



*16th Workshop Young Researchers
Association Jeunes Études Indiennes (AJEI)*

*Centre for Informal sector and Labour Studies
School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University
11, 12 and 13 February 2014*

Labour, mobility and mobilization

Call for Papers

The **Association Jeunes Études Indiennes** (AJEI) gathers students from different disciplinary fields of social sciences, from MA to post-doctorate level, who are undertaking fieldwork in South Asia. The AJEI organizes every year a seminar in France and a one-week workshop in India for young and senior researchers to present and discuss their work. The selected theme for the 2014 workshop is “*Labour, mobility and mobilization in India*“.

Labour in India has become in recent years a prolific theme for research in social and human sciences, as well as an important topic of debate among policy makers. The scholarly debate has evolved rather rapidly over the last twenty years, with a new focus on the informal sector, India's "jobless growth", labour welfare, workers' circulations, etc. The official conception of labour has undergone changes as well with a renewed interest for the labour force working in the informal sector, as the reports of the *National Commission on Labour* and the *National Commission for Enterprises of Unorganized Sector* demonstrate¹.

The changing nature and conceptions of labour and of the labour force represent an ever growing challenge for the social and human sciences. The issue of labour remains however central in understanding and analysing the current economic and social context of India, as it raises a great number of questions related to economic development and welfare, the reality of *inclusive growth*, social and geographical mobility, political mobilizations, etc.

The 2014 Workshop of the AJEI on *Labour, mobility and mobilization* aims therefore at giving an encompassing view of the most recent research works being conducted on labour in India, in order to understand both these conceptual evolutions and the most recent and pregnant issues related to labour in contemporary India. By focusing on the issues of political and social mobilizations and mobility, the objective of the workshop is to place the workers and their daily challenges at the centre of the discussion.

The AJEI invites papers on the following themes and topics : 1) International Labour Migrations from and to India, 2) Seasonal and circular Migrations of Labour 3) Workers' Mobilizations, Trade Unions and Labour regulations, 4) Employment trends in contemporary India and Ethnographies of Labour. The field of study remains however open to include original approaches, not integrated in the present proposal.

¹ Sharit K. Bhowmik, "India: Labor Sociology searching for a direction", *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 36, N2, May 2009

International Labour Migrations from and to India :

Large-scale international labour migrations from India are usually considered to have started with the system of Indentured Labour in the 19th century. Poor and unqualified workers were sent to different parts of the British Empire to work in plantations and answer the demand for cheap labour after the abolition of slavery. Most of these migrations became permanent for lack of opportunities or resources to go back to India. Many other systems developed in parallel, such as the Kangani System in Tamil Nadu or the Sardari system in Bengal¹, which relied on the workers' own networks to recruit new labourers². These "recruiting workers" had usually become foreman and could be considered as the equivalent of today's jobbers. In the mean time, many "Passengers" or free migrants travelled from India to other parts of the Empire to work as employees, merchants, clerks, taking part in the economic and political well-being of the British Empire³.

After the Independence, in the 1950s and 1960s, most International labour migrations from India took place towards the former colonial metropole. As Great Britain toughened its laws on Immigration, the flow of migrants shifted towards the "new" anglophone countries, USA, Canada, Australia. In parallel, work migrations to the Gulf Monarchies increased, both for qualified workers (doctors, nurses, etc) and unqualified labourers. In a fourth wave of migration, software professionals from India have been emigrating since the 1990s not only to North America, but also to Europe and East Asia⁴.

Studies on skilled and highly qualified migrants tend to forget or oversee the fact that these migrants are first and foremost economic migrants. The labour dimension of their migration is therefore often overlooked. We would like to invite papers that develop this dimension, to try and understand the challenges these skilled workers meet during their migration. The migrations of unqualified migrants travelling to and from India will also be a topic of interest of the workshop, especially papers focusing on the role of migrants' networks, issues of working conditions, gender-related issues, etc.

Seasonal and circular migrations of Labour in contemporary India :

Circular or seasonal migrations of labour for employment from rural to other rural or urban areas are not only an important reality of the Indian labour and urban landscape, but a central aspect of day-to-day lives and strategies of people in rural areas. These temporary workers usually do not benefit from any kind of welfare or security schemes and work in extremely difficult conditions (especially in certain sectors such as construction)^{5 6}.

² Armarjit Kaur, "Sojourners and Settlers : South Indians and Communal Identity in Malaysia", in Crispin Bates (ed), *Community, Empire and Migrations. South Asians in Diaspora*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001

³ Aurelie Varrel, Back to B'lore. *Etude géographique de la migration de retour des indiens très qualifiés à Bangalore (Inde)*, PhD Thesis, Poitiers University, Poitiers (France), 2008

⁴ Binod Khadria, Perveen Kumar, Shantanu Sarkar and Rashmi Sharma, "International Migration Policy: Issues and Perspectives for India", *IMDS Working Paper*, no1, December 2008

⁵ David Picherit "Migrant Labourers' Struggles Between Village and Urban Migration Sites: Labour Standards, Rural Development and Politics in South India," *Global Labour Journal*: Vol. 3: N°1, pp. 143-162, 2012

As Breman, Guerin and Prakash (2009)⁷ describe, the proletariat of landless and landpoor labourers "constitutes a huge reserve army of labour hired and fired according to the need of the moment, in agriculture but increasingly also in other economic sectors. The extension in scale of the rural labour market gave rise to new patterns of both intra-rural and rural-to-urban labour circulation". They are what Jan Breman calls, "Footloose labour"⁸, who have to deal with low wages, no regular employment nor security or welfare. They often come across "new forms of labour bondage", especially in industries such as construction, brick kilns, rice mills, etc.

These circular migrations, as well as the permanent or long-term exodus of workers from rural areas to cities (which is, in India, of relatively low intensity⁹), play a central role in urban and economic growth. For instance, the construction workers in cities such as Bombay or Delhi are instrumental to Infrastructures' development and Real Estate growth. However the official tendency is to look at permanent or temporary migrations to cities rather as a problem than as a part of the economic activity.

The AJEI would therefore like to invite papers on issues related to seasonal and circular migrations of Labour, especially if they focus on working conditions of the workers, Labour networks and role of jobbers, new and old forms of labour bondage in India, Gender-related issues, etc.

Workers' movements, Trade Unions and Labour Regulations :

Workers' movements in India have a long history, dating back to the end of the 19th century - beginning of the 20th century : the first workers Unions were created in the 1920s, in Chennai and other big industrial cities¹⁰. The absence of labour regulations, as well as the high concentration of industries and employment in the big urban areas are among the most symptomatic characteristics of the Indian industrial working class under the colonial period¹¹.

Post-Independence a "consensus" between the State, the big industrialists and the Unions led to relatively few workers' movements in the first 15-20 years of Independence¹². However in the 1960s, the shift towards technology and capital intensive industries by the big Indian industrial firms, as well as changes in the sociological structure of the workers (more educated, more politicized, growing class-consciousness) and their representatives led to increasing unrest in the big industrial hubs and to the big strikes of the 1970s, and especially to the Railway Strike of 1974¹³. As Heuze, Zins and Jagga (1993)¹⁴ underline, these workers' movements did not necessarily benefit the workers.

⁶ Peter Robb, *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993

⁷ Jan Breman, Isabelle Guerin & Aseem Prakash (eds.), *India's Unfree Workforce : Of Bondage Old and New*. New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2009

⁸ Jan Breman, *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

⁹ Frederic Landy, Jean-Luc Racine, "Croissance Urbaine et Enracinement Villageois", *Espace, Populations, Societes*, Vol.15, N2-3, 1997

¹⁰ Sharit K. Bhowmik, "India: Labor Sociology searching for a direction", *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 36, N2, May 2009

¹¹ S.K.Bhowmik, 2009; Op.cit.

¹² Gerard Heuze, Lajpat Rai Jagga & Max Zins, *Les Conflits du Travail en Inde et au Sri Lanka*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993

¹³ Heuze, Zins and Jagga, 1993 ; op.cit.

¹⁴ Heuze, Zins and Jagga, 1993 ; op.cit.

If they provided the large public industries workers with increased security and higher wages, they did not provide such advantages to other industrial workers.

In last 30 years, the structure of labour has evolved towards informalization. Smaller industries, as well as sectors often considered as "insecure" for the workers (construction, small manufactures, etc) have flourished. The working class has also been growing in smaller towns, leading to a lesser concentration of the workforce. The rise of the informal sector leads to numerous questions about Unions' influence, work quality, working conditions, wages, etc. As Bhowmik (2009)¹⁵ mentions, the average wage of a formal sector worker is 4 to 5 times higher than the wages in the informal sector. Workers in the unorganized sector moreover tend not to benefit from the protection of the largest Workers' Unions, to which they are often invisible, nor of Labour regulations, most of them being conceived for large industries. What consequences can these evolutions have on wages and power of the working class? Does the "steep slope"¹⁶ between the public sector workers and the rest of the working class still allow for a common class-consciousness among Industrial workers?

Papers dealing with Labour Regulations, Labour laws and the right to work, Labour and workers' security and working conditions, Labour conflicts and workers' mobilizations and movements in the formal and informal sectors, role of Workers' Unions, Informal sector's Workers Associations and Unions, etc, will be especially welcomed.

Informalization : Employment trends in Contemporary India and Ethnographies of Labour:

The recent decades have seen an important shift in the structure of employment in India. The traditional sectors of employment, especially agriculture, have been receding, as the tertiary sector has been increasing at a steady pace¹⁷. There has moreover been a growing imbalance between the organized and unorganized sectors. As mentioned before, the recent dynamic of the Indian workforce goes towards more and more informalization, especially in rural areas, which leads to degradation of working conditions, lower wages and lesser negotiation power for the workers. This informalization of the workforce makes the debate on the existence or not of a dual economy ever more pregnant. Is the steep slope of Holmstrom (1984)¹⁸ still pertinent, or has the situation paradoxically evolved towards Holmstrom's (1976) first hypothesis, the state of a "citadel" that separates the workers with security and welfare from the others? Or on the contrary does the frontier between organized-sector workers and unorganized-sector workers go thinner with the informalization of the workforce?

One of the biggest current "challenges" for policy makers holds in making the current economic growth in India an inclusive one. Many recent studies have focused on India's jobless growth, even if the concept has since then been criticized by many economists. Is India experiencing a "jobless growth"? How to make the economic growth inclusive? Even if the economic growth is leading to job creations, what kind of employment is created? Under this theme, we would therefore like to invite papers on liberalization and the evolution of the job market, place of employment in

¹⁵ S.K.Bhowmik, 2009; Op.cit.

¹⁶ Mark Holmstrom, *Industry and Inequality: The Social Anthropology of Labour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984

¹⁷ Himanshu, "Employment Trends in India: A Re-examination", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, N37, Sept. 10. 2011

¹⁸ Holmstrom, 1984; op. cit.

public policy, employment quotas and policies towards "minorities", unemployment and the concept of "jobless growth" in contemporary India, etc

In recent years, a new wave of studies have focused on the micro-level and on the workers themselves, towards a concrete knowledge of labour¹⁹. In the same spirit, the objective of our workshop is to place the workers and their daily challenges at the centre of the study. We would therefore like to dedicate a session of the workshop to more ethnographic papers on the day-to-day lives of workers and their working conditions. We hope thereby to collectively develop a better understanding of the current challenges and debates about labour in India. The objective of this session would be to study the concrete evolutions of labour in contemporary India, as well as the changing dynamics of work in different sectors and in different places.

Any paper focusing on the relationship between Labour and Society, both the social conception of labour and the place of labour in social evolutions will also be welcomed. We would like to invite papers on topics such as conception and relation to labour in Contemporary India, link between labour, caste and class, labour and gender, as well as on more specific topics such as Child labour, working discriminations, Workers' professional and social mobility, Labour security, distress employment, etc

Propositions of contribution:

The propositions of contribution (500 to 1000 words) should be submitted in French or in English before the **8th of November** at the following address: ateliers@ajei.org. Each presentation will be in English, are to last 20 minutes, and will be discussed by a specialist. Please include with your proposal your last name, first name, your disciplinary field, your study level, your institution(s) of affiliation and your research topic. After the decision by the organization committee and the announcement of inclusion is announced, the contributors will be asked to send their complete articles (10 000 words) in English to the discutant of each session, before the **19th of December**.

Please do not hesitate to contact the organizers for any further information regarding the workshop, accommodation, etc.

Organizers:

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¹⁹ Geert De Neve, *The Everyday Politics of Labour*, Delhi: Social Science Press, 2005