nature of *work*, with which this essay is concerned. From work, we get the category of the *worker*, and from the category of the worker we get the *working class*. The nature of work described in the preceding pages not only provides us an image of the worker in India, but also gives us the crucial lead as how this worker can be represented in the category of the working class. What emerges is the picture of the working class as a more discrete formation with this image having enormous consequences for a theory of labour democracy, which is at heart of any significant theory of popular democracy.<sup>42</sup> The implications are on the theory of collective actions, which in the last few decades had solely relied on various versions of the form of processions, meetings, petitions, and strikes; these implications are also on the issue of how to ensure representation of the unorganised worker as a fundamental pillar of popular democracy; finally they are on the elemental issue of how work is to be considered as the core of not only economics but politics and society too. In fact this is the point at which we suddenly discover with clarity the relevance of the entire discussion on primitive accumulation to popular democracy. In modern time, class demonstrates its existence through collective actions, which are occasioned by primitive accumulation, and discrete formation of popular resistance.<sup>43</sup>

All these contradictions and their implications point to the dilemma capital as relation faces now. It will always need sovereign power to maintain the bourgeois society, which would mean maintaining conditions of capitalist production and the bourgeois mode of organising social relations. On the other hand labour democracy would mean democracy in the process of production, democracy at workplace, interrupting, halting, and disrupting – and if possible reconstructing – the process of accumulation, which is at the same time the process of separating labour power, means of labour, and the labourer from each other. The issue of informal conditions of labour occupies a strategic place in these two processes. Appearing as exception in a formally organised democracy, informal labour poses a challenge to the modern strategy of producing out of the worker the autonomous juridical figure of the citizen (who can claim on an equal basis all due entitlements) and on the other hand maintaining sovereign power to buttress conditions of accumulation. Thus under the present conditions of capital accumulation the emergence of informal labour as a component of democracy becomes at the same time necessary and impossible. This opens up a field full of tensions impacting upon the project of citizenship and democracy. Primitive accumulation and the heterogeneity of labour signify this permanent contradiction of a democratic polity.

All these can be retold in another way: Capitalism and capital accumulation as its basis want to do way with all borders as Marx and Engels had told vividly in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* long ago. Yet the heterogeneity of labour

keeps on multiplying borders and boundaries. Indeed at times they signify borders. Consequently this heterogeneity of labour makes the post-colonial critique of capitalism and bourgeois democracy so potent.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984), "Conclusion", pp. 469-470

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 484

<sup>3</sup> Labour File, March 2008

<sup>4</sup> Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector (hereafter RUS), Government of India, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, 2007), Tables A1.1 and A1.2, p. 240; in Chapter 3 the Commission states that as of 2004-5 there were about 52.9 million wage workers in the unorganised non-agricultural sector, and 76.7 million unorganised or informal workers in the organised sector, that is to say that more than in the unorganised sector, it is in the organised sector that informalisation of wage labour continues – p. 27, Paragraph 3.1

<sup>5</sup> RUS, Table A3.1 p. 259

<sup>6</sup> RUS, Chapter 3, pp. 33-34

<sup>7</sup> On the RUS, read the admirable summary highlighting the main points of this massive reports, Dipak Mazumdar, "Dissecting India's Unorganised Sector", Economic and Political Weekly, 9 February 2008, pp. 27-33

<sup>8</sup> RUS, Table A3.1, p. 259

<sup>9</sup> RUS, p. 25

<sup>10</sup> For details, see P.K. Nag and A. Nag, "Drudgery, Accidents, and Injuries in Indian Agriculture", Industrial Health, 42, pp. 149-52, National Institute of Occupational Health, Ahmedabad, 2004

<sup>11</sup> RUS, p. 129

<sup>12</sup> Peter Mayer, "Trends of Real Income in Tiruchirapalli and the Upper Kaveri Delta, 1819-1980 – A Footnote in Honour of Dharma Kumar", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 43 (3), 2006, p. 356; Dharma Kumar's study referred here is, Land and Caste in South India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); On the debate on the question as to if the condition of agrarian labour improved in the long run, see the bibliography at the end of Mayer's article; one more comment – if this is the situation in Southern India, things cannot be much improved in rest of the country, possibly elsewhere it is worse.

<sup>13</sup> R. Srivastava, "Changes in Contractual Relations in Land and Labour in India", Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics, 45 (3), 2000, pp. 253-282

<sup>14</sup> On flexibilisation of labour brought in by new technology and a consequent restructuring of the labour process, I had written earlier. See, R. Samaddar, Workers and Automation (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), particularly chapters 4 and 6

<sup>15</sup> On this see, R. Samaddar and D. Datta, "Knowing the Worker -- The Tannery Mazdur of Tangra" in Parthasarathi Banerjee and Yoshihiro Sato (eds.) Skill and Technological Change - Society and International Perspective (New Delhi: Har Anand, 1997)

<sup>16</sup> RUS, pp. 132-33

<sup>17</sup> "Impact of Increasing Migration of Women in Orissa", Study conducted by Sansristi, and supported by the National Commission for Women, Bhuvanesar, 2007, p. 67

<sup>18</sup> Dhananjay Mahapatra, "SC Altered Government to Illegal Migrants", Times of India, 19 May 2008, p. 13

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- <sup>19</sup> Of Master Plans and Illegalities in an Era of Transition, A Study by Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore, 2003; for an overall view, Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Laura A. Benton (eds.), The Informal Economy – Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)
- <sup>20</sup> On this apart from several newspaper reports in 2006-07, see Flavia Agnes, “The bar dancer and the Trafficked Migrant – Globalisation and the Subaltern Existence”, Refugee Watch, 30, December 2007, pp. 19-35
- <sup>21</sup> Anjana Pradhan, “Pushed to the Wall”, Times of India (Bangalore edition), 18 May 2008
- <sup>22</sup> “Illegality spread: Responsibility to Curb Human Trafficking Rests on Society” – A Report by Manjumohan Mukherjee, The Statesman, 25 June 2008
- <sup>23</sup> RUS, p. 49
- <sup>24</sup> The Supreme Court in the case of Bandhua Mukti Morcha (1984/SCC 389) held that even piece rated worker is entitled for minimum wages. However, different minimum wages may be fixed for different employments and different classes of work in the same employment. Likewise it can be varying according to hour, day, month, or any other prescribed wage period.
- <sup>25</sup> Findings of a study on Orissa migrant women workers; see “Impact of Increasing Migration of Women in Orissa”, p. 11
- <sup>26</sup> “ILO Convention on Fish-Workers” in Labour File, 23 June 2008, [www.labourfile.org](http://www.labourfile.org)
- <sup>27</sup> RUS, pp. 167-67
- <sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1 (Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling / First English Edition, 1887), Part 8, Chapter 26, “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation” - <http://www.marx.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch26.htm>
- <sup>29</sup> See the discussion in William Sites, “Primitive Globalisation? State and Locale in Neo-Liberal Global Engagement”, Sociological Theory, 18 (1), March 2000, pp. 121-144
- <sup>30</sup> “Knowing the Worker -- The Tannery Majdur of Tangra”, see note 14
- <sup>31</sup> The instances are many; for an insightful analysis around the instance of New Orleans in the United States after Hurricane Katrina, see Benedict Seymour, “Drowning by Numbers, or the Non-Reproduction of New Orleans”, February 2006, <http://thelondonparticular.org/items/drowning.html>; to get an overview of the entire process in the current context, see Lara Coleman, “The Gendered Violence of Development: Imaginative Geographies of Exclusion in the Imposition of Neo-liberal Capitalism”, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 9 (2), 2007, pp. 204–219
- <sup>32</sup> Judy Whitehead, “Space, Place, and Primitive Accumulation in Narmada Valley”, Economic and Political Weekly, 38 (40), 4-10 October, 2003, pp. 4224-4230
- <sup>33</sup> On the significance of new enclosures, Soumitra Bose, “Special Economic Zones: Neo-liberal Enclosures In India”, Radical Notes, 17 May 2007, [www.countercurrents.org/bose170507.htm](http://www.countercurrents.org/bose170507.htm) / 050608; see also, Radical Notes by Pratyush Chandra and Dipankar Basu, 9 February 2007, <http://www.countercurrents.org/chandra090207.htm>
- <sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, (1867, New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 896.
- <sup>35</sup> Jan Breman, Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 23
- <sup>36</sup> Capital, Volume 1, p. 926; Marx wrote, “Tantae molis erat, to establish the “eternal laws of Nature” of the capitalist mode of production, to complete the process of separation between labourers and conditions of labour, to transform, at one pole, the social means of production and subsistence into capital, at the opposite pole, the mass of the population into wage-labourers, into “free labouring poor,” that artificial product of modern society. If money,

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According to Augier, “comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek,” capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.” – see also, <http://www.marx.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm>

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of the debates on primitive accumulation, see Rodney Hilton (ed). The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (London: Verso, 1978); see also Massimo De Angelis, “Marx’s Theory of Primitive Accumulation - A Suggested Reinterpretation”, March 1999 –

<http://homepages.uel.ac.uk/M.DeAngelis/PRIMACCA.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

<sup>39</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 3 (1894; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 354

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse (1858, New York: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 459; see also –

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm#p459>

<sup>41</sup> Grundrisse, p. 459

<sup>42</sup> R. Munck, Globalisation and Labour – The New Great Transformation (New Delhi: Madhyam Books, 2002); For reflections of this on the Indian situation, see, A. Chakrabarti and B. Dasgupta, “Disinterring the Report of National Commission on Labour – A Marxist Perspective”, Economic and Political Weekly, XLII (21), 26 May 2007; A Chakrabarti and A. Dhar, “Labour, Class, and Economy – Rethinking Trade Union Struggle”, Economic and Political Weekly, 31 May 2008

<sup>43</sup> There is a great need to integrate the writings of Charles Tilly on the history of collective actions in Great Britain in the political accounts of primitive accumulation. See for instance, C. Tilly, Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Social Movements, 1768-2004 (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), Chapter 3, “Nineteenth-Century Adventures”, pp. 38-64; also his Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834