



Life between source and destination (*Photo*: Sandeep Yadav)

Denied the Right to Have Rights

The Social and Political Exclusion of Circular Labour Migrants in India

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Prologue

On December 16, 2012, a 23-year old physiotherapy student was gangraped in Delhi, India's national capital. Even as the country reeled from the details of the ghastly crime, its perpetrators quickly transformed into objects of hatred and contempt. Leading the charge was Raj Thackeray, chief of a Mumbai-based political party who had this to say:

All are talking about the Delhi gang-rape, but nobody is asking where these men came from. No one is asking who did this. No one is talking about the fact that all these rapists are from Bihar. *NDTV* (January 6, 2013)

Thackeray's tirade was of course only superficially linked with antipathy towards people from Bihar. It reflected the widespread suspicion harboured by millions of people around the world that migrants are to be held responsible for most ills that befall their localities. No less a dignitary than Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of Delhi between 1998 and 2013, blamed the rising incidences of rape and other crimes on migrants. In an interview reported in *India Today*, she blamed "huge migratory populations and (Delhi's) porous borders", clarifying for her audience that one "can come into Delhi, commit a crime and just run back again" (*India Today*, April 12, 2012).

Even P Chidambaram, India's Home Minister between 2008 and 2014, did not shy away from blaming migrants for the ills plaguing urban India:

Crime takes place because Delhi attracts a large number of migrants... There are large numbers of unauthorised colonies (in Delhi). These migrants who settle in unauthorised colonies carry a kind of behaviour which is unacceptable in any modern city. *India Today*, December 13, 2010

Not to be outdone, a respected politician of the Delhi unit of the BJP, Vijay Goel called for a halt in migration from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar into Delhi

Every day more migrants come to Delhi ... Most of them are from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They come here because they don't have employment opportunities in their states.... These migrants settle in slums, which later become unauthorized colonies. If we have to solve the problems of Delhi, we need to stop this inflow of migrants. *Times of India*, July 31, 2014

Others were even more frank in their appraisal of migrants' contribution to crime in the city. The *Hindustan Times* reported on June 10, 2017 the following evaluation offered by the former chairperson of the Haryana State Women's Commission:

It is no secret that most of the brutal crimes against women are committed by migrants in the unorganised sector, particularly in Gurgaon, Delhi and the neighbouring regions. Gurgaon, for instance, records an influx of thousands of migrants every year. They stay away from their families, drink a lot, watch porn and most importantly, have little to no fear.

A member of India's National Commission for Women claimed before the same newspaper that "not 90 but rather 95% of cases" of sexual assault could be traced back to migrants.

Such assertions have been made on the basis of anecdotes rather than evidence. An *Indian Express* report about Aman Vihar, a neighbourhood in northwest Delhi, filed on December 16, 2016 – four years after the horrific violence against the young woman in Delhi – is revealing about the attitudes of the police, bureaucracy as well as politicians. The report was headlined 'Why this dark corner in Delhi has become rape's Ground Zero' to attract readers' attention to the huge spike in incidents of rape here.

The paper quotes a police officer, who previously served that neighbourhood and was at the time of the interview with the National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Sciences:

People migrate from different parts of the country and settle down in Aman Vihar. They don't have permanent addresses. Their identity remains a mystery. The area has also seen a rise in land disputes, and there are 108 unauthorised colonies. The same person who commits a petty theft can be involved in rape. Also, job losses result in drug addiction and gambling.

The report further cites the Aam Admi Party MLA representing the neighbourhood, as attributing the incidence of rape to the fact that 95% of Aman Vihar's population were migrants, with poor literacy and no employment.

The bureaucracy concurs with this assessment. *The Indian Express* reports Assistant District Magistrate (North-West) as holding the 'floating population' responsible for the spike in incidents of sexual assault. This 'floating population', according to the bureaucrat, gets power from its anonymity. "People stay here for a very short period, due to which it is very difficult to establish their identities", the newspaper reports the bureaucrat as having said.

Mobility: The 4th M in post-1990 politics in India

Such prejudices against 'floating populations' exist alongside the increased circulation of people across India. Although Indian society has historically been

far from the sedentary society that colonial officers and social scientists (see for instance, Davis, 1951) once suggested (Zacharia, 1964; de Haan, 1994; Chakrabarty, 1989; Chandravarkar, 1994) there appears some agreement that spatial mobility in India has seen a particular upsurge since the 1990s (Mishra, 2016; Economic Survey, 2016; Bhagat, 2010; Kundu and Saraswati, 2012; Deshingkar and Akter, 2009; Srivastava, 2011; Tumble, 2015; Migration Working Group, 2017). Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that, along with the iconic themes of 'Mandir', 'Mandal' and 'Market', 'Mobility' is a key ingredient in the unfolding story of India's politics (Rao, 1977; Weiner, 1978; Katzenstein, 1979; and Irudaya Rajan, 2011).

The structural changes that underpin mobility in India are by now well-known. The 2011 census enumerates 454 million internal migrants in India, up from 315 million in 2001 and 220 million in 1991. Moreover, a comparison of the 2011 census figures with previous ones suggests that India's workforce has become more mobile. Over 10% of India's workforce is mobile, according to the 2011 census, compared with 8% in 1991 (Economic Survey, 2016: 266). However, these figures are likely to be underestimates, given the well-known fact that much of the internal migration in India tends to be circular, which is not captured in the census data. Using data from the sectoral workforce, Deshingkar and Akter (2009) estimate internal migration figures in India to touch 100 million. Mazumder et al (2013) draw on the data provided by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) to peg this number at 70 million. Scholars also argue that India's workforce is more mobile than suggested by the census. Mazumder et al (2013) suggest that 17% of the workforce comprises of migrant workers, while Tumble (2015) argues that this figure reached 20%. Srivastava (2011) pegs this figure at 29%, a figure endorsed by the *Report of the Working Group on Migration* (Migration Working Group, 2017).

In terms of inter-state mobility, Bihar is regarded as one of the top sending States in India. According to the 2001 census, outmigration from Bihar comprised nearly a tenth of all inter-state migration. As in the rest of India, migration from Bihar to other States witnessed a steep increase since 1991, as can be gleaned from census data on male migration be-

tween 1981 and 2001 (Tsujita and Oda, 2012: 5). The 1981 census enumerated 610,988 men as having migrated from Bihar to other States. The 1991 census counted 700,317 male migrants. However, by 2001, this figure has jumped to 2,182,328, or a jump of 211%, contrasted with an increase of 14% in the previous decade. Micro-level studies corroborate this huge increase (Brass, 1993; Jha, 1997; Wilson, 1999; Chakravarty, 2001 and Karan, 2003). Explanations of this increase have been sought in the collapse of Bihar's economy after 1990 and growing economic opportunities in other States during the very same period (de Haan, 2002; Karan, 2003; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2011; Sharma, 1997), an attempt by the underclass to escape caste oppression and increased violence (Wilson, 1999; Chakravarty, 2001; and Karan, 2003); and the persistence of a culture of migration among working classes in the State (Tumbe, 2015). Drawing on these works, scholars have examined the economic impact of the resources remitted by migrants (Datta, 2016), the impact of outmigration on social relations (Jodhka, 2017; Roy, 2016) and the cultural influence of Bihari migration in destination areas, including conceptions of home and belonging (Fazal, 2016).

Scope of the present paper: research focus, argument & methods

The present paper elaborates the vulnerabilities to which circular labour migrants in India are subjected. By doing this, I aim to direct attention to the ways in which they are effectively excluded from exercising their citizenship. I first present snapshots of the official data that testify to the vulnerabilities suffered by circular labour migrants. I follow this up with an account of the economic, social and political factors that spur migration from the countryside in the first place, drawing on a synthesis of existing literature in India and my own fieldwork in Bihar. In the third section, I specify the mechanisms that underpin circular labour migration by emphasising the channels of labour recruitment, the prevalence of advances, and the conditions under which migrants travel. Their conditions of labour and life are illustrated in the fourth section, with specific attention to the social exclusion and political disenfranchisement to which they are subjected. The fifth section presents the multi-local reality of migrants' households,

with an eye on the ways in which women, children and the elderly support and subsidise their very existence as they circulate through town and country. Through these discussions, I hope to make a modest contribution to the vast literature on the subject of migration (Tumbe, 2012) that has considerably enriched our understanding of the theme.

The discussion in this paper leads me to argue that circular labour migrants in India are denied citizenship, understood here as the 'right to have rights'. I emphasise the fragmented experience of citizenship for circular labour migrants in India. Even as they have contributed to and benefitted from the deepening of democracy in their rural homes since the 1990s, migrant workers continue to face considerable political and social exclusion alongside labour and caste oppression in their urban homes. In this vein, the sixth section explores the theoretical implications of circular labour migrants' loves, lives and labours on questions of citizenship. Drawing on Hannah Arendt (1979), I will argue that circular labour migrants in India suffer social and political exclusion not only because they are 'outsiders' for the destinations *to* which they migrate, but also 'exterior' to the sources *from* which they migrate. The concluding section offers some policy recommendations, based on collaboration and consultations with government, civil society, academia and the media.

Much of the data offered in this paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork. By exposing researchers to what might otherwise be perceived as insignificant, ethnographic methods allow them to appreciate the quotidian ways in which people create new identities and forge new practices that interrogate (or affirm) existing relations of power, authority and influence (Willis, 2000). They provide a window to the ways in which people forge their collective selves in tension and negotiation with one another as well as the structures they encounter. An ethnography of people on the move potentially unsettles several of the certitudes that social scientists hold in relation to such themes as citizenship, democracy, and modernity. Such ethnographies allow us to confront the ambivalences and the heterogeneities that attend to the migration process, while eschewing both unbridled optimism as well as nihilistic pessimism.

The ethnographies on which this paper draws build on fieldwork I conducted in a cluster of adjacent villages in north Bihar's Araria district as part of my doctoral research in 2009-10, details and findings of which are reported in Roy (2018). I returned to these villages for short periods in 2013, 2014 and 2016. In addition to fieldwork, I organised a census survey covering approximately 5000-odd households in 2015-16, the findings from which are reported in Roy (2016). The present ethnographies were thus conducted in a locality to which I have returned several times over the previous decade. Far from being a solipsistic exercise, these ethnographies were collaborative in spirit and action and hosted by the Delhi-based Center for Equity Studies.

The ethnographies were implemented for the ESRC-funded Future Research Leaders Award (ES/L009676/1 -) titled *Political ideas, identities and practices of circular labour migrants in India*. Two of the three ethnographers on the present study worked closely with one family of migrant workers each for a period of twelve months as they traversed the country (Jayaswal and Anand) while the third lived in the locality throughout this period (Ajmal). This multi-sited fieldwork (Marcus, 1995), a common approach (Nyiri, 2002; Glick Schiller, 2003; Sayad, 2004; Smith, 2005) among scholars undertaking ethnographies of mobility (Salazar, 2016), provided granular insights into the reasons offered by people for their migration, their social practices, as well as the political ideas and narratives they held. In this respect, the ethnographies of mobility offer rich perspectives on ethnographies of citizenship (Stack, 2012; Thapan, 2014; Lazar and Nuijten, 2013; Isin, 2012) or the ways in which people assert their belonging to a political community.

I

Circular labour migrants in India: a vulnerable group

That circular labour migrants in India face severe vulnerabilities is by now well-established (Connell et al, 1976; Breman, 1996; Oberai and Singh, 1983; Bannerjee, 1986; Sharma, 1997; de Haan and Rogaly, 2002; Sahu and Das, 2007; Rogaly et al, 2002; Deshingkar and Farrington, 2009; and Mosse et al, 2002). Analysis of official data testifies to the vulnerabili-

ties suffered by circular labour migrants (Srivastava, 2011; Mishra, 2016). In this vein, the *Report of the Working Group on Migration (RWGM, 2017)*, commissioned by the Indian Government, offers further insights into these vulnerabilities. Table 1 below reproduces data presented in the RWGM on the occupational structure of circular labour migrants. The table illustrates that a large proportion of migrant workers find employment in India's burgeoning construction industry and ancillary industries such as brick kilns, both notorious for their precarious labour conditions. Circular labour migrants of rural origin work in the primary sector, especially agriculture while migrants of urban origin work in the manufacturing sector.

Table 1: Occupational structure of short-term migrants in India, 2011

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Rural origin</i>	<i>Urban origin</i>
Primary	24.9	13.2
Manufacturing	16.8	26
Construction	41.6	25.2
Services	13	23
Others	3.7	12.6

Source: RWGM, 2017: 13

The vulnerabilities to which circular labour migrants are subjected vary across sectors.

The highly fragmented nature of India's construction industry (NSDC, nd) contributes to the vulnerabilities of circular labour migrants. Around 96% of all construction companies are classified as small and medium enterprises. Srivastava and Jha (2016) demonstrate in their study of the construction industry based in the National Capital Region (NCR) that nearly all workers hired by the construction units were migrant workers. As many as 94% of their interview respondents have no formal labour contracts. Nearly 60% report working for 11 to 12 hours a day. Almost half of all workers reported working for all seven days during the week while 43.2% reported a six-day week. Over a quarter of all workers reported working all thirty days in the month. The majority of labour migrants live in fenced-in and guarded worksites, with conditions similar to those of labour camps. Many of them live

under tarpaulin roofs with poor amenities. They work through day and by night, with little by way of ‘overtime payments’.

The growing informalisation of India’s manufacturing sector further exacerbates the vulnerabilities of circular labour migrants. Not only does Indian manufacturing witness the growing number of informal units but also a growing contractualisation of employment in formal units. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector reports a dip in the total number of workers on formal contracts (NCEUS, 2008: 4). Migrant workers tend to be paid lower than their local counterparts. Employers regularly flout statutory minimum wage stipulations. They also prefer to pay piece rates. Payments are often irregular and sometimes not made on time.

While workers in general face wage repressions, with migrant workers being especially precarious, the vulnerabilities of circular labour migrants are particularly acute (Keshri and Bhagat, 2012; Chandrasekhar, Das, and Sharma, 2015; and Agrawal and Chandrasekhar, 2015). Analysing unit level data from NSSO, Keshri and Bhagat (2013: 181) demonstrate that the proportion of circular labour migrants tend to concentrate among lower Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) quintiles, while the proportion of longer-term migrants increases as one moves up the MPCE quintile hierarchy. Furthermore, circular labour migrants tend to be disproportionately drawn from such historically marginalised communities as Dalits and Adivasis, officially classified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively. Table 2 reproduces the data first computed by Srivastava (2011) to present the comparative profile of circular labour migrants by different communities and contrasted with long-term migrants.

State-specific studies further testify to the vulnerabilities faced by circular migrant workers. A well-regarded survey of six districts in Bihar (Rodgers et al, 2013) notes that short-term circular migration is undertaken mostly by members of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Class and “low-caste” Muslim communities of landless and/or agricultural labourer classes. Another study on Bihar (Kumar and Benerji, 2010) arrives at similar conclusions. An incisive analysis of NSSO data from Odisha (Mishra, 2016) notes analogous findings for that State. A class-analytic survey of nine villages in Andhra Pradesh also resonates with these findings. That circular labour migrants are drawn from among the most socially vulnerable communities and classes is thus well-established in the literature. Gendered analysis has further alerted us to the implications of migration for women in both source (Datta and Rustagi, 2012; Rodgers and Rodgers, 2011; Rogaly, 1998) and destination (Bhattacharya and Korinek, 2007; Ravindranath, unpublished Ph.D) localities.

II

Factors contributing to enhanced circular labour migration after 1991

A fascinating account of migration from one of the study villages, which I call Sargana, located in north Bihar’s Araria district, may be gleaned from one of Ajmal’s interviews with Himmat Mehta, who has been working in Punjab since 1975. Ajmal was particularly keen to interview Himmat Mehta since he was commonly said to be among the pioneers who sought and obtained work in Punjab. It was probably an exaggeration to suggest that he was among the first people to step out of the village, but Ajmal

Table 2: Community profile of circular labour migrants and longer-term migrants

Community	Population share	Total			Rural		
			Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled Tribe	8	20.1	3.5	18.6	6.8	2.2	6
Scheduled Caste	16	23.7	17.5	23.1	19.2	11.8	17.9
Other Backward Class	52	39.5	43.6	39.9	44.5	37.9	43.3
Others	24	16.7	35.4	18.4	29.5	48	32.8

Source: Srivastava (2011).

was excited enough to seek an interview with Himmat Mehta. An excerpt from that interview is reproduced below:

I was about 22 [in 1975], and happily cultivating my tiny plot of land. I had just got married and we had had a child. I was content with life. Then one day, a Musahar called Buchan Talwa – he must have been about 16 or 17 years of age – drove a buffalo into my plot. Everything was ruined. I lost all my season's earnings. Naturally, I was upset. I thrashed the fellow soundly. He confessed that he did what he did at the behest of [Rajput landlord in a neighbouring village]. That man [the landlord] and I had a long-standing dispute. He hated me and others of my community. How could 'Backwards' like us do well?

Whatever it was, I was devastated, and took out all my anger on that moronic Musahar. I thrashed him black and blue....

Three years later [1978], suddenly, out of the blue, I have a visitor – a young man wearing bright new clothes. A well-ironed shirt, neat pleated trousers, a pair of goggles. The fellow comes and touches my feet, greets me with respect. I am surprised. He looks familiar. I ask him to sit down near me. But he tells me he is in a hurry. He only came to thank me, he says. I am non-plussed. "Thank me for what? Who are you?" I ask.

[Himmat's eyes widen with excitement] *Turns out the man was none other than Buchan Talwa. I asked him why he was thanking me, when I had thrashed him so badly. Buchan tells me that was exactly why he had come. [The conversation turns more animated, with Himmat waving his hands about] You see, after that encounter, he was fed up of life in the village. He was dependent on the landlord, so he had to do the landlord's bidding. If he did, he would get thrashed – like he did when he attacked me. If he didn't, he was as good as dead. So, he ran away.*

"Where did you go", I ask him.

"Punjab", he replies.

"Punjab?", I ask?

"What did you do in Punjab", I wonder.

"Worked as a farm labourer", he answers.

"Farm labour?" I ask incredulously. He bought all those fancy clothes and accessories by being a farm labourer. I found it hard to believe.

Buchan Talwa told me that I should go to work in Punjab as well. He had heard about my difficulties after he destroyed my crop. I had to sell that plot. Although I bought another one, this one was much smaller, so I had to supplement my farm income with agricultural labour. Both my wife and I – we worked on [A Kayasth landlord]'s farm. The fellow was extremely stingy. Buchan told me that if I had to work on someone else's farm, I might as well work in Punjab. Life was better in Punjab. People treated one

another with respect, he told me. They offered each other ijjat.

I liked the idea. He told me he would take me. I said great. Some fourteen of us went with him the next season. Some of us were Nais, others were Yadavs. And there were one or two Harijans as well. And here we were, trusting our lives with a Musahar who we didn't even know. But it was great that he took us to Punjab. We loved it there.

Ajmal, interview notes ZA.I.09.2017-01-17, Himmat Mehta, January 17, 2017

Ajmal's interview with Mehta distils for us the several factors that fomented migration from Sargana. These are briefly outlined below.

Social conflict

The social conflicts that ravaged Sargana and similar villages across Bihar are unmistakable from Mehta's account. Three axes of conflict stand out in particular: 'high' caste landlords against 'low' caste peasants; 'low' caste peasants against 'untouchable' labourers; and 'high' caste landlords against 'untouchable' labourers. The 'high' caste landlords resented the improving economic condition of 'low' caste peasants facilitated by the abolition of landlordism carried out by the post-colonial state in Bihar after Independence. Although the very modest economic gains made by 'low' caste peasants were precarious at best, Bihar's 'high' caste landlords detested those gains which, they correctly perceived, chipped away their own privileges. They successfully deployed such 'untouchable' labourers as Buchan Talwa who were still dependent on them for work and wages to undermine the emerging economic improvements of the 'low' caste peasants. While resistance to such demands was not uncommon, as accounts of armed left-wing movements of agricultural labourers in the State illustrate (Kunnath, 2012; Wilson 1996; Chitralkha, 2003), most agricultural labourers found themselves with few options but to comply with landlord demands. Outright refusal to comply with landlord demands often meant ostracism, destitution and even death. Relations between 'low' caste peasants and 'untouchable' labourers remained fraught at best: the shared experience of subordination to a common landlord could not subsume contradictions arising due to hierarchies of caste status, economic standing and labour relations. 'Low' caste

peasants such as Himmat Mehta typically hired 'untouchable' landless labours such as Buchan Talwa at even lower wages than did the 'high' caste landlord, and fewer offers of patronage.

Caught between the declining privilege of landlords who remained influential but not dominant and the growing clout of peasants who did not hesitate to assert their dominance even if they were not yet influential, labourers such as Buchan Talwa seem to have had limited options indeed. The option Buchan Talwa is reported to have taken entailed fleeing the social conflict in which he was rapidly enmeshed. Such a course of action appears reasonable for millions of 'untouchable' landless labourers who may have found themselves engulfed in conflicts between a landed gentry with eroding fortunes and an emerging peasantry willing to assert its dominance in the countryside.

The quest for dignified lives

The social conflicts plaguing Bihar and the economic precariousness blighting the lives of its poorest people should not obfuscate the social hopes they harboured. A recurring theme from the fieldwork pertained to the vocabulary of 'dignity' to which migrant workers turned time and again in their discussions of life and labour. An excerpt from Ajmal's conversation with Harish Rishi, whose brother, sons and nephews regularly travel for work to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir, is illustrative:

Work in Punjab is god-sent for us. Here in Sargana, there is hardly any work. Where there is work, there are no payments. Where there are payments, there is no dignity. At least in Punjab, they recognise our worth as human beings.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/9/30/post-25-sargana>

Harish Rishi is from the Rishideo community, whose members are increasingly keen to shed the label of 'Musahar' that have historically been ascribed to them (Roy, 2017). His family leases in a small plot of land (0.2 acres), on which they grow the sunflower crop to sell in the local agricultural market. His sons Shailendra and Ram Kishore Rishi both work as a construction worker for gurdwaras on the outskirts of Ludhiana city in Punjab. As far as Harish

Rishi can see, work in Punjab is valuable not only for the employment and wages that it brings, but perhaps more importantly the dignified conditions under which it is perceived to be organised. He does not fail to point out that not only are workers paid on time and without having to haggle but employers address their labourers by their names, do not use caste-specific slurs during an argument and sometimes even break bread with them.

Jayaswal met Harish Rishi's brother Pradeep while the latter was travelling to Poonch in the northern State of Jammu and Kashmir. An excerpt from his observation is revealing:

Although this is the first time Pradeep is going to Poonch, he is very familiar with other cities in J&K, especially Jammu and Srinagar. He has been going there for the last fifteen years. The uncertain political situation in the State, especially the frequent curfews, have not deterred him and others like him, many of whom are from Bihar. People there treat us with a great deal of respect, he says. "When they hear we have come for employment, they tell us - 'yes, make sure you earn well and eat well'. People in Punjab can sometimes be quite rude. But never in J&K."

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/9/13/post-21-ludhiana>

Jayaswal's observations suggest that the volatile political situation in Jammu and Kashmir does not dissuade labourers such as Pradeep Rishi from seeking employment in the State's construction industry. Rishi has worked for decades in Punjab in industries as different as agriculture, construction and footwear. But he appears to tire of the occasional rude behaviour of his employers here. In Jammu and Kashmir, by contrast, employers treat him with dignity.

The vocabulary of dignity is hard to miss among Bihari labour migrants. Bablu Yadav, who operates a grinding machine in a flour mill in Ludhiana's Abdullahpur Basti, invoked the term in conversation with Anand (2016) while complaining about the unreasonable expectations his employer held of him. One evening, as Bablu Yadav stepped out of the mill at the designated time of 7 p.m., his employer instructed him to continue working since there had been more orders of wheat consignments than expected. Bablu Yadav flatly refused and assured his employer that he would start work promptly the fol-

lowing day at the usual time of 7 a.m. On his way out, Bablu Yadav asked Anand: “I begin work at 7 a.m. and finish at 7 p.m. How can he expect me to work longer hours?”

He then proceeded to complain about his employer’s alleged bias in favour of some workers:

That [name of another employee with home in eastern Uttar Pradesh’s Gonda district] works up till 10:00. But he comes in to work at 9:30 a.m. [The employer] pays him an extra of INR 50-100 for the additional half an hour. But he never pays me if I stay on for a little while longer. A malik should treat all his employees as equals. He should respect his worker’s dignity.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/rachit-journal/2016/11/13/post-29-abdullahpur-basti>

Juxtaposing Bablu Yadav’s complaint to Harish Rishi’s claim about the conditions of work in Punjab and the respect accorded to them highlights the shared expectation of a dignified life they both hold. Indeed, throughout our fieldwork, references to *ijjat* have been galore. Accounts of labourers not giving *ijjat* to farmers, of people stigmatised as ‘low castes’ demanding to be treated with *ijjat* by self-styled ‘high castes’, of people wanting to lead lives with *ijjat* were strewn across my field notes.

Growing subaltern confidence

The emergence of the vocabulary of *ijjat* was intimately linked with the political ascendance of Lalu Prasad Yadav as Bihar’s Chief Minister in March 1990. Yadav’s ascendance transformed the political discourse of the State, instilling a high degree of confidence among rural subaltern populations. A particularly popular slogan to be heard across Bihar was: *Vikas nahin, samman chahiye*, which translates loosely in Hindi to say ‘we want dignity, not development.’ During my own fieldwork in rural north Bihar at various times between 2010 and 2015, the common refrain, as I have reported elsewhere (Roy, 2013; Roy, 2015; Roy, 2016; and Roy, 2017) was:

Lalu allowed us to raise our voice. He recognised our dignity.

Illustrative of this perspective is an exchange witnessed and reported by Ajmal during a memorial service for the aunt of one of the migrant workers.

We assemble for the prayers services to begin. As other attendees start streaming in and sit on the cots and plastic chairs arranged for them, Shailendra’s uncle Pradeep Rishi talks about the changes he has witnessed over the decades. He says that it was unthinkable for an earlier generation to organise memorial services such as this and have plastic chairs: members of Brahmin and Rajput communities would not allow it.

“The chairs and cots were meant only for them to sit on. We would have to sit on the ground. We couldn’t enter their homes. We couldn’t even stand in their presence wearing chappals (open rubber footwear).

“All this changed with Lalu. After he came to power, no Brahmin or Rajput could stop us from sitting on chairs.”

Pradeep’s brother and Shailendra’s father, Harish disagrees.

“He only got us to sit on chairs. What about jobs?” he chuckles.

“Oh come on,” Pradeep retorts, “Lalu inaugurated charwaha (literally: shepherd) schools for children of cattle-grazers, agricultural labourers, for others. We could attend school while at the same time tending to our cows, pigs, goats, what have you. Have you forgotten? Didn’t this mean a great deal for us poor folk?”

Turning to the others, he continues, “Lalu allowed us to raise our voice.”

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/7/25/post-13-sargana>

Shyamdev Mandal, no admirer of Yadav because of his perceived bias in favour of Yadavs and Muslims, was forthright:

After Lalu [using his first name], our world changed. Things became different. You could feel the fear flee. You could see the enthusiasm in people’s steps. [I ask why people remained so poor if Yadav had been such a good Chief Minister. Mandal looks amused] You have to understand...you could see the confidence [in English] in people’s dealings with the upper castes. Does that not matter? [I nod in agreement still not convinced. A flicker of irritation appears on Mandal’s face]... well, it meant a great deal to people here. We could now do what was good for us, not what others wanted us to do for them.

Roy, interview notes, Shyamdev Mandal, September 4, 2013

Mandal does not explicitly say that people started to migrate in larger numbers after Yadav's ascendance. But his repeated reference to people's enhanced social confidence after Yadav becoming Chief Minister, and the contrast he himself draws with their social diffidence in an earlier period are revealing. Narendra Yadav, who by 2015 had been disenchanted by Yadav for the corruption scandals in which he had been embroiled, readily agreed with Mandal's account and added:

They preferred to work there. People who could never have dreamt to set foot outside of the village began travelling as far afield as Punjab. Many of our neighbours went there. By then the situation had considerably improved for us. We didn't feel worried about the safety of our family members. Of course, there were difficulties. [Referring to a Rajput neighbour, with whom he and his wife have a long-running dispute, which I have documented in Roy, 2013] has harassed my wife in my absence. But he can't get away with it any more. The old days are gone.

My father, who was always so scared for us, started making plans too. But his health was failing...

Roy, interview notes, Narendra Yadav, March 1, 2015

In emphasising that people who had previously not considered outmigration as an option were doing so now, the account offered by Narendra Yadav allows us to appreciate the importance of social confidence and the vocabulary of dignity in shaping the decision to migrate. His account, as well as those offered by Shyamdev Mandal and Pradeep Rishi resonates with findings reported in Jha and Pushpendra (2012):

People recalled that once Lalu visited that village and went to OBC and SC hamlets. He told the gathering, "Migrate to any part of the country wherever you find work, earn money, and when you come back dress well (jeet-jat se raho) and live with your head held high."

The quest for dignity that animates migration from Bihar signals an erasure of the caste identities that define people's lives in their villages of origin. Scholars have noted that instead of restricting their identities to the caste or occupation within which they are enmeshed, migrant workers identify themselves as Biharis. For example, studies in Arunachal Pradesh, where the researchers (Mishra,

2015: 99; and Harriss-White et al, 2014) interviewed shoe-makers from Bihar suggest that the migrant workers identified themselves as *Bihari* instead of deploying other markers of identity. While narrating the implications and motivations of migrating from their villages, the shoe-makers celebrated this change of status as positive outcome of their migration experience.

Such insights guard against an analysis that reduces migration from Bihar as a mechanical reaction to 'pull factors' such as economic growth or 'push factors' such as destitution and poverty. Rather, they enable us to appreciate the ways in which political inclusion enhances social confidence, thereby facilitating mobility. Omvedt's (1993; 2008) analysis of anti-caste movements alerts us to these possibilities across rural India and enables us to appreciate the dynamic interaction between political inclusion and spatial mobility.

III

Mechanisms underpinning migration

Having established the multi-faceted factors that spur migration from Bihar, I now turn to the mechanisms underpinning migration. An understanding of these mechanisms enables us to understand the vulnerabilities that structure the lived experiences of migrant workers even as they strive to negotiate an improved position for themselves.

Labour recruitment

The intricate ways in which labour recruitment was shaped by existing social relations is borne out by the ethnographic work conducted by our research team. Jayaswal, who accompanied Shailendra Rishi on his journey to Ludhiana's outskirts, spent a few days with the family prior to their departure. Because it was the harvest season, he frequented the tiny sunflower field cultivated by Shailendra's family. On one of these days, he observed the son of Shailendra's labour contractor Damodar Rajak inspecting the flowers that had just been harvested. An extract from Jayaswal's observations from that afternoon is reproduced below:

I walk towards Shailendra's sunflower field. The crop has been mostly harvested. Shailendra's father is cutting the few stems that are still standing. Damodar's younger son Giridhar is standing by, observing. I ask Giridhar what he is doing there. Giridhar says he has come to inspect the flowers since it is likely to rain anytime now.

Giridhar tells me that the 0.2 acres on which Shailendra cultivates the sunflower is owned by a local landlord, Tejpratap Singh. Tejpratap leased the land to Damodar Rajak for two years in exchange of INR 30,000. Damodar Rajak in turn leased the land to Shailendra's family: the input-costs (fertilisers, water, fuel for irrigation, etc.) and harvests are shared equally, although it must be noted that the expenditure on labour is entirely Shailendra's responsibility.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/8/25/a-new-post>

Jayaswal's observations reveal that Shailendra's labour contractor Damodar is at the same time effectively his landlord. Although Damodar is in turn dependent on a wealthier landlord from whom he leases the land, he clearly wields a great deal of influence over the livelihoods of Shailendra's entire family. Not only does he control the Rishis' cultivation activities in Sargana, he brokers access to jobs for them in Ludhiana. During the twelve months he spent with Shailendra and his family, Jayaswal did not discern any hint of coercion or force in Damodar's interactions with Shailendra or his family. But the interlocking relations of dependence on Damodar to which Shailendra was subjected is undeniable.

Not all migrant workers are subjected to such overlapping relations of dependence. But they remain disadvantaged by informal methods of labour recruitment that bind them to specific employers. An illustration of these forms of social bondage is provided by Anand's account of the circumstances under which Rachit Yadav, who was hired as a driver by Birjinder Singh, owner of one of a flour mill in Ludhiana. One evening, over six months into the research, Rachit informs Anand that he has been offered another job, one that paid him much more than the present one. But, Rachit goes on to say that he cannot take up that job:

"[The prospective employer] was willing to pay anything to have me work at his shop. I could have asked him for as much as INR 7000."

"How much are you earning now?" I enquire.

"INR 4000." He replies, and adds that Birjinder provides him with food and accommodation as well.

"But why are you staying on then?" I ask perplexed.

"Ah – its complicated," he looks away as we walk into the mill...

Once inside the mill, he adds:

One of our neighbours Santosh Yadav worked as an agricultural labourer on the farm owned by Birjinder's brother-in-law. I happened to be in Punjab looking for a job, when they needed a driver. So Santosh tipped me off and asked me to meet them. I did. They liked me, and then hired me. But after a few months, they wanted a professional driver, and they hired one. Around that time, Birjinder too was looking for someone to drive his car, and asked his brother-in-law for advice. That was when I started working for Birjinder.

I am here because Birjinder's brother-in-law set me up with him. And I got the job there because of my neighbour Santosh Yadav: I am very grateful for his help. If I cease working for Birjinder, his brother-in-law will be upset with Santosh Yadav, who got me the job in the first place. Santosh's credibility is at stake.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/rachit-journal/2016/12/25/post-46-abdullahpur-basti-ludhiana>

Rachit's account makes it clear that the only reason he desists from leaving his present employment despite receiving better offers is the possible repercussion this action will have on the neighbour who recommended him to his present employer in the first place. The neighbour, as we see above, is employed by a relative of Yadav's present employer. Any provocation on Rachit's part could threaten his neighbour's employment, due to which he avoids leaving his present employment despite being paid a pittance. These forms of social bondage, while empirically distinct from the forms of bondage and neo-bondage about which Jan Breman (2010) has so eloquently written, result in similar consequences for labourers such as Rachit, who find themselves trapped in adverse employment relations.

Thus, individual decisions about employment and migration are shaped by networks of friends and family. This finding resonates with the insights offered by theorists of New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) who challenge neo-classical economists' emphasis on individual motivations to maximise incomes. Inspired by Stark (1985), NELM theorists argue that individual decisions to migrate are often shaped by collective decisions to mini-

mise risks. Rachit's careful navigation of his social networks is a clear illustration of the relevance of this framework in understanding circular labour migration in India. Another example is supplied by Gyanesh Mandal, Shyamdev Mandal's son who went to work in a footwear manufacturing firm in Kerala. Gyanesh argued with his father and decided to leave home and "go as far away as possible from [his] nagging parents" (Interview, Zaheeb Ajmal, October 26, 2016). But he was careful to consult with his extended family and indeed chose his place of work in Kozhikode based on their advice.

A growing body of literature within the scholarship of circular labour migrants in India is beginning to illustrate the ways in which entire families, and not only individual men, migrate for work. Bannerjee and Raju (2009) note the increasing number of women who undertake circular labour migration. Deshingkar and Start (2003) find that more than half the households in four out of their six study villages in Madhya Pradesh included migrant family members, including women. A study by Mosse et al. (1997) of the first phase of the Western India Rainfed Farming Project (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan) funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) revealed that 65 percent of households included migrants. Mukherjee's study of migrant women from West Bengal to Delhi who go to work as housemaids notes that the additional income has helped them to come out of poverty and acquire some dignity, but the social costs have been high because they are separated from their families (Mukherjee 2004). Thus, circular labour migration is becoming increasingly gendered and demands greater scholarly attention.

Advances

The ties between employers and employees are further deepened by advances loaned by the former to the latter, deeply embedded in the labour recruitment process in the construction sector. Such advances are often demanded by the labourers as a condition of starting work, as the following excerpt from Jayaswal's observations illuminates.

Journal entry 3: May 20, 2016. Sargana.

7:00 a.m. There is a slight drizzle. I reach Shailendra's house, my backpack ready for our journey. However, I can only hear his voice and see his cousins, who were supposed to travel with him, sitting around the wooden cot in the courtyard. Sundar, one of the cousins, demands, "Rs 500 is too little. Damodar (the contractor) must pay us at least Rs 600 as advance." Sundar's brother Mahendra disagrees, "No no, at least Rs 1,000. Otherwise we will not go."

Shailendra is flabbergasted. He emerges from his house, obviously ready for the journey, and pleads with his cousins: "The contractor is coming with us. Why are you worried about money? The bus will leave soon. Let us go and sort this out on the way."

But he fails to convince his cousins. The only one agreeable to travel with him is his neighbour Sandeep.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/8/3/example-daily-journal-post-1>

Jayaswal reaches Shailendra Rishi's house at the departure time agreed between him and his neighbours, only to find that they refuse to budge unless the contractor pays them an advance. This despite the contractor travelling with them on this particular journey. The contractor eventually pays them the advance they demand, and journeys with his labourers nearly a week later.

Jayaswal's observations corroborate the pervasiveness of the system of advances at least in the construction sector presented in several other accounts (Srivastava, 2009; Breman, 2009; and Pitcherit, 2009). Intense negotiations characterise labourers' routine request for advances, as contractors willingly extend advances but seek to limit the volume of cash advanced. Jayaswal reported such negotiations in Jammu where he accompanied Shailendra's uncle Pradeep Rishi who worked with another contractor from a neighbouring district on a project to build a missionary school:

Two of [the workers from Kishengunj, a district neighbouring Pradeep's in Bihar] request for advances of INR 5,000 each because they want to purchase mobile phones. But the thekedar persuades them to accept INR 3,000.

Pradeep has already taken an advance of INR 5,000 the previous week. He asks for a further advance of INR 1,000. The thekedar offers him INR 500, which Pradeep reluctantly accepts.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2017/1/18/post-53-arnia-jammu>

Such advances sometimes roll over from one job cycle to the next, a situation reported by others (Shivakumar et al, 1991; Olson and Murthy, 2000; Srivastava, 2016). Shailendra Rishi and a few of his co-workers (though obviously not the neighbours reported above), Pradeep Rishi, as well as the workers from Pradeep's neighbouring district all find themselves carrying their advances from one job cycle to the next. While such advances do provide a modicum of economic security to the workers, they also deepen personalised ties between labourers and their contractors, rendering it difficult for labourers to look for alternative employment.

Conditions of travel

While scholars debate the implications of labour recruitment practices and advances on the well-being of migrant workers, their vulnerability is particularly stark during the journeys they make to their destinations. Jayaswal reports that Shailendra and eleven of his neighbours journey for over 40 hours to reach their destination, combining a three-wheeled auto-rickshaw, a bus and a train. Once on the train, they travel in what is called the General compartment, where seating is unreserved. In a compartment meant to seat 99, it is not uncommon to find up to 150 people sitting cheek by jowl with other passengers on the berths or cramming up the floor (<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/12/20/post-7>). Their group of twelve reaches Sirhind in Punjab at quarter past midnight. As they alight, Jayaswal observes almost 300 people having taken over the platform for the night, trying to catch some sleep before embarking on their own journeys (<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/12/20/post-8>). Anand, who similarly notes the combination of modes of transport used by Rachit, his brother and two neighbours, who he accompanies, to their destination in Punjab. He too emphasises the cramped conditions in which they travel (<http://www.livesonthemove.com/rachit-journal/2016/12/20/post-5>) and the way in which migrant workers have no option but to sleep on the platform as they await the train.

It is not only the inconvenience of cramped transport and crowded platforms that make the journeys of migrant workers such as Rachit, Shailen-

dra and millions of others precarious. Official and societal attitudes exacerbate these precarities.

An excerpt from Jayaswal's journal entry from his journey with Shailendra bears this out:

A policeman is wandering about the compartment, ostensibly to maintain law and order. He orders a seventeen-year old who is sitting beneath Shailendra's berth to stand up and then proceeds to occupy that seat himself. No one says anything.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/shailendra-journal/2016/12/20/post-8>

Likewise, Anand reports the following exchange between migrant workers and "locals" as their train entered Ambala railway station in Punjab.

The train arrives into Ambala. Aravind bids us goodbye. A middle-aged couple enter our compartment. The lady looks around at us, and complains of the crowds. She continues to complain about people from UP-Bihar sitting in train coaches without purchasing tickets. At this, one of our co-passengers, a 55-year old man, tells us her off: "No one from UP/ Bihar is travelling without tickets. If we stopped coming to Punjab, you will face many hardships. Please do not speak ill of us."

Visibly embarrassed, the lady apologises.

<http://www.livesonthemove.com/rachit-journal/2016/12/20/post-7>

Both accounts reveal the official and societal attitudes towards migrant workers. The policeman can ask migrant workers to vacate their seats on the train with impunity, while the "local" woman can accuse migrant workers of travelling ticketless without any evidence to support her claims. Of course, it is also important to note that the migrant workers could challenge her allegations in a way that they could not contest the policeman's actions. Furthermore, the woman takes back her words when called out: it is unlikely the policeman would apologise even if he had been called out for his actions. Nonetheless, these important differences should not obscure the prejudices harboured by official as well as societal actors against migrant workers.

IV

Social exclusion: denying the 'right to have rights'

The precarious conditions under which migrant workers travel augur the vulnerability that mark their lives and livelihoods during their circulations. In this context, Srivastava and his colleagues (2013) show as many as 94% of such migrants have no formal labour contracts, indicating a precarious life indeed. The majority of labour migrants live in fenced-in and guarded worksites, with conditions similar to those of labour camps. Many of them live under tarpaulin roofs with poor amenities. They work through day and by night, with little by way of 'overtime payments'. Roy's (2016) survey of nearly 6000 households in north-east Bihar also testify to labour migrants' precarious working conditions as well as perilous conditions of life. His findings corroborate the social exclusion confronted by migrant workers, who cannot access their entitlements to subsidised food. Under the public distribution system (PDS), their ration cards are invalid in their destinations of work. Such migrants either depend on their employer/ labour contractor for their food provisions or purchase it in the open market. Their dependence significantly increases the cost of living for them and reduces the additional earnings they might hope to remit to their families. The only social support their families possess is the compensation offered by the State Government in case of their death at work. Because migrant workers are mostly in informal employment across several sectors and industries, they have very little spaces to voice their grievances and articulate even legitimate complaints. In-depth interviews with labour migrants bears testimony to this precarity. The ethnographies bear this out.

Uncertainty at work

Shailendra, his cousins and their friends and neighbours came to Ludhiana because their labour contractor Damodar had assured them that there would be work for them in constructing *gurdwaras* (Sikh places of worship) in the State of Punjab. Shailendra was experienced in this specific sub-field of the construction industry and was confident of making it as an independent contractor at some point in the near future. It was to construct *gurdwaras* that he

and the others accompanied Damodar in May 2016. Within four months of their arrival into Ludhiana, however, the demand for the construction of *gurdwaras* appears to have slumped. The committee that managed the construction of *gurdwaras* apparently told Damodar they would not be able to pay for the construction till at least the January of the following year. As Jayaswal observes:

Journal entry 16: August 7, 2016. Beeja.

4:00 p.m.: [Damodar] tells Shailendra that the Committee has instructed him to go slow on construction work. Work on the dome for which Damodar had offered Shailendra the contract does not need to be ready before January, which is a nicer way of saying he will be paid his contractual fees only in January! Only one labourer is required in Beeja, instead of the five who were working here earlier.

Shailendra's cousins are now considering other options. [They] have already left for other locations.

It is not only the livelihoods of construction workers such as Shailendra that are precariousness. Even workers employed in jobs with ostensibly 'higher' status face severe uncertainties. Rachit, who came to Ludhiana to take up a job as a driver for Birjinder Singh, the owner of one of the city's numerous flour mills, found out for himself. As Anand reports:

Journal entry 86: April 12, 2017. Arati Chowk, Ludhiana.

6:15 p.m.: Rachit comes to my room to look me up: I have been unwell. We sit on the terrace since there is no electricity and the room is too dark.

Rachit informs me that he plans to return to Sargana on May 5. The brother of his friend Santosh, who left for Sargana last month (hyperlink to journal entry 78), might be leaving Ludhiana that day, so Rachit will try to go home with him. I enquire if Birjinder will allow him to leave: as driver, one of Rachit's responsibilities is to drop off and pick up Birjinder's children from school.

Downcast, Rachit tells me that Birjinder has asked him to leave the job. "He told me I am free to go back to Sargana whenever I want. He also told me that when I return, I need not come to his place. Basically, he has sacked me."

I am stunned. "Hasn't his wife objected? I thought she relies on you for her shopping needs," I ask.

"It was her idea," he replies. "Birjinder's aunt is moving into their house and will be living on the ground floor. They will have additional expenses and say they cannot afford a driver any more."

Despite the vast differences in the occupational circumstances and conditions of work for Shailendra Rishi and Rachit Yadav, they both share similar uncertainties at work. Neither can count on guaranteed employment. Neither has signed a contract with their employer. Their employment is thus at best precarious, rendering them vulnerable to arbitrary lay-offs as determined by their employers.

Labour conditions

The precarious employment of circular labour migrants such as Shailendra Rishi, Rachit Yadav and Gyanesh Mandal is rendered even more vulnerable by the abysmal conditions at their workplace. The dangerous conditions under which construction workers labour has been documented in Srivastava (2016). Jayaswal observed similarly dangerous conditions of work endured by Shailendra Rishi and his co-workers throughout their employment constructing *gurdwaras* on the outskirts of Ludhiana. Scaffolds are erected but without sufficient precaution, which means accidents are frequent and may lead to severe injuries and even death.

Even where labouring conditions do not pose immediate danger of death, they remain strenuous. Drawing on his ethnographic observations at the flour mill in Ludhiana's Abdullahpur Basti owned by Rachit Yadav's employer Birjinder Singh, Anand notes the millworkers operating the mills without being provisioned any earplugs or other devices to muffle the noise pollution (Journal entry 11: September 2, 2016. Abdullahpur Basti) for hours at a time. Furthermore, they are not supplied any protective gear to prevent them inhaling flour dust, even when they are covered from head to toe in flour dust within the first hour of operating the mill (Journal entry 31: November 19, 2016. Abdullahpur Basti). Not only do the millworkers endure noise pollution and flour dust, they are also tasked with loading the sacks of flour onto the waiting vehicles of their customers. This particularly arduous task entails lifting sacks of flour weighing up to 10 kilograms onto one's back with no support whatsoever and carrying these to customers' vehicles parked some yards away (Journal entry 34: November 27, 2016. Abdullahpur Basti) The work is literally back-breaking as the workers use no trolleys, no pulleys and no devices of any kind except their bare hands and bare backs. The

mill too is poorly ventilated and allows little natural light.

Unlike the millworkers who at least have a fixed place of work, Rachit Yadav finds himself drawn into all sorts of tasks set for him by his employer. Although primarily responsible for chauffeuring different members of the Singh household, he is also called in for other jobs. It is not uncommon, as Anand observes, for Rachit to help at the mill:

Journal entry 31: November 19, 2016.

6 p.m.: Rachit is working at the flour mill, covered from head to toe in flour dust. Birjinder has deployed him in the mill to cover for the absence of Hiralal as well as Ambika who has been off sick for the last few days. Vishnu, Mevalal and Bablu go about their work as usual.

They all look at me incredulously when I ask if Rachit will be paid extra for his work in the mill. "The malik is very stingy," Bablu whispers. "He does not pay us for loading and unloading weights onto clients' vehicles. We have to haggle with them ourselves. Rachit knows better than to expect him to pay even a rupee extra."

Rachit's services were particularly exploited by his employer in the immediate aftermath of the infamous demonetisation of currency announced by Prime Minister Modi on November 8, 2016. Following the Central Government's decision to demonetise high-value currency, banks and financial institutions across the country witnessed a flurry of activity to exchange old high-value currency notes for the new ones. Like millions of other entrepreneurs, much of Birjinder's business operates on the use of cash. Demonetisation rendered useless the high-value currency notes that Singh possessed. However, neither he nor other members of his family had the time to queue up at banks, and asked Rachit to stand in their stead. Rachit reported (Journal entry 27: November 12, 2016. Abdullahpur Basti) standing for three to four hours each day from November 9 to November 12 exchanging currency notes on his employer's behalf.

Early in 2017, Rachit Yadav doubled up as care-giver for his employer's ailing aunt. When she was admitted to a private hospital in the city, Rachit was called on to attend on her. While Singh's immediate and extended family stayed with her during the day, Rachit was tasked with attending on her during night-time. Although attending on the ailing aunt

was not as physically strenuous as lifting sacks of flour or carrying bricks up perilous scaffolds, it did deprive Rachit of a proper night's sleep for over six weeks: he was provided with a chair by the patient's hospital bed and slept through the night while sitting on it. Anand's reportage of Rachit's emotional labour is telling:

Journal entry 48: December 27, 2016. Kitchlewnagar, Ludhiana.

5:30 a.m.: Rachit sits by the hospital bed in the ICU, keeping a constant watch on the monitors that display Amarjeet's heart beat rates and blood pressure levels. The graph depicting her heart beat frequently plateaus, leading the device to sound out an alarm that calls for the immediate attention of the nurses and attending doctors. Rachit is evidently exhausted and I remain on tenterhooks.

8:00 a.m.: Rachit steps out to the waiting area outside the ICU briefly to catch some fresh air. He stands around this area for about fifteen minutes before hurrying back in.

10:00 a.m.: Amarjeet's son-in-law arrives at the hospital as scheduled. Rachit and I leave the hospital. We are both hungry and stop near Arati Chowk to eat some chhole bature (a savoury snack consisting of chhole, or chickpeas boiled and cooked in a spicy batter, served with bature, a large flour flatbread).

10:30 a.m.: Rachit drops me to my room and proceeds towards Birjinder's home.

Journal entry 53: January 13, 2017. Arati chowk, Ludhiana.

8:45 p.m.: Rachit stops by on his way from the DMC Hospital to meet me. He has been there since 2 p.m. and says he needed a break. Birjinder's aunt has been readmitted into intensive care.

A huge bonfire illuminates the market place, lit by traders and residents of the neighbourhood, to celebrate Lohri, a festival at which people pray for good harvests. Rachit and I stand near the bonfire as people sit around it and chat. In a while, we are both invited to join as they stand up and begin to walk in a circle around the fire. We are all given some rice grain, pop corn and sesame seeds to throw into the flames as we circle it, with some people chanting phrases which I cannot understand: Rachit later tells me that these chants are to invoke the gods to bless the land and banish poverty.

10:00 p.m.: Rachit then leaves to return to the hospital.

Journal entry 56: January 16, 2017. Arati Chowk, Ludhiana.

2:15 p.m.: Rachit stops by at my room on his way back from DMC hospital where Birjinder's aunt remains admitted. He informs me that her health has remained the same. Her relatives have had to return to their respective homes since they cannot be away from work for a prolonged period of time, so it is now his responsibility to provide care for her. He has been at the hospital since the previous night and is now rushing home to pick up Birjinder's children from school. Once they have been dropped back home, he will drive back to the hospital to attend to Birjinder's aunt.

3:00 p.m.: Rachit glances at his watch and hurries away.

Journal entry 62: January 27, 2017. Abdullapur Basti, Ludhiana.

7:00 p.m.: Rachit comes into the mill for a fleeting moment. He informs me that his temperature is slightly higher than normal and goes back inside the house to continue his household chores.

Journal entry 67: February 2, 2017. Ludhiana. DMC Hospital, Ludhiana.

5:15 p.m.: Rachit picks me up on his way to the hospital, where he will attend to Birjinder's aunt. He is wearing a red-coloured jacket and a pair of orange-coloured trousers. On reaching the hospital, we head to the general ward where she is admitted. Her daughter and son-in-law have come to visit. They instruct Rachit to purchase some medicines from the pharmacy. After he returns, he begins to apply some coconut oil on the old lady's feet and then proceeds to massage them.

Journal entry 73: February 19, 2017. DMC Hospital, Ludhiana.

5:00 p.m.: Birjinder's aunt has now been shifted into the General Ward. A marked improvement in her health is discernible. Rachit sits by her bedside and brews a glass of lemon juice for her.

For every single day, from December 27, 2016 to February 19, 2017, Rachit attends on his employer's aunt in addition to chauffeuring their family around the city, loading and unloading sacks of flour at the mill and helping with household chores. However, his employers offer him no additional remuneration for these tasks and hardly recognise his physical and emotional labour.

Living conditions

Where the conditions of work endured by migrant workers are so precarious, living conditions are unsurprisingly appalling. Resonating with the findings in Srivastava and Jha (2016), construction workers such as Shailendra Rishi rely on their contractors for housing. Such housing is extremely basic and barely protects the workers from the elements. As the photographs assembled by Jayaswal show, Shailendra and his co-workers braved the inhospitable winter of southwest Kashmir in dreadful conditions.

The accommodation for Ludhiana's millworkers as documented by Anand are more habitable. But they come at a price, since homeowners with properties near the city's mills charge steep rents for the rooms they let to tenants. For example, four of the millworkers, Vishnu Mandal, Hiralal Paswan, Pawan Yadav and Raj Kumar Yadav, all employed at Singh's mill rent a small room barely enough to accommodate four rope cots. They each pay INR 1,000 or nearly a tenth of their monthly salary. Not only does their labour contribute to the profits earned by Singh and his mill, but the housing of their very bodies becomes a source of profits earned by property owners. Tenants are willing to live in cramped housing since they can maximise savings and property owners are happy to accommodate since they maximise profits.

It is not only conditions of housing that are precarious. Migrant workers such as Shailendra undergo further insecurities in their social transactions. In the aftermath of the demonetisation drive declared by Prime Minister Modi, Shailendra Rishi and his cousins needed urgently to exchange the high-denomination currency notes they possessed with new ones or else those would be rendered worthless. However, banks tended to be overcrowded, with long queues snaking through town and country for months. Under such circumstances, Shailendra Rishi and his cousins feared that waiting in these queues would imply the loss of wages, which they could scarcely afford. As Jayaswal reports (Journal entry 60: April 24, 2017. Beeja), they approached a currency broker in the neighbourhood who agreed to exchange their money: they were to pay him cash and he would issue them a cheque for the same amount. Shailendra paid the currency broker the cash equivalent of INR 36,000. However, the cheque issued by the broker bounced in the bank. Panic-stricken, Shailendra and

his cousins, accompanied by Jayaswal, searched for the broker across Ludhiana and its environs before realising that he had given them the slip and stolen their cash. As migrant workers, they had few social contacts on whom they could draw. Fearing harassment, they avoided reporting the matter to the police. Their repeated efforts to contact the Sarpanch of the village on the outskirts of Ludhiana in which the broker lived bore no fruit, and few other politicians were willing to help.

Social and political exclusion

Dinesh Rai, whose family cultivates a tiny plot of land in Bihar's Sitamarhi district, drives an autorickshaw in Delhi. He has been working in Delhi since 2004, beginning as a construction worker, before taking up a job as a headloader, and finally driving cycle rickshaw he rents from an agency. Dinesh Rai circulates between Bihar and Delhi at twice each year, since his family members – including his wife and children – live in the village. In his interview with us, documented at <http://www.livesonthemove.com/video/>, Rai compares his circumstances in Delhi with that in Bihar. He praises the subsidised foodgrains provisioned to low-income households under the Indian Government's Public Distribution System as saving the lives of millions in villages such as his. Consequently, he laments the absence of such provisions for individuals such as himself while they are on the move in search of dignified employment. Because the Below Poverty Line (BPL) card is issued to his household and is valid only during their stay in their village, Rai has no option but to rely on the market to purchase food supplies while he is in Delhi.

Rai's circumstances are not unique, as becomes clear through interviews with other labour migrants who circulate several locations in any given year. Bismay Oraon, who complements his income from farming his plot of land in Chhatisgarh's Bilaspur district, was interviewed by Jayaswal (Jayaswal, interview notes, AJ.I.01.2016-11-14) as a construction labourer at the worksite of the Punjab Agricultural University in Ludhiana during November 2016. Oraon was introduced into construction work by his brother who was a foreman in a construction company since approximately 1980. Since then, he has worked as a *beldar* at hundreds of worksites across

India, interspersing his employment in construction with work on his farmland back in Chhatisgarh. Oraon echoes Rai's complaint that, although the subsidised foodgrains provisioned by the Public Distribution System (PDS) in his village prevent starvation, itinerant migrants such as himself find that they lose any entitlement to such provisions the moment they leave their village. As a *beldar*, Oraon has been left with little option but to meet his food expenditures from advances borrowed from whoever happened to be his *jamadar* (labour supervisor). Those advances are adjusted against his wages, leaving him with too little to either save or invest. The result has been further borrowing, leaving Oraon trapped in a cycle of debt.

Similar to the circumstances reported by Rai and Oraon is the narrative offered by Harilal Kashyap to Anand as the latter assembled his life history (Anand, life history notes, AA.LH.01.2016-09-25). Kashyap vends lemon soda on a mobile cart at a traffic crossing near Kitchlewnagar in Ludhiana. He has been in Ludhiana since 1999, when he first arrived in the city with his father. Kashyap first found employment in one of Ludhiana's several garment sewing factories where he and his co-workers would often work 18-20 hours through the day and night, with little or no overtime. After falling out with his supervisor in the factory, Kashyap took up a job with construction companies as a painter. Finally, about three years ago, he decided to set up his present enterprise. Because he circulates between his village in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district and Ludhiana, Kashyap has retained his BPL card at his rural home so his family members can benefit from the provisions of the PDS. The consequence has been his exclusion from such provisioning and him having to rely on the open market in order to meet his food requirements.

The general precariousness of work combined with the specific denial of social entitlements to millions of labour migrants such as Dinesh Rai, Bismay Oraon and Harilal Kashyap provide a stark contrast with the aspirations unleashed by the substantive democratisation of the Indian polity after 1989. Even as labour migrants such as Pradeep Rishi, Narendra Yadav and Shyamdev Mandal – all of whom celebrate the advent of Lalu Prasad Yadav in 1990 as enhancing their social confidence and enabling them

to even think about leaving their village in search of dignified livelihoods – circulate between different employments across the country, they confront an ensemble of precarity and informality that not only constrains their livelihood options but also the social entitlements that provision food for them at prices they can afford.

The policy framework

Recognising the vulnerabilities that migrant workers suffer, the Government of India instituted the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act in 1979. The Act aims to regulate the employment of migrant workers, protect their conditions of service and ensure that the rights accruing to them as workers are not undermined. The legislation applies to any industrial unit that employs five or more inter-State migrant workers. Borhade (2016) correctly notes that the provisions of this important legislation need to be reoriented towards recognising the myriad forms of employment into which migrant workers are recruited. For example, while construction labourers and workers in footwear manufacturing may well be covered under the aegis of the Act, rickshaw pullers such as Dinesh Rai and drivers such as Rachit Yadav are not. In this vein, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has constituted a working group to recommend amendments to the Act.

Borhade (2016) has highlighted the fragmented nature of legislation pertaining to migrant workers in India. Sectoral policies related to education, health and labour rights tend to be based on the assumption that targeted beneficiaries live and work in the villages where they are registered. A case in point is the smart-card based health insurance scheme the RSBY, to avail which only households registered as below poverty line (BPL) are eligible. However, it is not always possible for migrant workers to produce their BPL cards while they are away from their home localities. Other schemes have been more successful, such as State Governments' attempts to provide education for children of migrant workers. The World Bank-supported Andhra Pradesh Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a case in point, as it has built synergies between the State government and organisations in civil society such as Aid et Action, Disha Foundation and America India Foundation to provide state edu-

cation to children of migrant workers originating in Western Odisha.

The digitalisation of governance espoused by the Indian state offers opportunities for the social inclusion of migrant workers in India. A coalition of organisations called the National Coalition for the Security of Migrant Workers (NACSOM) sees precisely such potential in the introduction of Adhaar cards, a digital technology that promises to offer a national database, thereby guaranteeing people's identity as Indian citizens. NASCOM has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI, which oversees Adhar), to include migrant workers within the database and enable their social and financial inclusion. However, a pilot project launched by Disha Foundation in Maharashtra found that inclusion in Adhar did not necessarily facilitate financial inclusion as the banks rejected the validity of Adhar as a credible database (Borhade, 2016). Clearly, technocratic solutions to addressing the social exclusions faced by migrants are inadequate.

The Government of India is acutely aware of the social exclusion to which the country's internal migrants are subjected (RWGM, 2017). Indeed, the Report of the Working Group on Migration, commissioned by the Indian government, outlines these exclusions as well makes recommendations for the social inclusion of migrant workers. Recommendations include: 1) Legal protections of migrants' working conditions, health and social security in destination areas; 2) Establish outreach measures to enhance migrants' awareness of and capacity to demand their legal rights; 3) Provisioning educational, financial and public distribution services to a mobile population; 4) Housing for a floating population; and 5) Timely collection and analysis of data pertaining to people on the move. These recommendations are comprehensive and well-intentioned. Nevertheless, they refrain from addressing the political dynamics that underpin the social exclusion to which migrants are subjected.

Underpinning such social exclusion is political exclusion. Despite the adoption of universal adult suffrage at its foundational moment, the Indian State remains impervious to the need to make such suffrage meaningful to a population that is increasingly mobile. Voting rights in India continue to be re-

stricted to the places of people's usual domicile. For migrant labourers, who give the best part of their working lives to multiple locations in urban and rural India, such restrictions have two implications. On the one hand, this reduces their value to the destination locality's politicians, who do not need their votes to win elections at all. On the other hand, migrant laborers are not able to always go back to their homes during election time to cast their votes: ample reportage on the political exclusion of migrant workers from the 2015 Bihar Vidha Sabha elections bears this out (Roy, 2016; Parth, 2015; Express News Service, 2015): a point more generally made about the 2014 Lok Sabha elections (Patel, 2014). A survey I conducted for a related project (Roy, 2017) resonates somewhat with these reports. Just under half of the 6000-odd rural outmigrants interviewed during that survey reported to have voted for the 2015 Vidhan Sabha elections (held October/ November). The figures for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections were comparable: slightly fewer respondents reported being able to return home to cast their vote during the elections held in April/ May of that year. Indeed, a study conducted by the NGO Ajeevika and their partners (Ajeevika Bureau, 2012) revealed that over 60% of labour migrants were unable to cast their vote in at least one election held during their adult life for the simple reason that they were away from home. While the Bihar figures might be interpreted as representing the greater enthusiasm of migrants in that State for elections compared with migrants from others, it remains a matter of shame for the world's largest democracy that some of its most precarious populations are unable to exercise their franchise.

V

Fragmented citizenship: mobility, citizenship and the right to have rights in an unequal India.

The exclusions from electoral participation and social entitlements wrought upon internal labour migrants bring us back to the prejudiced narratives engulfing them in an increasingly unequal India. Such exclusions not only frustrate the social confidence of migrant populations, but actively deny them the foundational rights that constitute citizenship. These foundational rights exceed the de jure civil-judicial

rights that outline the relationship between individuals and the nation-states which confer the status of 'citizen' on them. Rather, as Hannah Arendt (1979) would have it, the foundational rights to which citizenship pertains are to do with the right of recognition, inclusion and membership in society. Citizenship thus refers to, in Arendtian terms, the 'right to have rights'. The effective loss of the right to vote and of the social entitlements to which internal migrants are eligible only so long as they are domiciled in the villages in which they are registered undermines their 'rights to have rights'.

Drawing on these insights, Margaret Somers (2008) helpfully distinguishes the formal rights attached to the legal status of citizen from the *right to human personhood*, which entails the recognition of people as moral equals endowed by a full inclusion in the social and political community. Accordingly, citizenship studies typically intimate a two-sided field: one, which refers to the geopolitical borders of exclusion that distinguishes 'insiders' from 'outsiders'; and two, which fleshes the differential practices of membership within those designated as 'insiders', privileging some as 'interior' whereas others as 'exterior'. As this paper has shown, circular labour migrants in India suffer social and political exclusion not only because they are 'outsiders' for the States to which they migrate, but also 'exterior' to the States from which they migrate.

In making these distinctions, Somers draws on, but also departs from, TH Marshall's (1950) classic formulation of citizenship as comprising civil, political and social rights bestowed by the state on its people. However, she is careful to avoid Marshall's assumptions of a linear progression from civil to political to social rights and notes instead the processes through which citizenship claims are advanced, contested and institutionalised. In a similar vein, Bryan Turner (1990) suggests that citizenship has to do with, on the one hand, social membership or belonging to a community and, on the other hand, with the right to the allocation of resources. Applying this perspective to her study of China's so-called 'floating populations', Dorothy Solinger (2004) finds that although circular labour migrants in that country hold formal citizenship on account of their being Chinese nationals, they are effectively excluded from both the social membership in the host cities as well

as state-provisioned social entitlements. A possible way of addressing such exclusions, suggests David Harvey (2008), is to conceptualise a comprehensive understanding of the "rights to the city", which urges scholars, policy-makers and activists to step beyond a focus on securing urban services to transform social relations in the city. The material presented in this paper resonates with these perspectives of citizenship, thereby enabling us to analyse the social and political exclusions to which circular labour migrants in India are subjected.

In her magisterial work, Niraja Gopal Jayal (2013) reminds us of the complicated relationship of the three Ms of post-1989 India – Mandir, Mandal and Market – with the practice of citizenship in India. While the politics of Mandir have exposed majoritarian tendencies, the politics around Mandal have spurred an egalitarian promise. The politics of liberalising markets has exacerbated inequalities in India even as the vocabulary of rights has become ever more entrenched in the body politic. This paper has illustrated the ways in which the 4th M – mobility – intimates the ambiguities of citizenship in an India of growing inequalities. On the one hand, the enhanced mobility among subaltern populations such as Pradeep Rishi, Narendra Yadav and Shyamdev Mandal reflects the heightened social confidence inspired by their subscribing to politicised ideas of human dignity. On the other hand, their increased mobility compels them to lead precarious lives, bereft of the social protections and electoral rights to which they are formally entitled, to which such individuals as Dinesh Rai, Bismay Oraon and Harilal Kashyap testify. Such circulations call attention to the fragmented citizenship that have come to characterise political subjectivities in India since 1989.

Indeed, Jayal's scholarship offers us important leads in elaborating the fragmented contours of citizenship in post-1989 India. On the one hand, members of historically oppressed communities are able to exercise their suffrage autonomous of elite diktats in rather unprecedented ways. The emergence of political parties that explicitly advances the voices and interests of individuals from such backgrounds certainly deepens democratic citizenship beyond the formal exercise of the franchise. Vibrant social movements that challenge unjust government laws have sprouted across the countryside, holding the

state accountable to its promise of social justice. The extension of affirmative action and institution of laws that guarantee social entitlements as a constitutional right contributes to entrenching the vocabulary of rights across the political landscape. On the other hand, however, the achievements of such advances are blunted by state action. The economic reforms initiated through the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the systematic whittling away of state investment in agriculture and industry. Slowly but stealthily, governments across Indian States diluted labour protections and sought to reduce employment in the public sector at the very moment when affirmative actions began to be extended. The “buccaneer capitalism” promoted by the state in India spawned economic inequalities unheard of in the country since the high noon of colonialism, negating the substantial achievements of the anti-caste politics that inspired subaltern confidence.

Jayal’s treatment of citizenship enables us to avoid the pitfalls of three prevailing tendencies in the scholarship on citizenship in India. Liberal formulations assume a teleological progression of economic, social and political rights that synchronise with economic growth, political democracy and social change. While these authors (Khilnani, 1997; Guha, 2007) rightly celebrate India’s achievements as a democracy, they trace these achievements to the efforts of a select group of liberally-minded politicians (especially Nehru) and economic growth (as for instance promoted by reformers in 1991). As a result, they remain oblivious to the ways in which liberal ideas of political membership that hinge on conceptions of individual rights that assume people to be territorially-rooted actively undermine citizenship in India and elsewhere. Marxist formulations consider citizenship to be a veneer that conceals social and economic inequalities. For example, Anderson’s (2012) scathing criticism of political and economic processes in India since 1950 ignores the very substantive gains made by members of historically oppressed communities as a result of the political and social activism. Exacerbated inequalities should not blind us to the tremendous social and economic churning that has marked India’s political landscape in the decades since the country adopted its republican constitution.

Postcolonial formulations ably navigate the binary conceptualisations of citizenship by Liberals and Marxists to recognise these substantive changes in Indian society and politics without limiting their explanations to structural changes in the economy or ideological predilections of individual politicians. Chatterjee’s (2004) conception of political society in the context of squatter communities in Kolkata is exemplary: he recognises the ways in which subaltern politics has sought to redefine democracy by invoking moral conceptions. Such conceptions emphasise personal connections between populations and their politicians through which members of historically oppressed request to be exempted from the law rather than enforce its application. Positing these practices in ‘political society’ against a politics of ‘civil society’ which he equates with the application of the law, Chatterjee (2012: 24) makes a normative case that the analysis of political practices be framed ‘as a redefined norm that endorses differentiated rather than equal citizenship as the normative standard for the modern state’. While the distinction between political society and civil society is a helpful heuristic, the inference that inhabitants of political society seek differentiated citizenship does not chime with the claims to dignified lives that we encounter in this chapter. Indeed, as Jayal (2013), drawing on Young (1989) reminds us, egalitarian imaginations of the political community need not be difference blind. Chatterjee’s endorsement of differentiated rather than equal conceptions of membership in the political community as a normative standard for governance is at odds with many of the substantive claims advanced by the inhabitants of political society. Kolkata’s squatters do not want themselves and their descendants to remain squatters and be subjected of the insecurities and vulnerabilities entailed in squatting. Rather, they request not to be evicted presumably so that they can better their lives and get their children out and away from the squatter-communities.

The formulation of ‘fragmented citizenship’ to understand the social and political experience of circular labour migrants in India draws together Jayal’s (2013) delineation of the tribulations of citizenship in the country after 1989 alongside the social struggles to which Omvedt’s (1993; 2008) scholarship has

drawn our attention. While struggles of social justice have animated the social and political lives of sub-altern populations, enhancing their collective confidence and search for dignified lives, these emancipatory claims have been blunted by state apathy and growing economic inequalities. The dreams of equality that spur circular labour migrants are negated by the social and political exclusions to which they are subjected.

Epilogue:

On November 23, 2010, members of India's Lok Sabha assented to a bill amending the Representation of People Act, 1951. The amended legislation extended the franchise to approximately 11 million non-resident Indians (NRIs), members of the Indian diaspora in other countries. Adding substance to form, the then Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government issued a gazetted notification in this regard. Although the initial plans envisaged NRIs to have to be physically present in their constituencies to cast their ballot, subsequent developments suggest a considerable reconsideration of this original position. The *Times of India* reported on January 13, 2015 that India's Election Commission had recommended the use of electronic ballots to enable NRIs vote on election day, dispensing with the need to be physically present. Thus, not only has the franchise been extended to Indian diaspora communities, but provisions for their casting their vote electronically have also been specified (Rajagopal, 2015). The social and political exclusions to which India's internal labour migrants are subjected became even starker after this development.

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