Situating Transit Labour

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As part of the Calcutta Research Group's work on Transit Labour, we publish here four presentations on the idea of transit labour, reflecting on a larger platform on new forms of labour in the global context. These presentations serve to complicate the idea partially by historicising it and partially by expanding its scope. In other words, while one view of 'transit labour' looks at it as a form peculiar to sectors of the economy that have been generated by the post-Fordist global political economic structures and networks, these lectures suggest that the applicability of the concept has deeper historical roots and extends to what is hitherto considered as more traditional sectors. The concept of transit labour has, in this context, taken on a more protean, multivalent dimension. This volume presents four notes on transit labour.

Engaging With the Idea of 'Transit Labour'

Samita Sen [*]

How do we conceptualise 'transit labour'? I would suggest that we see this at the intersection of two major conceptual grids characterising the understanding of labour in the present: first, transitional forms of labour, which are inextricably related to transitions in mode of production, involving change in forms of labour arrangements, shifts in, creation or closures of labour markets, and in types and structures of labour deployment; and, second, transitory labour, which may be considered in chronological/empirical frame to denote changing and shifting patterns of employment or, in a more particularised sense, may address questions of labour mobility, both physical and structural.

Let me address first some of the major historical questions associated with labour in a transitional stage. The context most relevant to our discussion of changing labour regimes in areas brought arbitrarily and rapidly into processes of urbanisation - that we are now discussing - is some of the conceptual issues associated with debates about the transition to capitalism. Traditional pre-capitalist economies are believed to be characterised by settled and stable labour arrangements or at least social and legal processes strive to achieve such forms of stability. Thus, forms of bondage seek to tie peasants to land (serfdom) or the artisan to masters/workshops (guild systems). This is not to say that there are no exceptions. Recent research has shown that in Europe, for instance, journeymen had a great more mobility than was previously imagines (thus named 'journey'men) and wage labour made an early appearance around the 13th or 14th centuries, especially in the context of sailors and seafarers. Nevertheless, the dominant trope of labour arrangement was to tie labour down and the denial of mobility facilitated the extraction of surplus. Thus, capitalism's primary slogan was 'freedom' - to 'free' labour from being tied down in a variety of forms of indenture or servitude. That this 'freedom' meant in fact a limited legal freedom allowing labour to contract for its own exploitation is an old and much told story into which we need not go into just now. For our purpose today, what I would like to emphasise is the myriad resonances of this idea of 'freedom': in its classical historical (and conceptual) form - legally, it meant individuation of labour, physically it meant the migration from countryside to towns and cities and sectorally it meant a shift from the land to the factory. Such shifts were associated with wider social changes — the transformation of the family, the erosion of religion and ecclesiastical controls, the subversion of existing social hierarchies, including those of gender and generation. In one view, these changes effected a major social transformation, empowering the individual vis-à-vis family and community; in another view, social change was (or had to be) slowed down or managed to preserve social order, thus ensuring that institutions such as the family were not fully incorporated into the regime of contract and exchange; in yet a third view, many of these social changes were more apparent than real, capitalism worked by scripting existing social hierarchies within its fold, thus transforming but neither subverting nor eliminating hierarchical relations of race, caste, gender and community.

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Whatever view one may take of the wider meanings and implications of individuation of labour, the mobilisation of labour in its more limited sense was a critical aspect of capitalist development. In colonial India, the advent of capitalism in the mid- to late nineteenth century, signalled a massive mobilisation of labour in the non-agrarian sector. There was short-term and long-term employment in public works such as the railways and in public services such as the army, in small-scale artisan occupations and cottage industries, for large-scale industries such as jute, cotton, and mining, in the urban service sector including municipal works, personal and domestic services and entertainment trades, and for plantations both within the country and overseas, such as tea, coffee, sugar and rubber. Many of these employments involved migration for varying distances and periods, ranging between local week-end commuting to permanent settlement in distant lands. Some 2.5 million people travelled to Assam to work in the tea gardens; about 1.5 people left India to work in sugar and rubber plantations across the world.

The history of early industrial capitalism in colonial India demonstrates one kind of tension between the different understandings of the wider social concerns of labour mobilisation discussed above. The British, even as they managed the millions on the move within and out of India, playing critical roles as regulators, employers and recruiters, persisted with a paradoxical approach to the labour question. On the one hand, a stated commitment to 'free labour' remained the watchword of the colonial state, overseas emigration of Indian labour being justified by the abolition of slavery (needless to say this did not prevent their acquiescence and active involvement with forms of labour regulation that involved draconian regimes of indenture). On the other hand, they continued to uphold (and frequently devised labour strategies based on the belief) that Indian society continued to be organised around and was committed to the self-sufficient village economy, bound by family, caste and community. In this imagination, the Indian peasant was immobile, immune to pressures of poverty and incentives of wage; the Indian woman was of course even more circumscribed, imprisoned behind *purdah*. Suspicious of the evidence generated by their own bureaucracy, the higher reaches of British policy-making continued to believe that Indian labour required inordinate levels of pushing to work at all and complex hierarchical structures of supervision when they did.

Employers adopted different, sometimes contrasting labour strategies, depending on the scale of labour mobilisation. In the case of the Assam tea plantations, for example, employers failed in their attempt to mobilise local labour. Not only because population was itself sparse in the remote locations of the gardens, but because local labour could not be disciplined into the cheap labour regime desired by planters. The solution - the import of workers from the plains of Bengal and Bihar, the hills of Chota Nagpur (and later, the forests of Chhattisgarh) - was an expensive one. The cost of transportation was enormous, and added to that was attrition - desertion and mortality undercut planters' long-term plans of stability and settlement, reaching unprecedented peaks at times with employers losing four out of 10 recruits. The response to such difficulties was to legislatively produce stability - the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act (1859) allowed for 'contract', even assuming that the process of recruitment allowed for 'free' entry into the labour contract, the Act closed the possibility of voluntary exit, thus simultaneously proletarianising and de-proletarianising plantation labour. The dracocian indenture regime produced in the tea 'gardens' required an elaborate regulative machinery in which employers and the colonial state colluded. By contrast, urban industries, such as jute and cotton mills, benefited from existing streams of migration. Millowners were not required to undertake recruitment and transportation of labour and the primary thrust of their strategy was to pass on the costs of migration and reproduction on to the workers. To this end, they produced a highly casualised labour force operating within an economy of surplus, best represented by the institution of '*badli*', which allowed for a highly replaceable workforce, a significant proportion of

hiring being by day and at the factory gates. These represented two ends of a spectrum of labour strategies: one aimed at locally self-reproducing settled communities of labour and the other a highly casualised labour force, which allowed short-term adjustments to the vagaries of the market.

Over time, both these kinds of labour were formalised. If early capitalism undercut the stability of pre-capitalist labour regimes, in the period after the First World War and in India the Second, concerted efforts were made towards new kinds of stabilisation of labour and the rhetoric was of 'protection' and 'rights'. In the Indian case, early attempts at this began in the 1920s and 30s, as factories, mines and plantations were brought under regulatory regimes with minimum welfare measures, monitoring of wage and working conditions. These processes speeded up after Independence. In these three decades, some enclaves of labour had been unionised. As federated trade unions became affiliated to political parties, they were able to influence policy sufficiently to win much greater protection in terms of wage, working conditions, influence over hiring, and employment security. This process reversed the process of casualisation in some enclaves, but of course, left the vast majority in the same situation as before. In the plantations, the indenture system was gradually dismantled beginning from 1915 and after Independence, legislation brought new kinds of regulative control over employment exit. In these enclaves, which came to be known as the 'formal' or the 'organised' sector, comprising about 10 per cent of the working population of the country, an increasingly male workforce found some measure of social welfare and protection, could aspire to the single male breadwinner family and upward social mobility. This provided for a more stable regime of labour upheld by powerful strategies of collective bargaining and reflecting new political confidence on part of certain segments of labour. This political settlement, one could expansively hold it to encompass six decades between 1920 and 1980 may be termed the 'Age of Regulation'.

Our immediate context begins in the 1980s, which quickened in the 1990s, with the advent of New Economic Policy in India, but is related to wider global trends which dismantled Fordist regimes of industry, ushered in a new international division of labour and witnessed a hunt for cheap labour across the world by an unprecedented mobile industrial and finance capital. In the age of multi- or trans-national corporations, the dismantling of stable labour regimes (which had complemented Fordist industry) has become the key to profit-making. In this economic environment, organised labour has seen the erosion of its hard-won political stake and an assault on precisely those regulative mechanisms which was productive of (or desired to produce) an enclave of a stable labour regime. In the last three decades, thus, we have witnessed the slow dismantling of regulative regimes, more direct and violent confrontations between labour and capital and the undercutting of organised labour. A major aspect of the changing labour scenario is the expansion of the 'informal', which is now appearing as appendages within the erstwhile 'formal' sector as well as reaching higher and lower within the economic spectrum. Thus, even government supplements administrative staff by 'contract' workers; while in the upper reaches of the informal sector, lucrative wages/salaries offset the disadvantages of impermanency. How do we understand these new processes of a new kind of casualisation of labour? It is my contention that placing the process of casualisation we are witnessing today in the historical context I have sketched briefly and in skeletal outline here will help us understand better both the process itself as well as its wider social ramifications. And these, I expect, will be addressed in more detail by the following papers.

'Transit' Labour in Mumbai City

Mouleshri Vyas [*]

Background

In a rapidly urbanising world, cities are seen as centres of growth, of opportunities and of development. In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population of more than 1 million. In 2015 there will be at least 550[1]. This shift towards a largely urban world has been a complex phenomenon with varied histories and trends in different countries. The Report on Indian Infrastructure and Services (2011), projects that India's urban population will be close to 600 million by 2031 which is more than double that in 2001. Cities with a population of 1 million and above numbered 35 in 2001; are 50 in 2011; and will increase to 87 by 2031. The growth in size of Indian cities is a result of expansion of the peripheries with smaller municipalities and villages becoming part of the municipal areas. The report goes on to say, "As (more) cities provide economies of agglomeration and scale for clusters of industries and other non-agricultural economic activity, the urban sector will become the principle engine for stimulating national economic growth" (p. 24). Increasing urbanisation will result in increase in demand of produce other than food grains leading to increasing investment in infrastructure, logistics, retailing, processing, packaging, etc. Such growth will build linkages and synergy between rural and urban areas.

Spatially, therefore, as cities grow, they expand and engulf the peripheral small towns and cities such that it is not only a city, but a region that develops as an urban centre. Concomitantly, urban infrastructure and public transport become priority areas to be developed and improved. The National Mission on Sustainable Habitat (2010), one of the eight missions under the National Climate Change Action Plan, aims to make cities sustainable through efficient management of solid waste, public transport and so on (ibid; p. 27). This is borne out in cities such as Mumbai which have witnessed large-scale transport and infrastructure development projects in the first decade of this millennium.

> Along with housing for the poor, mobility is a major contributor to inclusive development. Transit-oriented development planning and trip-reduction zoning followed by countries like Singapore and the USA (e.g. locating the poor in high-density settlements on major metropolitan public transport nodes) are yet to be adopted in India. Planning for Indian cities has tended to ignore transportation. The master planning system has not focused on spatial planning for the urban poor to provide them 'a place to live', 'a place to work', 'a place to sell', and public transport to move from one place to another. Urban transport can also play a major role in increasing access to services like education and healthcare for the poor as well as strengthening social networks (p. 99).

> As the capital of Maharashtra, the second most urbanised state in India (46.2 per cent), Greater Mumbai's population has gone up to 22.7 million in 2011 from 9.4 million in 1981.

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[1] UN Population Division, *World Urbanisation Prospects,* The 2001 Revision, New York, 2002: Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, 2006

The city, once a leading industrial centre, has now become a tertiary economy, with just one-third of the male workers and one-fifth of the female workers employed in the secondary sector (manufacturing and construction) in 1999-00 as per the data from National Sample Survey. The rest of the workers are in the tertiary sector. But, less than 20 per cent of the male workers in this year are employed in higher end tertiary sector (Mahadevia 2005; ibid: 2011), indicating a predominance of low-end jobs in the tertiary sector in the city, and poor income levels. More than half the city's population lives in low-income settlements, in conditions of poverty and labours as part of the informal and amorphous workforce.

The story of the growth of cities like Mumbai is the story of migration from all parts of the country into this urban centre, and continues to be so, the regional politics around the insider-outsider notwithstanding. In this urban development, there has been the massive input of migrant labour – from smaller towns and cities and rural areas. Over several decades, the city has been the receptacle of the labour of these migrants. However what the migrants as the working poor receive from it is much less than what they contribute. With the growth in number of urban centres and in the size of cities like Mumbai, the requirement for labour increases while the policies and institutions for the governance of the cities, and of labour, impose certain conditions within which this labour must interact with the city. Large sections of labour in the informal sector build the city, and yet remain on its periphery in more than the physical sense of the term. Their struggle to find a foothold in living and work spaces keeps them steadily on the move within the city and between the city and its hinterland.

In examining 'transit' labour in the context of Mumbai, some features that define it and perhaps set it apart from other cities, need to be noted: as the financial capital of the country, it has a particular profile of business and industry, that has undoubtedly undergone significant change in the past few decades; the vision of makeover of the city along the lines of Shanghai that was much publicised and critiqued, came from the idea that a 'clean' city would attract investment. However, policies aimed at cleaning and organising the city have pushed the poor into greater struggles for shelter and livelihoods. The city continues to attract migrants from other districts in the state and various parts of the country, leading to a continual building and rebuilding of its spaces, since the physical space crunch today, as well as the requirement for basic services and infrastructure, has assumed different dimensions today than it had even a decade ago. The agenda for urban development in what is now the Mumbai Metropolitan Region is not tension-free. There are claims and counter-claims with political, economic and social interests holding active stakes, often in collusion with each other. This sets the idea of 'transit' labour in Mumbai in a complex terrain.

To begin with, since the concept of 'transit' conveys a sense of physical movement, the theoretical underpinnings for the discussion can be located in the discourse on work and residence geographies; more than eight decades have passed since the Chicago School's pioneering work on work and residence geographies.

There is every reason to believe that the difference between segregation at home and work has increased; metropolitan areas have changed in many ways, and residential neighborhoods remain stubbornly segregated while some notable strides have occurred in workplace desegregation. The dispersion of jobs across metropolitan areas means that workers more likely commute beyond the boundaries of their community for employment than before. Zelinsky and Lee (1998, p. 288), for example, comment on the growing "spatial disjuncture between home and work" as a "distinct departure from the intra-metropolitan circulation patterns of earlier generations of immigrants"... Two strands of theory, one spatial in emphasis and originating in geography, the other focused on

social networks and based in sociology, provide insights into the relationship between residential and workplace segregation.[2] (Is the last sentence two strands…segregation part of the quote?)

In the globalising world, the above analysis based on spatiality, is found to be inadequate and David Held and his co-authors have argued persuasively that, "As economic, social and political activities are increasingly 'stretched' across the globe they become in a significant sense no longer primarily or solely organised according to a territorial principle" (Held et al., 1999: pp. 27-8; Munck, 2002: p. 4). Globalisation, in the shape of its prime economic agent, the giant corporation, does indeed cut across political frontiers in a way which leads to deterritorialisation. Munck however, argues that 'counter-tendencies' such as 'new' localism and 'new' regionalism with cities and regions renegotiating globalisation is a type of re-territorialisation. Ash Amin rejects "the *territorial* idea of sequestered spatial logics – local, national, continental and global – pitted against each other" (Amin, 1997: p. 133; Munck, 2002: p. 172). These are not separate 'places' but, rather, intermixed social relations. Thus labour cannot really pursue a progressive strategy of transformation based on territorial units; rather, it needs to take account of the hybrid and interdependent social logic of globalisation/regionalisation/localisation (Munck: p. 172).[3]

That one needs to go beyond territory in the understanding of labour and the issues it is confronted with in the present context, and grasp its interlockedness with social relations, seems to be clear from the above quoted argument. However, laying out key questions that I think need to be dealt with in unpacking the concept of transit labour seems to be in order at the outset:

- How would one attempt to explore the concept in the context of Mumbai? In effect, in locating this discussion within the city as space, as a unit of administration, as a set of social, political and economic relations and dynamic, the idea of the territorial cannot be rejected.
- Secondly, in transcending the territorial, what are the possible pivotal concepts that can be used?
- Thirdly, is it possible that transit labour exhibits certain unique or distinctive features that set it apart from other categories, such as informal labour? Is it an independent category or one that is embedded in existing segments of labour?
- If certain features of transit labour can be delineated within the economy of the city and region, what are the implications for urban and city planning, in particular?

In attempting to address these questions, the following three sections focus on *examining transit labour in a web of relations; as types of work and therefore the transitory nature defined in terms of the nature of work; and lastly, the implications of transit labour.*

1. Conceptualising Transit Labour Beyond Territory

Cities across the world follow different trajectories and rationales for their growth. In some instances, it is possible to demarcate specific regions as transit zones or areas, due to the nature of economies that build it into a hub of a particular kind. For instance, the Chicagoland area has long been a critical node of goods movement in the United States. Chicago grew with the westward expansion of railroads in the 1800s, and became a trade centre for meat and grain. It is the only place in North

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[2] Mark Ellis, Richard Wright, Virginia Parks, 2004: *Work Together, Live Apart? Geographies of Racial and Ethnic Segregation at Home and at Work*; Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 94, No. 3 (Sep., 2004), pp.620-637 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3693933 .Accessed: 30/08/2011 09:06

[3] Munck, Ronaldo. 2002: Globalisation and Labour – The New 'Great Transformation'; Madhyam Books, Delhi.

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America where six Class I railroads meet, creating links between all corners of the continent. Today logistics in this area is growing and it is the top logistics location in the country. This growth means creation of many new jobs. "Workers in warehouses load and unload trucks, stack, pack, sort and move goods by hand or forklift, maintain shipping and receiving records, and perform other functions that allow for the efficient movement of goods."[4]

It emerges from this study of the Chicago area that a majority of the workers are in temporary or seasonal employment with layers of contracting often making it difficult for the worker to know which company is his or her employer. It appears that in situating the concept of transit labour spatially, we would be highlighting the historical growth of a region, certain types of work that make it into a transit hub for manufacturing and transportation etc., the nature of jobs that the hub offers, as well as the terms of employment and its fallouts for labour.

Moving ahead from this point towards interrogating transit labour beyond geographies, in complex areas such as metropolitan regions and cities, there seem to be three key aspects within which this discussion can be situated: the first being the nature of migration into cities over a period of time, as an ongoing phenomenon; the second, the sectoral profile of labour demand and supply, flexibility, and employment opportunities; and the third, the governance of the city and of labour. All of these could lead to a conceptualisation of transit labour as a phenomenon and process that is more fluid in nature.

Migration into cities is a feature of many third world cities; its impact on the city and its people has a temporal, socio-cultural as well as economic dimension. The waves of migrants that enter a city space over the decades therefore find themselves absorbed or not absorbed in avenues of work opportunities they seek. Those who join the ranks of the working poor in the city, struggle to find shelter or spaces and make them habitable over several years. Over the years, the city expands outwards and within the city too, there are the more and less preferred spaces that start getting occupied depending on the economic and social status of the settlers. The working poor in the informal sector set up shelters within shrinking and unaffordable spaces – in slum settlements, along railway tracks and even inside unused water pipelines; there is, in fact, a hierarchy of spaces that is created over a period of time with the poorer people in the least preferred spaces. Needless to add, it is the market mechanism and the real estate lobby in cities like Mumbai that greatly influences the valuation of properties and areas in the city.

With migrants in certain cities of India, citizenship is now to be transacted formally in a politically and economically determined context. Some sections of labour will therefore always be in transit, living with uncertainty, and lacking social insecurity due to disconnect between governance institutions and mechanisms in places of origin and of new settlement. For not very different reasons, some are what Breman refers to as 'footloose' labour, those men, women and children who comprise a reserve army of labour, whose presence is often not acknowledged and whose muted voices remain unheard. As circular migrants, they face many hardships and are the victims of the transnationalised politics of development (2010: p. 24). He goes on to say that the informal sector is not a stepping stone towards a better and settled urban life but a temporary abode for labour which can be pushed back to its place of origin when no longer needed.[5]

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[4] Bad Jobs in Goods Movement: Warehouse Work in Will County, Illinois: Report by Warehouse Workers for Justice, 2010

[5] Breman, Jan. 1994: *Wage Hunters and Gatherers: Search for Work in the Urban and Rural Economy of South Gujarat*, New Delhi: OUP

As a second aspect, in unpacking the nature of employment sectorally, there is an internal hierarchy or arrangement and continuum of formal to informal employment that is in evidence in each sector. This is explained in part by the segmentation theory that

…focuses upon the question of how compensation, working conditions and training/promotion opportunities are linked to the distribution of power in society and the way market activities are structured and institutionalized. It posits segments, whether labour markets or, more generally, economic sectors or work worlds. The theory has developed essentially as a critique of, or supplement to, explanations of employment-based differential life chances which are cast in terms of individual characteristics, human capital or economic qualities. The main segmentation argument is that inequalities and inequities are in large measure a function of the way work is organized in modern society.[6] (Apostle et al; Pg 252) (Page number in footnote and page number here different)

For instance, in solid waste management (SWM) in a city of a specific size, there would be waves of employment and of absorption of workers and therefore changes in work opportunities over a period of time. Spatiality and temporality interlock to open up and to close certain kinds of jobs in the city. Urban local bodies (ULBs) today are severely reducing recruitment for permanent jobs in certain departments, such as SWM. However, due to rapid growth of urban centres like Mumbai, the requirement for workers in this department is on the rise. Hence, hiring on contract is a common practice across ULBs in India, creating a less privileged class of workers in the same sector. As lower rung jobs not demanding of skills, new entrants into the city find that they can be absorbed into such spaces, but not without daily negotiations at local levels and a steady set of informal transactions and relationship-building with sub-contractors.

Further, with urban expansion and growing populations in the cities, the enterprise of people struggling to survive finds expression in a large number of avenues for self-employment. New markets are created and developed over a period of time and these grow into sectors that absorb more people through creation of different sets of employer-employee and buyer-seller equations.

Thirdly, governance of cities and of labour, and the nature of policies and shifts in them over the years, has impacted specific arenas of employment and, in particular, the urban poor that constitute the informal sector in these arenas. These have determined the extent, nature and content of transaction between labour and the state as well as the boundaries for claim-making by labour. Breman regards informality as a dimension of governance and holds that the struggle for a better deal leads various sections of labour to compete with each other in a narrow bargaining space.[7] In SWM for instance, the Municipal Solid Waste Rules brought into force in the year 2000, have emphasised door-to-door collection of waste, cutting off the waste pickers' access to waste and pitting them against the collection and transportation workers employed by the ULBs as standard or non-standard workers. In this scenario, there are at least three segments of workers affected by such a policy shift. As another illustration, the policy of the city administration towards the street vendors has brought to the surface the conflict between street vendors and residents' associations as well as that between the former and the local authorities.

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[6] Richard Apostle, Don Clairmont, Lars Osberg, 1985: *Segmentation and Labour Force Strategies;* The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie, Vol. 10, No. 3; (Summer, 1985), pp. 253-275; Published by: Canadian Journal of Sociology; Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3339972; Accessed: 30/08/2011 08:20

[7] Breman, Jan. 2010: Outcast Labour in Asia: Circulation and Informalization of the Workforce at the Bottom of the Economy; New Delhi; OUP

The interlocking of migration, sectoral labour requirements and employment opportunities, and governance and policy framework, create a web-like situation for informal labour – one where it is in flux, where there is constant negotiation and claim-making through both formal and informal mechanisms, resulting in some segments of labour always being in transit on an everyday basis in cities in various parts of the world. In those where poverty, inequality and the informal economy are in evidence, the dynamic takes place in a specific physical direction as well. Mechanisms of governance and governmentality seem to reinforce the directions and scale of the flow of labour. Social stratification plays a role in determining who moves, where and for what purpose. To sum up this argument, recent migrants into the city, those with insecure terms of employment as casual and contract workers in certain sectors, and sections of labour that do not have positive experience of processes and policies of governance, can be seen as essentially in transit. From the city, the arena of employment and the state, they are not supported to anchor and secure themselves.

2. Nature of 'Transit' in Mumbai

Based on the discussion in the earlier section, three dimensions of transit labour in Mumbai are outlined below. They draw from: transitory jobs, work entailing physical movement across the expanse of the city, and the transitory nature of the very lives of people, and particularly the urban poor in the city.

Transitory Jobs and Sectors in Transition - *Difficult and Precarious Work*

In the hierarchy of jobs and work that is done to build and maintain cities and urban spaces, there are certain types of work that are undertaken as a last resort. They are at the bottom rung of the informal economy. While the idea is not to undervalue in any way the contributions of large sections of 'invisible' workers in the city, it is a fact that most often jobs of cleaning the city streets, garbage collection and transportation, maintenance of sewage lines, public toilets and so on, are taken on by people in extremely tenuous conditions of employment and poor conditions of work, due to an absence of any alternative source of survival. One of the clear indicators of these being transit jobs is that few of the workers would say that they want their children to get into the same jobs. Those who get into such work often do so with the hope that they will move out as soon as they get something better. In many cases, it is difficult to exit from such a job as the alternative does not present itself to this generation and it is only the next that is able to make the shift. Some aspects of this element of transit are evident with very exploitative conditions of women in prostitution, where the raging and value-laden debate is about whether it is 'work' at all, or quite simply exploitation of women. With cleaning jobs, the sheer negativity and filth of the working conditions is so strong that it overpowers even the advantage of standard employment. Hence permanent workers in municipal employment are seen to get casual workers to do the job for them. Lack of protective gear and any social security make this work extremely precarious.

The subjectivities of these dimensions of work are not easy to capture through short-term research and practice, but emerge in extended interactions with workers. In essence, these are jobs that are unpleasant and socially stigmatised, which workers would like to get out of whenever possible.

At another level, there are sectors in transition, which therefore put the labour in a state of flux. This is evident with SWM in ULBs across the country. Increasing privatisation of services such

as SWM has led to questions about the role of the state in protecting the interests of the labour that is now being engulfed by the contract system. Multiplicity of agencies, of employer-employer relationships and breaking up of tasks are features of this emergent regime. Conservancy workers in cities like Mumbai travel across 30-40 km of the city with the collected solid waste to landfill sites; they are just one category of labour in the city that travels significant distances, at cost of time and money to deal with changed equations with the city space and shrinking scope for negotiation. The altered nature of work, spatial fragmentation of labour, creation of newer categories of labour by policy and governance regimes result in the distancing of the labour from the city in both, the work and life domains.

The details of SWM in Mumbai given below outline some of the jobs that are performed as well as the scale of operations in the sector. Implicit is the fact of insecure terms of employment for large segments of workers, which is seeing an increase due to the advance of privatisation of service provision by ULBs.

> The per capita generation of wastes in Mumbai is about 630 gm. per person per day (MCGM 2004). The quantity of municipal solid waste generated within Greater Mumbai is 7,800 MT per day. Of this, the waste generation in the island city is 48 per cent, when its population is just 27.92 per cent of Greater Mumbai's population.
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> There is higher share of the island city in the total garbage generated than its proportionate share in total population because, the island city, being major employment centre, gets a large proportion of floating population, in the day time. The solid waste is in the form of regular garbage from households, debris, silt removed from the drains, nallas, cow dung and waste matter removed from gullies between the houses.
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> In Mumbai, there is manual sweeping of all the public roads on a day-to-day basis. In selected areas such as the arterial roads and the main station roads, sweeping is carried out during the night hours. The total length of streets in Mumbai is 1,800 km. To successfully cover the entire length, the area is divided into 'beats'… A pair of sweepers is assigned a single beat. There are around 4,200 beats for entire Greater Mumbai and about 8,400 staff for this activity alone. Wastes thus collected are deposited in nearby community dustbin containers, which are provided by the MCGM.
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> Of the total population of Greater Mumbai, 83 per cent is served by the community bin collection system and 15 per cent by door-to-door collection. This is being further strengthened under the implementation of the MSW Rules, 2000. Garbage collectors employed by various housing societies manually collect the waste generated at the household level and dump it in the garbage bin at specified street corners. Collection of waste from community bins is carried out once in 24 hours. There are about 6,300 community dustbins of different designs and construction provided throughout the 5,500 waste collection points in Greater Mumbai for collection and temporary storage of the all waste other than the debris, silt etc.
>
> Transportation of waste is carried out by using different types of vehicles depending on the distances to be covered by them. 60 per cent of waste is transported through stationary compactors, mobile compactors and closed tempos; 10 per cent is through partially open dumpers whereas 20 per cent is through tarpaulin-covered vehicles, which includes silt and debris…For primary collection, transportation and disposal, MCGM deploys 141 refuse vehicles for the city region and 120 for the suburbs. The maximum trips made by the municipal vehicles in a day are 425 and that by the Contractor vehicles are 660 and the minimum number is 395 and 651 respectively (MCGM 2004).[8]

The nature of work keeps labour on the move literally and in terms of creating a system of flexibility to serve the profit-making interests of the employers, the policies and governance

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[8] Mahadevia; Darshini, Bela Pharate and Amit Mistry, 2005: SP Working Paper Series; Working Paper No. 35; New Practices of Waste Management - Case of Mumbai; December 2005; School of Planning; CEPT University, Ahmedabad. (pp.1-8)

mechanism ensure that they are temporary, hemmed in by conditions of informality, and therefore unable to break out of this circle of poor wages and working conditions, lack of social protection and access to decent housing and other services for the family.

Work Based on Physical Mobility - *Life and Work on Local Trains in the City*

An outsider to the city of Mumbai said, "People in this city are always on the move…and in a rush to get somewhere…!" There is a question implicit in this statement – to do with *where* people are going. There is something about the pace of Mumbai and its people's preoccupation with making a living that defines its core character. In this light, it would not be amiss to examine the concept of transit labour in a more literal sense of those physically on the move in the course of everyday work.

The Mumbai Suburban Railway, built as an offshoot of the first railway built by the British in 1853, today ferries 6.9 million commuters every day. It is the principal mode of mass transport in Mumbai. This pulsating lifeline of the city carries the sweat, the aspirations and the crowd of passengers segregated in the general or ladies' compartment and by the first class and second class coaches; it is a cultural cauldron of the city. Covering more than 460 route kilometres (?), there are more than 2,300 services each day.

The Koli women returning at 5 a.m. from purchasing fish from the wharf, the *dabbawalas* at work during late morning to evening hours, the hawkers selling their wares through the day, and the office-goers, packed four in a seat during the peak hours, are just some of the citizens who spend significant parts of their lives on the trains. Bound by a journey of a certain number of minutes or hours, trains allow for purposeful social connections bridging the physical distances of the place of work and place of stay for some hours each day. The fact that urban lives are organised with a premium on time, allows for repeated contact among certain individuals and groups on a daily basis and year after year. Sometimes this contact and the relationships that are built span several years and move into spaces beyond the train journey.

As with the garbage collection and transportation workers, the vendors on the local trains travel large distances each day. Young boys, girls, men and women move from one compartment of the train to another selling anything from hairclips, cosmetics, garments, handbags, ready-to-eat food items, to even fresh vegetables and fruits, are a common sight on the trains. With some there is a friendly banter that regular commuters engage in and purchasing goods on credit is also not uncommon. Conversations, cries of the hawkers, the sound of bhajans are some of the familiar noises in a local train.

All consumers of these goods will affirm that these men and women selling their wares on the trains actually render a service to the commuter who prefers to shop while on the move rather than making a stop at a market on the way home. Conceptually a part of the informal economy of the city, this massive mobile network of service providers that works and to a great extent lives around the railway stations, leads a life of everyday challenges. Underlying these informal interactions is a subtle conflict and element of territoriality that exists in the beats of the hawkers. With those selling similar wares, there are designated stations where one boards or alights; with the younger ones working alongside the elders there is evidence of familial and kinship ties. The railway authorities control the small businesses and activities at the station platforms and also on the trains; this governmentality results in a state of perpetual anxiety that the hawkers function under. Control of these fluid spaces and ambiguity in their governance makes for a situation where nothing really changes in terms of the real economics of it, the bribes that have to be paid and constant

intimidation and spectre of authority that looms large over the hundreds who make a living on the trains.

Lives in Transit and Work in Transit - *Transit Camps and Transit Labour*

With heavy investment in infrastructure development in the city in the past decade, the internal displacement of people has transformed the social fabric and the geographies of several communities. In the city of Mumbai, there are about 32 resettlement colonies across 11 civic wards with a total of 449 buildings housing about 35,000 displaced project-affected families (*Hindustan Times*, 28 April 2011).

This transition from slum life to more gentrified neighbourhoods and formal housing has meant a re-orientation of relationships within the family and the community, and re-building of lives and livelihoods. As jobs and work suffered due to the fracture of space and work links, there came into the lives of these families an uncertain phase of transition from one life to another where they perhaps did not have the space for claim-making and asserting citizenship rights. Studies conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Studies have shown that the distances for commuting increased, the access to services became costly and cumbersome and some people simply gave up the struggle, pushing new members of the family into the workforce.[9]

These altered spaces create new equations of governance; a modification from the informal to the formal and an overall dominance of the state and its institutions over the citizens, who are defined and re-defined through policies and directions that are compelled by a neo-liberal development paradigm. Several years down the line, these individuals and their families are still in transition.

The extent of internal and involuntary displacement in cities such as Mumbai is significant. The perspectives of the state, the voluntary agencies and the displaced people are divergent. Even from among the displaced population, there are likely to be multiple subjectivities, rendering this a complex terrain to analyse. However, the involuntary nature of the displacement is a manifestation of the conflict of citizens with the state and the power exercised by it to make the latter submit to its plans and the 'public purpose' of infrastructure development.

3. Implications of Transit

While the above examination of the concept has been exploratory rather than definitive in nature, the discussion on transit labour would be incomplete without dwelling on its implications.

Lack of Representation

Breman says, "Ongoing labour circulation and lack of representation reinforce each other in a vicious circle. The constant coming in and going off again pre-empts the building up of cohesion and mutual trust that workers need to engage in collective action. Keeping the workers in a state of flux by instant hire and fire procedures is a strategy to which employers or their agents resort in order to avoid being confronted by the politics of solidarity from below. While the workforce thus remains unorganised, those who make use of their casual labour power find ways and means to coordinate

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[9] Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2007: Impact Assessment of MUTP R&R

their action. To call the informal sector unorganised is to overlook how employers operating in this vast terrain manage to lay down the terms of the contract by engaging in collective action"(2010: 20).

One of the inevitable consequences of such work is the absence of class consciousness among the workers. The fragility of the contact with co-workers and its transient nature mean that workers do not know each other and seldom speak about the similarity of work and conditions. Organising and unionising are extremely challenging and the connections and networks have to be built over a period of time, since the interactions are perhaps stronger and wider in the residential domain than in the work sphere.

The spatial and social fragmentation of labour that results from the structuring of sectors of work and employment and the temporariness of interactions that result from these makes any collectivisation a challenge.

Fleeting-ness of Contact with the City

Moving beyond the geographies of the place of work and residence, the city is the space and unit of governance that the residents and citizens belong to. One of the dimensions of transit labour is the brief and superficial connect that these workers have with the city. Labour that is always mobile in the course of doing the job, and especially if these are low paid low rung jobs finds itself without much of a choice regarding where to live and where to work. In examining the concept of fleeting-ness of contact, some significant aspects are: the nature of spaces that workers connect to; duration of contact with these spaces; and the extent of interaction with these spaces.

Conservancy workers for instance, start the day at the ward office or a spot on the streets where they report for work and their shift for the day. After this, the movement to and from the landfill site comprises the major part of the working day, with brief stops at the landfill to offload the garbage. While the attitude of the workers is largely that of getting on with the job, the ward offices and street corners are sites of manifestation of the authority of the state, for allocation of the task of the day and reporting by the workers to the representative of the municipal body. In handling the waste of the city, there is an element of not lingering on with it. The rake or shovel does the job of pushing it onto the truck or off it. This is also work that is impersonal in nature; there is not too much interaction with co-workers while on the job, and most physical contact with the waste. The landfill in the city has years of unprocessed waste forming a layered ground atop which the vehicles move and additional waste gets deposited every hour and every day.

Several of the urban poor shift residence from one settlement to another so frequently that their documentation in terms of proofs actually suffers and works to their disadvantage in a system that is now increasingly document-based.

The second dimension of superficial connect with the city is in the form of limited and difficult access to services that the city offers: health, education, social welfare. Attempts to access these institutionalised services for such sections of workers have shown the following:

- Inadequacy of services at specific locations, requiring the person to travel at a cost of time and money.
- Splintered service delivery leading the citizen to travel from one part of the city or one office to another to complete the process, often giving up without getting the job done, or finding an agent to help with it by paying a fee.
- Mechanism of exclusion/bias through procedures that are difficult to follow and need to be bridged. A simple illustration is the fact that an articulate or English-speaking person is often

able to get certain jobs done, whether it is making the case papers in a government-run hospital or arguing an issue at the labour commissioner's office.

- These difficulties result in a need for mediation by individuals or organisations.
- Conflict-based claim making becomes a necessity as nothing comes to the poor without a struggle; there are several instances of unions having to fight with government hospital authorities to get a worker admitted; accidents at work are not uncommon, and each case has to be fought through afresh as the system responds in parts.

Conclusion

To revert to the questions posited earlier, and in attempting to consolidate the discussion so far, there are three points that can be made: firstly, the idea of transit labour has several dimensions such as transitory nature of work, within, at times, sectors in transition, physical mobility as a necessity of the type of work, and lives of urban poor in transition due to internal displacement. There is a precariousness and social insecurity in these arenas of work that lead to the concept of 'transit' being embedded in the informal economy. Secondly, there is an intrinsic and subterranean conflict that runs through 'transit' labour. Starting perhaps with seeking of stability and therefore a subjective resistance to being in transit, each of these situations of transit demonstrates conflict between various sections – groups of workers, workers-state, workers-other citizens and so on. The concept is therefore uneven, contested and unclear. Lastly, many cities are today in transit in terms of governance, populations, spaces, and such aspects. In the multi-layered situations, and articulation and resolution of conflicts, labour also finds itself in transit – it is designed to be so in order to not destabilise existing class interests.

Cities of today are therefore hubs of transit labour; their histories determine the biographies of workers, while conditions of 'neo-bondage' shape the nature of their contact and contract with the city.[10] As the mechanisms of governance are deeply entrenched locally and at other levels, it would require a massive surge of worker class consciousness from segments that are fragmented and increasingly becoming so, to address issues of labour. There is therefore a strong case for greater emphasis on the study, conceptual delineating, and organising of transit labour.

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[10] Breman uses the term 'neo-bondage' to refer to the practices adopted by present-day employers to ensure a sufficient and cheap supply of labour (2010: p. 45)

Labour Landscape in the Capital

Babu P. Remesh[*]

In recent years, the National Capital Region (NCR) has witnessed an unprecedented boom in construction and development activities. Some of the major projects include construction of road infrastructure (flyoverss, subways and bypasses), building up of the Delhi metro network, works related to the re-construction and renovation of Delhi airport and the projects undertaken for the Commonwealth Games(CWG). There has also been a remarkable boom in construction activities due to the housing schemes in Delhi and all its satellite townships such as Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad and Ghaziabad.

The past one decade also saw the city transforming itself as a major hub for a new service sector economy (hosting a spectrum of offshored and outsourced work) and as a centre of investment for multinational corporations. All these transformations led to massive influx of migrant workers to the city – not only for construction work but also in several other emerging occupations and sectors of logistic provision. The active presence of migrant labour changed the city and its population profile and brought in new dimensions to the labour landscape and urban planning. While some of these migrants gradually became integrated to the mainstream life of Delhi, a majority of them still continue to be 'invisibly' contributing to the progress of the city and then leaving (or being pushed out) after their short spells of active interactions with the city space. Against this backdrop, the present essay attempts to discuss select aspects and emerging issues/concerns of labour in the NCR.

Sourcing of Workers/New Patterns of Migration

The profile of migrants to the city has undergone considerable changes in the past one decade, with new patterns of migration and new sets of migrant labour, whose presence is visibly felt in select activities/occupations. While the city continues to be host to migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and other prominent north Indian states, it has now an active presence of people from several other states and far-off destinations – including domestic help from Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh; drivers from Himachal Pradesh; and unskillte labour from West Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal; and the new economy/service sector workers from southern and northeastern states. Alongside the emergence of new patterns of migrant flows involving social and kinship networking, there have also been detailed systems of recruitment, the chains of which are systematically extended to far-off and remote source regions. On the one hand, there are workers who come to the city on their own (or with the help of social networks) and start their job hunt in labour *chowks* and as rickshaw-pullers and street vendors. On the other hand, there are efforts to recruit them systematically from interior villages, for specific purposes, with the help of intermediaries. Examples

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here include recruitment of domestic helps from tribal pockets (of Jharkhand and Orissa) through agents; sourcing of construction workers for the CWG from far-off destinations; recruitment of security guards and factory workers from remote villages of Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh; and organisation of recruitment fairs for knowledge workers in the states of the northeast.

Improper Planning, Labour Right Violations

 The huge influx of migrants and its changing dimensions are often not properly understood by the urban planning authorities and the state. There are no systematic efforts, so far, to capture the dynamics of migration into the NCR and to gather data in a systematic manner – to plan for providing basic standards of work and life to the thousands migrants reaching the city every day in search of livelihoods. This *inter alia* leads to chaos and social tensions, apart from gross violation of labour rights. Absence of proper understanding of the quantum and directions of flows of migrant labour often leads to tensions in the city space. For example, the stampede in the New Delhi railway station in May 2010 (which left two dead and more than 15 injured) was due to a change of platforms for two Bihar-bound trains at the last moment.

The construction sites of state-initiated/run development projects have been notorious for labour right violations and dismal working conditions (leave alone the denial of minimum wages). Appalling working conditions prevailing in 'model' industrial clusters/districts of NCR (special 'exploitative' zones) and sheer absence of safety measures in construction projects undertaken in the heart of the city show the complete lack of planning. Acute absence of occupational safety and health measures for workers in the informal sector is more or less a common feature of most of the construction and development projects. Engagement of painters without brushes, welders and polishers without masks and construction workers without helmets have been *de facto* norms, not aberrations in the state-initiated construction projects. As Ghose (2010) explains, the plight of workers has been comparable to slaves during CWG times. The radiation incident in west Delhi's Mayapuri area (which led to the death of a worker and fatal injuries to many others) shows the acute absence of planning in important aspects of health safety (Remesh & Vinod, 2010). Many industrial/work site accidents go unreported as the workers are often 'invisible' in the city. Further, in many cases (like that of Metro construction) the world of work and workers are often not known to the outside world as the worksites are either underground or tightly covered. While it is commonly believed that Metro construction sites are comparatively fairer in terms of labour standards, there are also isolated reports that worker worries and accidents in these concealed workplaces are often underreported and misreported.

Apart from workplace-related exploitation, the migrant workers also find themselves facing discrimination in the larger society. Remesh (2011) explains the ethnic discrimination and insults being faced by the migrant workers from northeastern states. Emergence of night work as a prominent form have also added to the worries of the migrant workers in the city, because they have to commute to and from the workplace in an alien urban place during late hours at night.

Clean City and 'Dirty' Workers

'Clean and Green Delhi' has been high on the agenda of the city planners in the recent past and accordingly, many of the construction, reconstruction/renovation activities have been with an inbuilt agenda of pushing out the workers (who built the city) to urban peripheries or outside the city. Examples for such urban beautification acts include instances of slum demolitions; the drive for

removal of polluting (non-confirming) industries; hasty implementation of compressed natural gas (CNG) norms for three-wheelers and taxis and the massive and forced eviction of workers just before the commencement of CWG.

A major mode of redevelopment and beautification of the Capital for the making of a 'world-class city' was through slum demolition and denial of access of the poor to urban spaces. Dupont (2008) explains that the context of globalisation and the aspiration of the capital city to become a world-class city had a decisive impact on the transformation of land use and the reshaping of the urban landscape since the 1990s (which commenced with the initiation of the Delhi slum policy of 1990). The massive evictions along the banks of the Yamuna river (the Yamuna Pushta slum clusters) through an order of the high court in 2003 is a vivid example, in which the pretext of cleaning the Yamuna bank and fighting river pollution was effectively used for clearing the slum cluster – whereas the total discharge of waste from the 3 lakh residents of Yamuna Pushta accounted only for 0.33 per cent of the sewage released into the river, according to a report from Hazards Centre (Dupont, 2008).

The notion of `cleaning up the city' was also central to the massive drive of relocation of polluting small-scale industrial units in 2000 (citing violations of the Master Plan of Delhi). Here also a disproportionate responsibility for beautification of the city (and thus an improvement in quality of life in Delhi) was placed on migrant and footloose workers, who lost their livelihoods and meagre assets during the painful episode (Navlakha, 2000). It is very important to note that this agenda of maintaining the Master Plan intact was supported and upheld by the Supreme Court, where as the view of the apex court was eventually in favour of the violators in the much debated Master Plan violation case of Akshardham Temple complex construction.

On the eve of the CWG, there was a hasty drive to clean up the city and during this phase the urban authorities were busily loading and unloading 'dirty workers' to suburbs and places outside the city. In each of these episodes, the workers in the city had to pay a heavy price since these 'urban renewal projects' rendered most of them jobless and homeless through closure of their industrial units and/or by destroying their slums.

Labour Unrest

In the past two decades, the NCR has seen a considerable expansion in industrial production, with mushrooming industrial units (small and big) engaging thousands of workers – not only in the industrial clusters of Delhi but also in its satellite cities/towns such as Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad, Gaziabad, Gurgaon and Manesar. These units also include major manufacturing units of automobile producers. Different estimates suggests that the industrial units in the Capital region engages between 20-30 lakh workers, a large chunk of whom constitute migrants and those who work on contractual and casual jobs. Most of these workers are by design kept out of the organised trade union movement. Notwithstanding this, alongside the expansion of industrial units and clusters, there have been signs of labour unrest in several of the work sites in the Delhi region

The police attack on workers in Honda Motors in Gurgaon in July 2005 is one of the recent major incidents that brought the labour unrest in the region into the limelight. In 2008, in another incident, the CEO of an automotive component manufacturing company in Greater Noida was beaten to death by workers. The immediate remark of the then union labour minister, who termed the incident as a "warning" to managements not to "push" the employees "so hard" led to severe criticism by industry – and eventually the minister had to apologise! In a similar incident in October 2009, following the death of a worker in a unit of Rico Auto Industries in Gurgaon, agitated workers

beat up a manager and the workers in the unit as well as their counterparts in auto-component manufacturing units in the region struck work. In yet another episode, in Ghaziabad, in November 2010, agitated workers are reported to have beaten a manager to death. The latest in the series is the 13-day strike of over 3,000 workers in the Maruti Suzuki Plant in Manesar in June 2011 (for trade union rights), the sparks of which are still continuing.

All these events show the growing discontent among workers who are continuously and completely exploited by the managements through the imposition of rigid, exploitative and inhuman working and living conditions. It is important to note that in all the above incidents of worker unrest, the respective state governments had taken very proactive stands to provide adequate protection to the interests of capital. As Sehgal (2005) views it, these stands are consistent with the state's long-standing practice of providing an investor-friendly environment – free of labour unrest.

Concerns of Job Quality in Times of Outsourced Work

In the past one and a half decades, Delhi region has also grown as a major hub for internationally outsourced (offshored) work, which provides lots of employment opportunities to the educated youth in the city. Despite the gains in terms of employment provisions and comparatively better pay packages, even in its first phase, the workers in the business process outsourcing units were subjected to a range of insecurities and vulnerabilities (Remesh, 2004). Now along with other urban centres in the country, Delhi region is also in an 'extended phase of outsourcing revolution', which is characterised by a substantial spread of domestic business processing firms, operating with cost-minimising objectives. Recent empirical revelations suggest that the quality of employment in these second-generation outsourcing firms (that engage workers with low skill base) is much worse compared to their international counterparts in all aspects (including pay packages and other non-pecuniary benefits). All these suggest an undesirable temporal trend in the overall production organisation frame, where secure jobs are increasingly being displaced by temporary, flexible and insecure forms of employment. The available evidence suggests that with the overall deterioration of work conditions in the outsourced domestic sector in the Delhi region, there has been a massive transfer of jobs from bargainable zones/categories to non-bargainable zones/categories (Remesh, 2010).

Informalisation Within Formal Sector

Yet another major change in the labour scene of Delhi is the striking process of informalisation within the formal and public sector firms. In the last two decades, the concept of permanency in job has considerably deteriorated, as engagement of contract labour and project staff and outsourcing of office functions have emerged as the principal norm for formal (public) sector firms. A good proportion of workers in Delhi are those who work in government organisations and public sector firms. Over the years, all these workers are gradually being pushed to a regime where their employment with the principal employer is enabled and mediated through an intermediary (placement agency), which eventually results in dismal terms and conditions of work. Such engagement of contractual workers has become the norm for even quasi-government and private sector firms. For instance, Menon explains that the workers who keep the Delhi Metro rail stations shining are victims of exploitation by contractors (Menon, 2011).

To Sum Up

On the whole, the foregoing discussion helps to capture some of the striking trends and patterns in the labour scene of National Capital Region, which *inter alia* highlight several disquieting signals to the labouring poor.

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Disinterring Labour in Transit in Terms of Class Processes

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In any economy, the three essential components are production, distribution and consumption. Following the Althusserian logic of over-determination, these three components as *processes* are over-determined as they mutually constitute each other to determine the social plane, the very existence of which is effectuated by ever-changing contradictory and conflict-ridden economic, political, cultural and natural processes. This write-up is not meant to theorise such social planes as it is evolving today. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the very process of *labour in transit* as opposed to the traditional *process of labour in situ* in production processes and to unfold in its term the very *transition* of economy and society as it is taking shape against the backdrop of a globalised reality construed by the dictate of global capital. The question of transition is perhaps a never-ending process of evolution and negation and a journey which goes on and on in any social plane. And if one adheres to the logic of a class-focused Marxist approach then, this transition needs be understood in terms of transition of several *heterogeneous* class processes which do coexist in a social plane at a time. The question of transition if visited in terms of class transition then brings to the fore the very question of different labour processes as they exist today and as they are evolving and influencing the surplus accumulation at the dictate of global capital. Let us begin with the fundamental notion of labour process as it shapes any class process and let us then draw the line between the traditional notion of labour process and emerging notion of labour and work in transit.

Entry point of our analysis will remain surplus labour *a la* Marx. Production is a process of creating goods and services using labour and means of production. The process of manufacturing goods and services using labour over the means of production is dubbed as labour process. It involves the muscles, nerves and emotions of the owner of the labour power. This labour process in any production remains solely responsible for the generation of surplus (labour) and hence, for the accumulation of capital by the muscles, nerves and emotions of labour(er). And class in this way is a process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour.

Given the above notion of labour process and then class process, the image of labour that comes to one's mind is that of labour *in situ* – a labour(er) performing surplus labour within the abode of a (manu)factory. But this is not the received image of labour in transit. Labour in transit is not confined to the four walls of a factory. Rather, movement is the primary feature of such a labouring process. This moving labour process can be found in construction work, agricultural field (after Green Revolution where at the time of harvests agricultural workers leave their own places of residence), in the train compartments as vendors hawking various goods produced in small and tiny industries etc. The form of each as labouring process is different from each other, and so is their association with surplus production. One can, in this regard, distinguish between two forms of the labouring process – (a) one which it directly performs surplus labour and hence, is directly responsible for capital accumulation, and (b) the other which does not perform surplus labour directly but helps to procreate it by providing necessary conditions of existence of the very performance and appropriation of surplus labour with which they are related. And as provider of

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these necessary conditions, they receive part of the surplus. For example, let us consider the case of a hawker. He is not involved in the direct production of the goods which he is selling in the train compartments. And hence, he is not performing surplus labour. Rather, by selling the products he is begetting the value for the owner – the non-performer of surplus labour – from which surplus is generated. This hawker of ours receives a part of this surplus as his remuneration, which may be equivalent to his socially necessary actual labour time – taken to be sufficient for reproduction of his labour power. As receiver of part of the surplus labour he then occupies the Subsumed Class Position and the workers who produce those goods occupy the Fundamental Class Process as performer of surplus labour. Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), processes of performance and appropriation of surplus labour define Fundamental Class Process and processes of distribution and receipt of surplus labour Subsumed Class Process. Note that those who appropriate surplus labour (value) also take the decision of distributing it. Hence, the question of who appropriate surplus is an important one.

Our intention is not to render more importance to those who occupy the Fundamental Class positions. Rather, Fundamental Class and Subsumed Class Processes mutually constitute each other. Furthermore, we are also not rendering more importance to economic over other processes of social viz. political, cultural and natural. Class as an economic process is influenced by them and other economic processes and similarly also influence them *a la the* Althusserian logic of over-determination.

Representing labour in transit in terms of class processes we can say the work performed by transit workers fall in two categories – Fundamental Class Process and Subsumed Class Process categories. The class processes so envisaged may be either capitalistic or non-capitalistic. It is capitalistic when the production is for market and (money) value is generated and the surplus labour gets converted into surplus value; non-capitalistic otherwise. Presumably, most of these class processes are exploitative as surplus is appropriated by the non-performer of surplus labour. However, there are cases when they are non-exploitative when an individual direct labourer performs surplus labour and self-appropriates his surplus himself – say, a van-rickshaw puller (who owns his own van – the means of production) performs the surplus labour and self-appropriated such surplus. It is an instance of ancient or self-exploitative or independent class process which does co-exist along with other varieties of class processes. This suggests that production processes and the related work processes if viewed in terms of labour (process) in transit are not homogeneous. The notion of a whole macro-economy breaks down and is replaced by an economy constituted in terms of several/innumerable heterogeneous class processes which are mutually co-related, not independent.

It is possible for an individual to occupy several class positions at the same time as follows: (1) He may belong to the Fundamental and Subsumed Class position in the same production process; (2) He may occupy two or more Fundamental Class Positions in different production processes at the same time (working whole time in a production unit as transit labour and part-time in another); (3) He may belong to Fundamental Class and Subsumed Class Positions in two different production processes; (4) He may belong to two characteristically different Fundamental Class Positions – one capitalist and the other feudal, say. This list is not exhaustive. This is just to provide the idea of variety of class positions that an individual as transit worker may occupy at the same time at the same or different places. This is not the peculiar feature of labour in transit only. This is also the feature of labour in situ in today's globalised economy. But what distinguishes labour in transit from that *in situ* is the fact that chances of occupying several class positions in eking out a (socially) minimum living is more for labour in transit than for a labour *in situ*. This is derived from the acute livelihood risks

which confront such labour as the onslaught of global capital rises day by day. And this is where the relation between global capital and local labour in transit requires some elaboration.

The livelihood risks confronting an individual labour in transit stem primarily from the ever-expanding network of global capital which is continuously dispossessing farming communities from its means of production – the land – and hence, disturbing his self-sustaining livelihood (as in the New Town Project of Rajarhat near Kolkata). One can identify at least three processes effecting the transformation and hence, current transition from a self-sustained (and self-sufficient) livelihood to a mobile livelihood in the form of transit labour where transition does not signify moving from one state/plight to another definitely, rather it signifies a never-ending journey which makes the "temporary", "casual", "irregular", "mobile", "seasonal" or "temporal" the regular, permanent feature of a man's labouring life be it for the purpose of producing more and more surplus or for the purpose of garnering fundamental conditions of existence and reproduction of such surplus on ever-increasing scale. These three processes include (a) processes of urbanisation, (b) processes of industrialisation including setting up of SEZs, and (c) natural processes. The link between global capital and labour process is direct and immanent in the first two processes and there is plethora of instances by this time now which do not warrant further exploration. But natural processes are equally endangering established and self-sustaining livelihood of a great milieu in agriculture and allied activities. For example, one can cite the case of Padma river erosion in the district of Murshidabad in West Bengal which has uprooted thousands of families from the erstwhile livelihood pattern and compelled their earning members (including child labour) to take to alternatives with mobile working activities. In fact, men in this area are hired by agents to vend goods and stuff in other parts of the country – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa as vendors or hawkers – in the local parlance known as "*Harek Maaler Karbar*" (activities of selling variety goods on foot).

With the growing informalisation of the economic space – the informalisation which is visible even within a formal space (say within a jute mill) – and with the demand being created for newer forms of logistic services, labour has become more and more mobile – the mobility which goes on and on in future. It is in this context there is need to think afresh about the livelihood risks of these forms of labour; there is a need to re-examine the role of the labour organizations – the traditional trade unions; there is a need to think about their well-being – a well-being which would signify a real humane transition in their life-forms. Labour in transit is much more disaggregated, de-centred and de-politicised than labour *in situ*. A true resistance has to address these disaggregations and de-politicisations of a heterogeneous working class. The agenda is no doubt political. It is that political which would take care of a true transition of class processes and also, would address the "need" of these labouring masses at the micro level. In other words, the political struggle has to combine both class and need struggle for the betterment of live-forms of this vast working milieu.

Borrowing from Jan Breman we would like to portray labour in transit as footloose labour in the true sense of the term. It is from nowhere to nowhere the journey, the mobility, the transition is shaping the live-forms and livelihood risks of these men and women. The real transition at the micro level – in our rendition which class as well as need-based transition – should be understood in the broader perspective of resistance to global capital and the current waves of globalisation.

Reference

1. Resnick, S. A. and Wolff, R. D. (1987), *Knowledge and Class: A Marxist Critique of Political Economy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.