Invisible Labour: Support-Service Workers in India’s Information Technology Industry

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Abstract

The dissertation investigates the life, working conditions and urban experience of support-service workers in the Information Technology (IT) sector of India: the janitors, security guards, fast food delivery service professionals and carpool drivers who work in and around technology parks that develop software applications for a world-market. The common experiences of these employees are migration from rural contexts to a radically modern employment setting, where they work long hours with minimal benefits in informal conditions that often violate basic labour laws. The thesis draws on quantitative and qualitative research, and in particular on analysis and interpretation of hundred and six (106) interviews with IT support service workers, conducted across five Indian cities. Drawing on the analysis and interpretation of the interviews, the research describes the nature of the labour these workers are engaged in and their living conditions in relation to the Indian IT industry and the globalized urban space. Furthermore, the research examines the following questions: how do support-service workers with a traditional upbringing negotiate their rural identities with the homogenizing effects of globalization in an alienating urban context? How do the workers make sense of the ideas of freedom, individualism, flexibility and innovation of the digital society? Is there a possibility of the formation of class consciousness among these workers? The research shows that for these support-service workers the daily life is not limited by the polarized choice between the celebration of modern urban life or the adoption of identity politics shaped by their tradition. Rather their choices are contingent on the success or failure of their everyday struggle against the contractors, corporations and various other hegemonic relations in an increasingly privatized urban space.
Keywords

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... i  
Keywords ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................... iii  
List of Tables ................................................................................................................... ix  
List of Appendices .......................................................................................................... x  
Chapter 1 ......................................................................................................................... 1  
Introduction: The World of the Support-Service Workers ........................................... 1  
1.1 Background of the Study ....................................................................................... 1  
1.2 The Role of Support-Service Workers in the IT Industry ................................... 2  
1.3 Technology in the Political Economy of India’s Development ......................... 3  
1.4 Indian IT’s Integration with Global Economy .................................................... 4  
1.5 Filling the Information Gap .................................................................................. 5  
1.6 Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................ 6  
1.7 Research Questions ............................................................................................. 6  
1.8 Significance of the Research ................................................................................ 8  
1.9 The Structure of the Thesis ................................................................................ 9  
Chapter 2 ......................................................................................................................... 11  
Literature Review: Globalization, IT and the Working Class ....................................... 11  
2.1 Digital Technology and Shining India .................................................................. 13  
2.2 Theories of the Information Society ..................................................................... 15  
2.2 Technology Creating New Possibilities ............................................................... 19  
2.3 Going beyond the Binary of Good and Bad ......................................................... 22
3.8.1 Quantitative

3.8.2 Sample Characteristics

3.8.3 Education

3.8.4 Migration

3.8.5 Income

3.8.6 Working Hours

3.8.7 Benefits

3.8.8 Extended Family Occupation (Principal Earning Member)

3.8.9 Extended Family Annual Income

3.8.10 Children and Fertility Rates

3.8.11 Religion

3.8.12 Caste

3.9 Summary

3.10 Qualitative

3.11 Research Limitations

Chapter 4

Individuality and Social Relations in Capitalist Modernity

4.1 Changing Gender Norms

4.2 Class and Caste Conflicts

4.3 The Experience of Technology

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter 5
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Time, Place and Space</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The Past</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Present</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Toward a New Place and Community</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>At the Cusp of Rural-Urban (“Rurban”) Life</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Urban Education as Social Mobility</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Changing Role of Female Work in Urban Life</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Reproduction amid Contradictions</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Proletarianization and Class Consciousness</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Languages of Class</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Making of the Working Class</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Making of the Indian IT Proletariat</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Class Formation of Indian Support-Service Workers in the Tech Sector</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Questionnaire for Support Service Workers</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Ethics Approval</td>
<td>168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Ethics</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sample Distribution among the Cities</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gender Representation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Age Representation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sample Distribution among the Cities (Second Phase)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Level of Education of the Workers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Education of Father</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Education of Mother</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Income from Current Job</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Monthly Family Income</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Average Weekly Working Hours</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Extended Family Occupation</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Annual Income (Extended Family)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Caste</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for support service workers ............................................. 149

Appendix B: Ethics Approval .......................................................................................... 168

Appendix C Ethics ........................................................................................................... 170
Chapter 1

Introduction: The World of the Support-Service Workers

I am not content with the current job profile. But I need to work and if I do not work I would not get any money. The future I am aspiring to is not great. It is long hours of work and the salary is a pittance. I would be happy if my income increases gradually. Educating my children is the greatest aspiration I have.

(Majid, an outsourced cab driver at Amazon. He was born in Hyderabad to parents from Nizamabad in Telangana region, who sold their small tract of land and migrated to Hyderabad in search of work in the early 1980s.\(^1\)

1.1 Background of the Study

This dissertation is about the lives and working conditions of labourers in India’s information technology (IT) parks – labourers euphemistically called “support-service workers” or “facility management people” – and focuses on their positions at the bottom of the industry’s employment pyramid. These workers, typically young and middle aged between the ages of 18 to 35, are the janitors, housekeeping staff, security guards, fast-food delivery service providers and carpool drivers whose lives intersect with those of much better-off employees such as software coders, hardware engineers and call-centre operators in and around technology parks. The majority of these workers come from families of landless agricultural labourers or small farming families with marginal landholdings,\(^2\) many of which migrated from rural and semi-urban areas at the beginning of the economic churning of globalization in the 1980s. Some of these workers were initiated into city life when their parents arrived in urban centres to search for jobs and ended up becoming servants in middle-class homes; outcast labourers in brick kilns, garbage disposal and construction companies; or street vendors. It is from these conditions that sons and daughters of the first generation city dwellers sought to escape by entering the world of high-technology capitalism.

\(^1\)From my previous pilot study done in 2013 on support-service workers in India.
\(^2\) Marginal farmers own less than 1.00 hectares (ha) of land while small farmers have 1.00 ha to 2.00 ha of land: Highlights of Agriculture Census 2010-11, http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=132799.
1.2 The Role of Support-Service Workers in the IT Industry

In the Indian IT industry, employees are generally divided into two employment categories: direct and indirect.\(^3\) Indirect employment consists of jobs related to vertical sectors such as retail, telecom, hospitality and facility management which are not directly associated with the IT industry but are heavily IT dependent for industrial applications. Direct employment includes long-term permanent technology and administrative employees. In 2016-17, the IT industry in India had 3.7\(^4\) million direct employees and 12.0 million indirect employees. According to the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM),\(^5\) the IT sector is the largest private-sector employer in India. As per various industry estimates, support-service workers consist of 10-15% of indirect employees; however, since there has not been an industry survey about the total number of employees engaged as support workers, it is difficult to arrive at any exact number and, because so many workers are contractual labourers, the number continues to change (e.g., a security guard moving from a software firm to a big-box store when his or her contract ends).

Support-service workers in an IT company are considered indirect employees whose responsibility involves supporting office facilities (i.e., cleaning, security, transportation, food delivery, etc.) to help the workplace function efficiently. These workers are divided into three major categories of responsibility: (1) housekeeping: cleaners, janitors, servers and cooks at food courts; (2) security: workers who monitor the movements of visitors and guard IT companies in the technology park; and (3) transportation: car and bus drivers who ferry managers, engineers, software developers and call-centre personnel between their homes and offices. These labourers ensure a well-organized and cost-effective environment for occupants in technology parks. IT companies which work around the clock servicing clients’ everyday technology needs cannot function without these support-service workers, yet they are not counted among office employees. Technology companies treat them as peripheral contractual and dispensable employees while companies that employ them treat them as casual and informal workers. India’s economy, which began to open up in the last two

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\(^3\) [https://www.statista.com/statistics/320729/india-it-industry-direct-indirect-employment/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/320729/india-it-industry-direct-indirect-employment/)


\(^5\) National Association of Software and Services Companies, the not-for-profit industry association, is the apex body for the $154 billion IT-Business Process Management industry in India: [http://www.nasscom.in/about-us](http://www.nasscom.in/about-us)
decades of the 20th century, has attracted some major global facility-management companies, including French services company, Sodexo, and United Kingdom-based security company, G4S plc, to invest in the country. Nevertheless, the business landscape in India is still dominated by small and mid-sized enterprises which provide specialized services. Some of these service providers are fly-by-night operators whose profitability depends on cheating workers of their benefits and wages.

1.3 Technology in the Political Economy of India’s Development

India’s political economy in the post-colonial development era has been defined by modernization, industrialization and a state-led semi-controlled economy. For commoners, the journey toward industrialization has meant alienation from the land, rural-to-urban migration and the shift of work from the primary (farming) sector to the secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary sectors (services). Today, agriculture accounts for only 15% of India’s $2.26 trillion economy, although 60% of India’s population of 1.25 billion still live in rural areas. The combination of low incomes in villages with millions of mouths to feed has spurred the destitute rural population into the cities in search of jobs. These rural migrants may be seen as “footloose labourers” of globalization-led development.

Alongside globalization, neoliberal policies and IT have contributed to migration into urban areas over the last 35 years. The phenomenal growth of the IT industry between 1980 and 2016 suggests its dominance in the story of India’s development during the period. In 1979-80, the industry’s combined revenues were around $150 million; by 2016-17, revenues had touched $154 billion. No other Indian industry has recorded such dramatic gains. For example, out of the country’s largest eight employers, four are Indian IT companies and one is a transnational corporation.

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8http://www.nasscom.in/sites/default/files/NASSCOM_Annual_Guidance_Final_22062017.pdf
The post-1980s narrative of Indian globalization was perhaps led by the IT industry; however, there is an element of overemphasizing the contribution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the country’s development. Growth and development can become synonymous with “cyber-libertarian” development, which sidelines the effects of poverty and deprivation, labour and underemployment, land reform and landlessness, welfare economy and state intervention – key issues that are relevant to a country’s progress. IT is often assumed to enhance productivity by creating a trickle-down effect, passing the benefits to all the sections of the population. According to Parayil,

This euphoria on the prospects of IT-led development is more rampant in India than anywhere else in the developing world. This euphoria also occurred with the gradual disappearance of various modernization theories of development and their displacement with neoliberal development discourse towards the end of the twentieth century. (Pariyal 2006, 2)

Still, the rapid expansion of ICTs has played a positive role in structural changes. It is an important variable contributing to a new engine of growth, which can happen only “by bringing to the fore more traditional development concerns such as income distribution, mass education and infrastructure development” (D’Costa 2006, 13).

My research adds another element to this development matrix: how new technology has served the labouring population that moved from rural to urban areas as IT support workers in pursuit of a dignified livelihood. The growth of the IT industry is also a story of the labouring poor, who both rode the tide of this industrial expansion and fuelled the engine of India’s globalization with their sweat and blood. My study strives to understand the lives of these often overlooked workers hoping to escape from the poverty trap created by underdevelopment.

1.4 Indian IT’s Integration with Global Economy

When young, Indian IT entrepreneurs such as N.R. Narayana Murthy and Azim Premji cut their teeth in their respective computer services firms, Infosys Limited and Wipro Limited – notable representatives of India’s IT business – a “new” India tiptoed into offices and business establishments and transformed the clacking, tapping and zipping noises of the
old Remington typewriters into the clicking of computer keyboards. The emphasis on computerization of core economic activities complemented the adoption of new economic policies in 1990, furthering productivity growth and eliminating different barriers to ultimately open India’s economy to foreign capital. The digital machines and new economic policies led the country into a new stage of development – an intensified marketization of commodities. The footloose population of labourers was sucked into the vortex of impersonal market relations and productive forces, fleeing the disguised unemployment and impoverishment of rural work. These labourers were offered a Hobson’s choice between abstract labour in the global flow of capital in urban spaces or disguised unemployment as agricultural workers. For those who chose the former, the initial charm of city lights rapidly diminished amid the reality of long working hours with minimal benefits and conditions that often violated basic labour laws. But these employees contributed crucially to the lean and cost-effective functionality of green-glass ICT campuses that transform – and continue to transform – the business processes of large corporations.

1.5 Filling the Information Gap

In the last three decades, there has been a wide range of writing about the Indian software technology industry, including monographs, journal articles, industry surveys, consulting reports and even commercially successful novels, such as Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger (2008). The White Tiger tells the story of Balram Halwai, a poor lower-caste boy who escapes the oppressive feudal rule of the landlord and rural setting to become a Honda City car driver in Gurgaon, New Delhi’s tech hub, for a professional who has returned from the United States. However, he quickly realizes that despite Gurgaon’s opulence built on the edifice of IT industries, he will never realize his aspiration to become a respectable gentleman. Gurgaon’s shining and seamless multiplexes create a highly differentiated society in which a driver can never fulfil his dream of a better life. As one of his driver friends says, a driver is good till he’s fifty or fifty-five. Then the eyes go bad and they kick you out, right? …If you save from today, you will make enough to buy a small home in some slum. If you have been a bit smarter and made a little extra on the side, then you will have enough money to put your son in a good school. He can learn English, he can go

But Balram finds that there is another way to move forward. He steals his master’s money, kills him and becomes a call-centre entrepreneur in Bangalore. Soon, however, he is nabbed by the police and put in jail. Balram’s story can be read symptomatically to show the fault lines crisscrossing the globalized high-technology capital where there are high barriers of entry into the “good life” for those from low-income families.

1.6 Purpose of the Study
Support-service workers have largely been omitted from the vast academic literature on the Indian IT industry, which thus disregards an important segment of the workforce. The present research seeks to address this blind spot by understanding the everyday grind of a migrant, who might share an eight-foot by six-foot room with four to six fellow workers in an urban slum not far from the glass and steel wonderland of an IT park. My study tracks these workers’ rollercoaster ride as they leave their villages to enter urban life, and I seek to record its many discordant notes of hope, frustration, struggle and aspiration. Such an understanding should offer more meaningful insight into high-technology capitalism than simple analysis of these workers as anonymous factors of production as well as the related assumption that technology and capital yield positive effects on their lives.

1.7 Research Questions
The study addresses three basic research questions:

(1) Who are the support-service workers of India’s IT industry and what are their socio-economic conditions?

The quantitative and qualitative survey results describe their living conditions. In the quantitative survey, the data of the sample captures the socioeconomic statuses of these workers’ past and present conditions. Based on the quantitative responses, the open-ended qualitative interview questions target six major areas of respondents’ lives: labour conditions, gender issues, rural-urban migration’s role in shaping their consciousness, the importance of education for their children, the use of modern gadgets like mobile phones and computers and their hopes and aspirations.
(2) How do the modern social relations of service workers’ employment in the IT industry, and of their life in this industry’s urban context, relate to the more traditional, rural identities and contexts from which many of these workers come?

Chapters four and five examine this question. IT has revolutionized the ways in which commodities are produced and consumed. Studies on globalization and IT have shown that “just-in-time” production, a flexible labour force and mobile capital are some of the new managerial, financial and organizational imperatives enabled by digital technology. Technology has also affected the arrangement, organization and functionality of lives in the cities and megacities. It is important to understand how this affects workers, not just in their jobs, but in their familial, communal and political lives and how such changes in turn rebound on their work experience. The global informational economy is not merely about capital or technology, but it is also about creating new meanings and narratives in the metropolitan milieu. Thus the second research question will explore how the support-service workers reconcile the modern experience of living and working in a fast-paced urban environment with their ascribed identities of caste and community. How does the accelerated modern lifestyle lead to ruptures and discontinuities with the past?

(3) What processes of class formation and class consciousness are, or are not, apparent amongst the workers interviewed?

E.P. Thompson argues in *The Making of the English Working Class* that class is not only an affiliation with a ‘structure’ or something that can be treated as a ‘category,’ “but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (Thompson 2013, 8). Capital creates working class people, but working class subject formation is a tortuous journey of struggle, negotiation, contestation, accommodation and complaint about their state of being. It is through a historical process of contestation between labour and capital that working people become aware of their identity as a class. In the last chapter, I examine whether the workers’ narratives about wages, unions, hours of work, benefits, their family relations etc. contribute to the making of class consciousness or, are the narratives only limited to their selfish desires.
1.8 Significance of the Research

Based on India’s development history and relationship with technology, some Indian scholars are concerned with growth and equity and have challenged the assumption that implementing IT applications in everyday life could be the new engine of growth without confronting poverty, inequality and social hierarchies (e.g., Periyal 2006, D’Costa 2006, Saraswati 2012). These scholars also argued that the IT business does not work in a vacuum; its operation is influenced and shaped by the current economic restructuring under India’s neoliberal economic policies. This can raise questions of normativity as well as equity. Information-led development, which Periyal (2006) calls informational development, is not only about employment, freedom, flexibility and innovation – it also creates new orientations and identities that are not always aligned with expectations. My research examines the contours of this development process, investigating the possibilities and limits of technology in fulfilling workers’ desires and aspirations through the story of a migrant’s transition from daily labour in a village economy to a global workspace. This relates to an important question about whether IT’s productive capacity can generate enough growth through technological development to meet these workers’ expectations and hopes for a better life without basic structural changes.

Moreover, on a macro scale, the findings herein explore the relationship between technology and the invisible labour of these support-service workers. The labourers’ material and emotional responses to their new city life is mediated by technology in a complex and uneven process of economic change. This leads to an important question: how are class and class consciousness shaped in the era of globalization and “informational capitalism”? Recently, there have been theoretical discussions between Indian scholars across different disciplines on the impact of technology and global capital on the decomposition, recomposition and new composition of class relations both within and beyond the nation state. As the Indian market continues to open up to foreign investment, a new proletariat is born – manual workers in modern industries like engineering, textile and IT (Basant and Rani 2004, Biao 2007, Noronha and D’Cruz 2017). Many are from rural areas and were either unemployed or working in the field as landless labourers. Support-service workers are the new addition to this pool of labourers. My research seeks to enrich the current literature on
the ability of “new economies” to create a new labour force as well as their social and economic consequences.

1.9 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction where I examine the life and working conditions of support-service workers in the Indian IT industry as well as the significance of the study in the context of globalization and economic liberalization informed by digital technology.

Chapter two reviews the pertinent academic literature on the subject. I begin by discussing the key studies on the genesis of and reasons for growth of the IT industry in India. In the subsequent sections, I look at the literature concerned with workers in the Indian IT industry and the work they do. I end the literature review with a survey of various theoretical hypotheses on the issues of class and class consciousness in relation to the global economy.

Chapter three discusses the mixed-method approach I applied to address the research questions. In particular, I chose the survey-research method for my quantitative data collection and interviews for my qualitative investigation. I discussed my sampling method to select my informants and used SPSS Statistics software to present my quantitative data. In addition, the last section deals with the limitations of my research method.

Chapter four deals with the research question on the social changes experienced by workers in their everyday lives. I evaluate these changes in four categories: gender norms, class relations, caste relations and the use of technology. I enquire whether these support-service workers consider the experience of modernity to be a step forward from their past traditional and hierarchical existences into a progressive way of life.

Chapter five addresses the narrative of rural-urban transition. Here, I examine the social and political implications of workers moving from a familial place (i.e., their villages) to the uncharted global digital space where jobs, capital and technology create manifold opportunities and uncertainties.
Chapter six is the concluding chapter, in which I explore the everyday life stories of these workers and suggest any connection with the narrative of class emancipation. This is examined in the context of recent academic debates on the possibility of forming class and class consciousness in postcolonial India.
Chapter 2

Literature Review: Globalization, IT and the Working Class

The IT/ITeS industries are global in scope and are constituted by complex networks of capital, labour, commerce and organization that stretch across borders, creating relationships between geographically dispersed firms, workers, and other actors (Upadhya 2008, 64).

Academic writings, including journals and monographs, industry studies, government policies and think-tank research, have argued that one of the principal drivers of the post-1990s Indian economic liberalization was IT, which helped to propel the reforms. The “informational, global and networked” (Castells 2000, 77) characteristics of IT provided the necessary tools to integrate regional and national production as well as circulation and consumption of goods and services with the global supply-and-demand chain. Though India’s IT and IT-enabled service (ITeS) industries were at a nascent stage, the distinctive features of the new technology as a purveyor of “digital processing, storage and communication of information of all kinds” (Singh 2003, 9) were critical to the reform agendas, which sought to transform India “from an inward-looking, command-and-control economy to an outward oriented, incentive-based, private sector-led economy…” (Ahmed and Varshney 2012, 71).

The premise of India’s economic reform was “that markets provide a better incentive framework for many activities” (Rangarajan 2010, 101). To take advantage of the market’s logic – that is what, how, where and for whom to produce – the reform policies required a communication system that would support knowledge generation and information flows across the globe. Through software, computers, servers, networks and the Internet, new technology provided the “space of flows” (Castells 2000, 407), replacing business places with financial spaces. According to Upadhya, “The emergent [IT] and [ITeS] industries have become emblematic of India’s entry and integration in to the global economy and have put India at the centre of discourses about globalization” (2008, 9). Over the last three decades, IT has contributed to the fundamental shift in the Indian economy (Das and Sagara, 2017, Das 2002, Upadhya 2008), thus leading to a substantial increase in the country’s gross
domestic product (GDP) rate of growth to an average of approximately 6.5% annually for the next 25 years compared with the average growth of 3.5% from 1950 to 1980.\textsuperscript{10}

Though India’s new economic policy was formally launched in 1991, the Indian state played an active role in promoting IT and telecommunications infrastructure in the preceding decade (1980-1990). The state undertook significant initiatives to promote technical education with an emphasis on the disciplines of electronics and telecommunications. In 1984, the government established the Centre for Development of Telematics to make electronic telephone exchanges suited to Indian conditions, especially in rural areas. This was one of the major steps that led to the creation of the National Telecom Policy (NTP) in 1994, one main objective of which was “telecommunication for all and telecommunication within the reach of all. This means ensuring the availability of telephone on demand as early as possible” (NTP 1994).\textsuperscript{11} In 1986, the government announced a new policy to establish software technology parks across major cities and metropolises.\textsuperscript{12} In the next two decades, software parks would become the main growth centres of Indian IT companies, which recruited thousands of graduates. According to Keshab Das and Hastimal Sagara, “…the state had made immense efforts to build and nurture a knowledge infrastructure, which enabled the IT industry to prosper post 1990s” (Das and Sagara, 2017, 1). One could argue that the state’s initiatives to prepare India as a hub for ICT or information and communication technology laid the groundwork for the country’s pursuit of its the economic reforms agenda.

In what ways did this new technology advance the reform process? IT arguably helped to foster entrepreneurship among young, English-educated Indians. Gurcharan Das’s monograph \textit{India Unbound} characterizes the Indian information economy as a combination of talent, knowledge and entrepreneurship. The creation of “entrepreneurial successes in the knowledge economy” (Das 2002, XV) is both a product of new technology and Indian liberalization policies since the 1980s. For Das, the story of the reformed Indian economy is one of entrepreneurial miracles creating new millionaires who “have risen on the back of

\textsuperscript{10}India’s Economy: Performances and Challenges (Acharya and Mohan 2010, 7)
\textsuperscript{11}http://www.dot.gov.in/national-telecom-policy-1994
\textsuperscript{12}“The Information and Communication Technology Sector in India: Performance, Growth and Key Challenges” OECD report (https://ideas.repec.org/p/oec/stiaab/174-en.html)
their talents, hard work and professional skills” (Das 2002, XVI). Indeed, some such entrepreneurs were at the forefront of the Indian IT industry’s creation. The second contribution of IT was in the field of economic productivity and competitiveness. Digital-based commercial applications and devices in business processes and governance accelerated the pace of economic activities across the production, distribution and consumption chains. The IT sector revolutionized India, particularly since the 1990s, as it reduced intermediation in business and society, provided solutions across sectors (be it agriculture sector or manufacturing sector), re-organized firm level behavior, empowering individuals by providing them with more information and is increasingly becoming an important tool for national and rural development through E-governance, E-Banking and Ecommerce programmes. (Dubey and Garg 2014, 53).

2.1 Digital Technology and Shining India

India’s current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, uses the rhetoric of a “shining India” based on digital technologies to appeal to his bank of voters. “This new sloganeering of the Prime Minister and his government has given the ‘Digital India’ mission a whole new dimension, with electronically executed financial transactions and settlements becoming a means to realising larger economic and social objectives.”13 The discourse is that gains in digital technology will make India the new powerhouse in Asia. This narrative of hope on the back of technology is one that shapes and informs modern-day India.

With the recognition of new technology as a major contributor to India’s post-reform growth story, the stage was set for further study and deliberation on the characterization of the new technology – its social and cultural ramifications, the nature of working conditions for employees in IT and the ability of IT-related industries to produce a wide range of applications for other vertical sectors, such as manufacturing and consumer goods. Questions were also raised about the possibility of a trickle-down effect and the role of ICT in the country’s development; however, there are no easy answers as academics from various disciplines and ideological persuasions, IT entrepreneurs, policymakers and bureaucrats have argued and debated these relevant issues without consensus.

13 http://www.frontline.in/columns/C_P_Chandrasekhar/digital-mirage/article9456810.ece
Nevertheless, one of the dominant aspects of these formal discussions is to fetishize ICT as a magic wand that can address important developmental concerns such as inequality, poverty and productivity without considering the structural changes in income and distribution. Some proponents of the technological impact on Indian society are guided by euphoria about the computer’s infinite prowess to alter the existing power structure for growth and development. Spearheaded by think tanks and international development institutions, there were optimistic, even idealistic, projections about the ability of ICTs to create a “shining India” (Pariyal 2006). In February 2011, Kapil Sibal, then India’s Minister of Communications & IT, forecast that Indian IT revenue would touch USD 225 billion by 2020.\textsuperscript{14} Considering NASSCOM’s 2017-18 projection of USD166 billion, it is unlikely that the IT industry will reach USD 225 billion even in 2020. The then-minister’s projection did not account for issues of economic uncertainty, social conditions and technological disruption. Rather, his belief ignored economic and social landscapes – he simply believed the growth of the digital world to be unstoppable and would pave the way for a resurgent India.

Sibal shares the dominant discourse about digital technology’s omnipotent capability of creating a better world. The ICT that drives the IT/ITeS industries, according to Manuel Castells, has ushered in a revolution of new revolution and the new economy of “Informationalism, Globalization and Networking,” which have fundamentally changed the way human beings produce, distribute and consume commodities (2000,77). From this premise, the dominant discourse that shaped Indian public policy was that the combination of digital technology and economic reforms would contribute positively to the standard of living in India. The alternative –that computers alone would not promote development if structural issues, such as poverty alleviation, universal literacy and universal health care are not in place – is simply not addressed or seldom discussed. Nirvikar Singh’s 2003 monograph, “India's Information Technology Sector: What Contribution to Broader Economic Development?” and the 2014 journal article entitled, “Contribution of Information Technology and Growth of Indian Economy” written by Mohit Dubey and Aarti Garg represent the powerful theory that the IT paradigm has created a new mode of development called “informationalism,” in which “information generation, processing and transmission

\textsuperscript{14}http://www.rediff.com/business/report/sibal-says-it-is-not-just-a-cash-cow/20110208.htm
become the fundamental resources of productivity and power” (Castells 2000, 21). The starting point is how technology can facilitate or benefit the Indian growth story without considering that development is more than increased in GDP; rather, it is about equality and meaningful social change. According to Dubey and Garg, “Information technology is rapidly changing economic and social activities. It provides opportunities and challenges for making progress with accelerated growth and poverty reduction in India” (2014, 53).

### 2.2 Theories of the Information Society

Several influential academic works define the present age as the “Information Society” (Webster 2006), “Post-Industrial Society” (Bell 1973), “The Network Society” (Castells 2000) or “Knowledge Society” (Stehr 1994). The technology that shapes the “Information Age” is seen as disruptive as it revolutionizes production, consumption and communication. According to Castells, IT has created “new historical conditions, [where] productivity is generated through and competition is played out in a global network of interaction between business networks” (2000, 77). Arguments presented in Friedman’s *The World is Flat* (2005), Castells’ *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000) or Daniel Bell’s *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) tell us that contemporary society, based on the production and processing of information, is fundamentally different from the factory-centric commodity-production processes of the industrial era.

In Friedman’s “flat world” created by digital capitalism, a new digital labour force supposedly now enjoys greater freedom, more bargaining power and flexible work schedules. The new age, powered by the personal computer, fibre-optic cables and workflow management, has created permeable nation-state boundaries where the smooth flow of technology and capital encourages individuals, regardless of nationality, to develop skills with global applications. According to Friedman, this is “Globalization 3.0,” which “makes it possible for so many people to plug and play, and you are going to see every color of the human rainbow take part” (Friedman 2005, 11).

The observation of growth and poverty reduction as an offshoot of IT revolution is also one of the main themes of Thomas L. Friedman’s popular book, *The World is Flat* (2005). The opening chapter of the book titled “While I was sleeping” describes five-star facilities offered
to software writers on Infosys Limited’s (Infosys) campus in Bangalore. The chief executive officer (CEO) of Infosys, Nandan Nilekani, was citing the outsourcing business as a “… a new milestone in human progress and a great opportunity for India and the world – the fact that we had made our world flat” (Friedman 2007, 7). Outside the Infosys campus, it is old India, “pockmarked road, with sacred cows, horse drawn carts, and motorized rickshaws all jostling alongside our vans” (Friedman 2007, 5). Here, Friedman is hopeful that information that travels through computers, servers and telecommunications networks would ensure the flattening of terrain between the Infosys campus and the rest of the country. When this happens, Friedman predicted it would be a momentous leap to a new world, which could “usher in an amazing era of prosperity, innovation and collaboration, by companies, communities, and individuals” (Friedman 2007, 8). Ultimately, India’s story of success is also global story which “[connects] all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network” (Friedman 2007, 8). Friedman discusses the capacity of digital technology to offer equal opportunities for companies or individuals. His metaphor of flatness suggests that, wherever we are in this world, our spatial existence does not matter. There are no barriers to taking part in the globalized shrinking world where the opportunity for individual growth is enormous as “Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being empowered” (Friedman 2007, 11).

Friedman’s “Globalization 3.0” echoes Bell’s important work, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. The ICT that drives the industries has ushered in technology revolution and the new economy of “Informationalism, Globalization and Networking” (Castells 2000), which has fundamentally changed the way humans produce, distribute and consume commodities (2000, 77). Bell claims that, unlike previous societies based on agricultural and industrial modes of production, the “post-industrial society” is driven by a new class of knowledge and technology workers and is organized around scientific and technological revolutions, leading to the growth of the service sector and white-collar information jobs. As Bell states,

The concept ‘post-industrial society’ emphasizes the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the axis around which new technology, economic growth and stratification of society will be organized. Empirically, one can try to show that this
The axial principle is becoming more and more predominant in advanced industrial societies. (1973, 112)

The new stratification in “post-industrial society” divides the scientific and technical classes from those outside these classes and, “If the struggle between capitalist and worker, in the locus of the factory, was the hallmark of industrial society, the clash between the professional and the populace, in the organization and in the community, is the hallmark of conflict in the post-industrial society” (Bell 1973, 129). Bell says unlike industrial society, in post-industrialism, class or status does not prevent people from becoming professionals. It depends on the individual and what they want to be. Taking an example from the United States, Bell says that post-industrial society blue-collar jobs – those directly related to manufacturing – will shrink as a result of automation and increased productivity. This will substantially increase the influence of marketing and various professional occupations connected with services and information sectors. The journey from goods to services is one from the unionized working class to status-centric professional associations where the clash is not for better wages, but for the power to control rational and efficient decision-making processes based on information.

Castells does not always agree that the digital world’s new opportunities and promises are free of capitalism and the chaos of industrialization. His agreement with Friedman and Bell lies in the way the “Information Society” is shaping people’s work experience in the digital world. Friedman, Bell and Castells do agree that the digital world of communication and information as harbingers of a new modality of social change correlates strongly with technological innovation, horizontal organizational structures and the standard of living in a network society. The result is that

the work process is increasingly individualized, labor is disaggregated in its performance, and re-integrated in its outcome through a multiplicity of interconnected tasks in different sites, ushering in a new division of labor based on the attributes/capacities of each worker rather than on the organization of the task experience, power, and culture. (Castells 2000, 502)
Unlike Friedman and Bell, though, not everybody stands to gain from the de-territorialization of capital and information across the globe in Castells’ “Network Society” (Castells 2000). There are losers, namely the “switched off” labouring population, which is not included in the network of “programmable labour.” This situation may be a transitory phenomenon, however, as “the Information Age does not have to be the age of stepped-up inequality, polarization and social exclusion. But for the moment it is” (Castells 2004, 143). This qualified optimism about the future is often punctuated by a succinct analysis of the working conditions and consequences that are shaping the digital world. The individualization of work, fragmentation of work processes and flexibility of job conditions have “shaken our institutions, inducing a crisis in the relationship between work and society” (Castells 2000, 296). Ultimately, does this crisis of social exclusion and suffering of the “switched-off” labouring class have the power to disrupt the “flows of messages and images between networks [which] constitute the basic thread of our social structure” (Castells 2000, 508)?

For Castells, this question is superfluous, since his starting point of engagement with the information society is through the network-based social structure, which indeed has the power to adjust to any kind of adversarial challenges by processing and managing information with micro-electronics. Such networks “constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production” (Castells 2000, 500).

One example of networks responding to changes in the way capital operates is the labour market, where global networks of capital flows based on digital technology have restructured labour’s relationship with the work process. Outsourcing, subcontracting and mechanizing result in the conflation of classes. Castells believes that the line between owner, manager and producer is becoming increasingly blurred and that individual experiences are replacing class collectivity in the workplace. Castells is not making normative judgments about the information society; rather, he claims these are empirical observations based on his objective perception of reality. He appears to want to convey the information society as wonder-filled because that amplifies its power, superseding the industrial age. However, his claim that “where the twenty-first century will not be a Dark Age, it may well be characterized by
informed bewilderment” (Kreisler 2001) offers some insight about his position on the relationship between technology and society – that the global information society is the harbinger of a better world. Castells does not believe that his understanding of technology can be viewed as deterministic, but rather “it is dialectical interaction between society and technology…” and “Technology does not determine society: it embraces it. But neither does society determine technological innovation; it uses it” (2000, 5). In reference to Castells’ statement that “Technology is neither good, nor bad, nor is it neutral. It is a force” (cited in Van Dijk 1999, 136), Jan A.G.M. Van Dijk argues, “Castells does have an instrumental view of technology producing an autonomous development which can be used and supported, or not” (1999, 136). Van Dijk says that Castells’

…instrumental view of autonomous technology is not as dialectical as the views of Lewis Mumford and Fernand Braudel. For them, technology has definite technical properties, but these are deeply moulded and shaped by culture or society. Castells’ views are even further removed from views of technology as social (re)construction and design. (1999, 136)

2.2 Technology Creating New Possibilities

In the previous section, we discussed the theories that attempt to justify technology as a reified entity; however, there is another extreme – that is, IT as a tool is serving only the rich and powerful. Some specific studies delve into the historical development of the Indian IT industry as it manifests in software superpowers that are running back offices of global industries. One of the important works in this field is Jyoti Saraswati’s monograph Dot.compradors (2012) which presents critical insight into how high-technology start-ups have developed the software industry and how transnational venture capital funding has integrated the Indian state and economy into global capital. Whatever the positive implication of global capital converging with the Indian economy, Saraswati suggests that this point of view often misses that there are serious issues of lopsided growth in India. Saraswati points out that “fruits of the industry’s growth are limited to an extremely narrow stratum of Indian society: namely the upper and middle classes. Whether the industry

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15Castells interview: http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Castells/castells-con6.html
prosper or fails… the implications for wider Indian development are negligible.” (2012, xxxii). Saraswati cites India’s low IT penetration during the industry’s formidable growth period as an example of how the Indian IT industry catered only to the needs of the large local and multinational companies. Throughout this period of high growth rates, “India’s world ranking in IT diffusion fell from an already disgracefully low 105th in 1995 [to] 112th in 2008” (Saraswati 2012, xxxii). In recent times, India’s IT penetration has grown toward a sizable section of the population; therefore, digital divide is a stark reality. One example could be Internet connections. Because of aggressive marketing plans executed by mobile and Internet service providers, the internet subscriber base is growing, but a sizable number are still stuck with slow speed and two-thirds of the connections are in cities.

Saraswati uses a political economy framework to argue that: (1) contrary to the common assumption that growth in the software services industry occurred because the Indian state did not intervene, Saraswati says, “state interventions have played an integral part in the industry’s development” (2012, 96); (2) with India’s neoliberal approach to economic liberalism, Indian IT policy often has benefited large, western IT companies instead of serving the interests of local IT firms and the general population; and (3) there is a need for new policy, away from a neoliberal-only export-oriented business plan to a balanced mix of export and initiatives to develop the domestic market. Saraswati argues that “without a significant change in IT policy, the industry will undergo a rapid and extreme form of underdevelopment” (2012, 96).

Otherwise a critical monograph about the political economy of India’s IT industry, the argument that the Indian ICT business is mainly serving the “skewed pattern of elitist development” (Saraswati 2012, xxxiii) perhaps misses the point that ITC (i.e., mobile phones, computers, software, etc.) as a productive force has at least partially addressed the needs and aspirations of the non-elitist population as well. ICT extended income and employment opportunities for low-income families and unemployed youth, which was an improvement from pre-reform period. For example, the new mobile telecommunications network created prepaid and recharge booths across the country, which benefited subaltern

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17 http://www.thehindu.com/business/how-many-indians-have-internet/article17668272.ece

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groups. Extra cash flow redefined and reconfigured individual interests, necessities and requirements based on the possibility of more material wealth and acquisition. Although the technology’s initial social impact was mostly limited to urban enclaves, over the years since the beginning of the reform process, there is perceptible diffusion of technology in rural areas through telecommunications infrastructure and integration of agricultural cash crops with global commodity markets. For the rural poor, the extension of the global market and communication in the hinterland broke down the age-old accepted social life, which walked the line between poverty and subsistence. Possibilities for a better life were opening for the rural class; however, the call of the new, larger world often ended up in despair and required collective strength to fulfill this new desire for a better life. Saraswati’s view of software and hardware technology as catering only to the country’s particular section of the urban population may be missing the complexities and contradictions of social changes led by technology-directed intensive marketization of the economy. For the rural poor and urban workers, ICT and the new economic policy were more than a wager between good and bad, hope and despair, affluence and poverty; instead, they occupy the in-between space that throws up new conditions of life as opportunity and struggle, compromise and conflict. These nuances were missing in earlier ideas of technology’s promise.

One example of technology’s promise is in the area of gender inequality in IT workplaces. Fuller and Narasimhan’s study on the life of Chennai-based female IT professionals in relation to their family and work is a case in point to understand how “women IT professionals have partially but significantly reconfigured gender relations and, as they themselves sometimes put it, have gained freedom and opportunities that their mothers never had” (2008, 191). According to Fuller and Narasimhan, working as software developers provided females in that field with a sense of empowerment. As one female software developer shared,

This Lakshmi [one of the developers] explained that she feels empowered when she represents ICS [the IT firm] to customers abroad because it enables her to have a sense of achievement that women can scarcely find outside the IT sector. She is also respected by her family members for what she has achieved. According to Lakshmi her
employment also comes from her “financial freedom.” (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008, 197)

Along with empowerment, the demands for maternity leave and “more opportunities for working from home” often create a gender-sensitive environment that fosters positive connections between female IT workers and their male colleagues. As a result of this,

Very significantly, too, men IT professionals learn to treat women as equals. None of these developments will revolutionize gender relations throughout middle class Chennai, let alone the rest of India, but they are profoundly important to the many thousands of young professionals now working in the software industry. (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008, 208-209)

The struggle taken on by female IT workers can at times persuade top company executives to grant the demand for better working conditions, which also empowers professional women in IT to exercise their gender rights in modern IT workplaces. Fuller and Narasimhan’s interview-based research on women in six of the top IT companies in India suggests that realities for female IT professionals in the workplace are not only stories about work pressure, exploitative relationships and gender inequality; in fact, there are also stories about these women’s active participation in reconfiguring social relations and working toward empowerment and autonomy in the modern IT workplace.

2.3 Going beyond the Binary of Good and Bad

Behind the dominant discourse about technology’s ability to usher in a productive and developed global society is the proverbial phrase “darkness under the lamp.” The suffering, poverty and inequality experienced by blue-collar workers in the technology industry are often ignored under the shining lights of technology. The hope is that new technologies and the new economy will bring more freedom, employment, wealth, democracy and knowledge compared with any other time in human history. In short, technology offers the promise of a better world. The key argument for “Information Age” theorists (e.g., Castells and Friedman) is that fibre optics and software have brought about a new network of “knowledge workers” who are different than those of the manufacturing-focused industrial era. The annihilation of temporal and spatial constraints via the unhindered flow of data and information has created
multiple production networks across the globe. These networks allow everyone, regardless of their social and cultural location, to participate in producing market-driven commodities.

In one sense, the theorists of the “Information Age” and the flat world are right: in terms of the flows of capital and labour, digital capitalism is breaking down global barriers. Micro-level studies of the Indian IT industry show that this flat world, ruled by IT, has created a sizable labour force across the spatial zone of digital capitalism. However, this includes both a white-collar labour force with various skill sets as well as a mass of labourers who lack sufficient skills to succeed – support-service staff. Did flat-world supporters overstate the case that digitization would give more power to labour as capital with the help of technology homogenizing the workspace and eliminating the age-old traditional hierarchy of human endowments? Or did technology create a new precarious labour force, struggling and fighting for a fair share of their fruits of labour?

Beyond the rhetoric of cyberspace as the cure for social hierarchies, there has been a wide range of critical studies that attempt to capture this complex world. Many journal articles and monographs explore the macro-level social factors that made the Indian IT industry into the country’s leading employment sector while the micro-level lens looks at labour relations between employers, capital, technology and the state.

A survey of the literature published over the last two decades suggests that there have been some studies that employed a top-down analytical approach (e.g., Saraswati 2012) and others using ground-up descriptive studies reporting from workplaces, villages, streets, movements and homes (e.g., Nadeem 2011). These studies are concerned with the political economy of the Indian software industry as well as ethnographic and quantitative surveys on the working conditions of employees in digital workplaces. There are limitations to these studies, however, as they focus almost exclusively on skilled employees in technology, such as software coders, data analysts, hardware engineers, call-centre attendants and migrant technology workers. These workers constitute the knowledge workers in the Information Society (Nadeem 2011, Thomas 2012, Pariyal 2006, Keniston and Kumar 2004, Biao 2007, Upadhya and Vasavi 2008). Even when the business or financial aspects are investigated in light of labour conditions, these studies focus on the upper echelon of employees – their job
uncertainties (Xiang 2006), cultural alienation (Nadeem 2011) and gender and family issues (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008).

All of these studies offer valuable insights into how “the digital divide, unequal growth patterns, increasing gap between urban and rural areas and other issues born of the distributional consequences of information capitalism …” (Pariyal 2006, 3) have contributed to new conflicts, hierarchies and inequalities, over and above pre-existing ones. Nevertheless, the peripheral workers who provide various support services and form a substantial proportion of the workforce have remained outside the scope of these analyses. The absence of support-service workers in existing academic discourse has two significant theoretical ramifications. First, any analysis of how the Indian IT sector’s evolution, in relation to state policy interventions, has facilitated a ready-made supply of cheap labour for the technology sector remains incomplete without considering the vast pool of poor workers. Second, in the Indian context as well as in the global arena, there is debate about how much the poor, marginal and working classes have benefited from globalization and technology. For fruitful deliberations to occur about the relationship between new technology and poverty alleviation, various forms of economic inequality and casualization of work (as machines replace human labour), nation states’ relationships to existing power structures and financialization, it is necessary to understand the social and political impact of the digital world on low-income labourers.

Keeping these strengths and limitations of academic works in mind, the remainder of this review maps out recent academic contributions that are engaged in explaining how economic globalization and IT have contributed to the far-reaching social, economic and political changes in India and across the world. An important issue that some of this research addresses is the nature of transitions resulting from advances in ICT. In the first section, “Technology and Change,” I consider critical essays on technology’s role in initiating significant changes in the nature of work as well as social and economic lives of workers in the Indian IT and ITeS industries. The second section, “Class, Subjectivity and Technology,” surveys important criticism that deals with questions of association between technology and class, specifically the issue of subject and subjectivity in the age of digital capitalism.
2.4 Technology and Changes – the Indian Story

ICTs in India has opened up new opportunities by generating jobs, thereby helping to reduce poverty as other countries outsourced jobs to India. But a darker side of technology has also reared itself, generating broader and unexpected concerns about how technological gains are distributed, particularly in light of increasingly uneven development, inequality, job precarity and cultural estrangement.

In his work, “ICTs and Decoupled Development: Theories, Trajectories and Transitions,” Anthony P. D’Costa suggests that ICT in India remained confined to narrow enclaves of outsourcing and offshoring of technology services rather than “associated with the economy-wide technical change and structural transformation” (2006, 11). D’Costa attributes this to technology’s weak linkages to the domestic market and the absence of a robust hardware manufacturing market. According to D’Costa, “The narrow success of the Indian ICT industry is the outcome of three interrelated processes, namely decoupling, path-dependency and lock-in” (2006, 12). Decoupling involves the weak ties between technology and other sectors of the economy, with the exception of manufacturing and services. The Indian IT industry has stronger links with the foreign markets but, at the same time, backward integration with sectors such as agriculture, health and small-scale industries. This decoupling “implies limited spin-offs to induce wider economic transformation within India” (D’Costa 2006, 12). India’s dependence on tertiary technical education rather than the creation of a well-balanced primary, secondary and higher education system has led to a skewed structure with highly skilled graduates, but only one-third of the population with an education. Though this focus on tertiary education helped the IT industry pick people up from technical institutes and universities, it failed to develop a balanced education system. Another source of imbalance between the IT sector and the rest of the economy is a failure to produce software products that would not only serve a global market, but the domestic sphere as well. D’Costa also argues that India’s technology sector is locked in to the lucrative outsourcing and offshoring U.S. market, which limited the scope of India’s IT industry to develop a robust knowledge-based technology sectors across disciplines, boundaries and markets.
Upadhya’s work, “Employment, Exclusion and Merit in the Indian IT Industry” argues that digital workplaces have introduced an exclusion hierarchy in the employment structure of IT companies by creating informal barriers to low-caste job applicants. Given the pattern of inequality of opportunity in education that prevails in the country, any occupation that requires a high level of education and training, (especially such as a highly competitive one as IT), is bound to draw on the more privileged sections of society. (Upadhya 2007, 1863)

According to Upadhya, “…available data suggest that the social composition of the IT workforce is more homogeneous than is often supposed, in that the workforce is largely urban, middle class, and high/middle caste” (2007, 1863). This indicates that the IT sector has also reinforced existing inequalities of opportunity based on pre-existing social and economic stratifications. It also implies that the socially progressive aspects of affirmative job reservation, practiced by the public sector for marginalized social groups in India, is missing in IT and in other private realms. These sectors avoid implementing progressive practices in the name of enhancing efficiency, competition and employment growth. As Nandan Nilekani, one of Infosys’s cofounders, states, “When it comes to the private sector … we should encourage private companies to be more proactive about inclusion, and not over-regulate them. The focus should be on job creation — on creating more opportunity, rather than just dividing up existing opportunity.”

Shehzad Nadeem’s *Dead Ringers: How Outsourcing Is Changing the Way Indians Understand Themselves* takes up Upadhya’s idea hierarchy, asserting that there is a variegated employment structure within India’s IT industry in which the outsourcing and subcontracting of services create large disparities in job conditions. The “majority of white-collar work being offshored is of the back-office and low-skill and clerical variety: that is, application processing, data entry, invoice and payroll preparation, customer service, basic software coding” (Nadeem 2011, 21). According to Nadeem, if the “white proletarians” – software coders, designers, architects and contact centre employees – constitute the “elite”

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18 https://www.telegraphindia.com/1140320/jsp/nation/story_18098671.jsp
segment of the working class in the IT industry, then the support-service labourers are the “black proletarians.”

Xiang Biao delves further into issues of inequity, uncertainty and work flexibility in the IT onshore business of body shopping in her book *Global "Body Shopping": An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*. According to Biao, the political economy of body shopping works through a network of human resource management consultants in different countries to recruit IT technologists in India, leveraging low-cost project-based work contingent on the requirements of multinational companies. Underneath this practice are

… unequal socioeconomic relations on multiple levels. While wealth in the New Economy is created in an increasingly abstract manner, everyday realities – stock markets in New York, benched IT workers in Sydney, dowries in Hyderabad, and women and children in Indian villages – sustain this flexibility.” (Biao 2007, 5)

This highly flexible nature of the work “engendered very uncertain and unclear working situations: Workers did not know when they could get a job, for how long the job would last, how much they would be paid and how much they should ask for” (Biao 2007, 94).

In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, David Harvey identifies labour flexibility as a key feature of the post-industrial employment situation and addresses the issue as it relates to accumulation of capital (1989). Flexible labour conditions have led many software companies to employ more contract staff than permanent employees on their payroll, making it difficult to build wealth. Recently, highly skilled software programmers in India’s large software firms have faced employment uncertainty and a sizable section was laid off because of economic depression and the company’s adoption of newer technologies that rendered their services unnecessary.

As a product of globalization, outsourcing is creating new spaces for global capital to displace local accents, habits and lifestyles to produce a hybrid culture; however, Nadeem argues that the new spaces are still embedded within the lived experiences of these places,

which can never be erased. Globalization is not a unitary phenomenon, but the hybridity of spaces means that “the global and the local are mutually constituted” (Nadeem 2011, 221), creating new possibilities. While “Place has commonsense associations of security and stability, the homely and familiar… Space, by contrast, is a realm of freedom and uncertainty and possibility” (Nadeem 2011, 29). Bangalore, India’s IT headquarters, has become one such space where capital uses technology “as its medium to transform the concrete realities of a particular place into manifold possibilities of space” (Nadeem 2011, 29). According to Nadeem, the globalization of culture in IT workplaces extends beyond the creation of a homogenous globalization culture into new thinking and ideas.

Vasavi and Upadhya present a contrasting view of cultural dislocation in their work, “Outposts of the global information economy: Work and workers in India’s outsourcing industry” wherein they discuss the creation of new global identities that employees develop as they interact with foreign customers. The work requires leaving behind their local identities and becoming “transnationalized” subjects, which involves turning themselves into the demands of global work culture. Telecommunications workers undergo training to neutralize their accents and sometimes change their names to create fake identities. Software developers adjust their personalities to fit foreign clients’ requirements. This acculturation results in the creation of efficient personalities that adjust to high-pressure work demands without much resistance. For human resource managers of Indian and multinational companies, disconnecting workers from their roots is one way to fold them into global work standards and processes. Vasavi and Upadhya reiterate that “what flows between the centre and the periphery of the global informational economy are not merely jobs, capital or technology, but also a range of cultural identities and narratives, each crafted to mark the worker in different ways” (2008, 40).

Other studies deal with the broader impact of information industries on India’s urbanization rather than the particular changes that occur on a microcosmic, individual worker level. Janaki Nair’s study on Bangalore, India’s “Silicon Capital,” argues that the country’s participation in the drive toward globalization, marked by the IT revolution, has provided impoverished migrants and poor people (often those of low caste) with the opportunity to take part in a new semi-informal economy in India’s urban life (Nair 2005). As Nair
emphasizes, however, such a state comes at the cost of creating high-income disparity and turning public places into private slums. This gated place stands in sharp contrast to the rest of Bangalore, which is plagued by decreasing “lung spaces”; increasing traffic and pollution; skyrocketing real estate prices that force the lower classes to move out of prime locations; a high cost of living; and the intolerable stench of garbage. Interestingly, the social health of the city is itself not in a good state – just as it is the centre of India’s technological advancement, Bangalore has also earned unfortunate distinction as India’s suicide capital. This is how capital redevelops a city into a cyber-city via IT. Bangalore is a prime example of how unbridled capital flow, used to set up IT parks through big Indian and foreign software across Indian metropolises, has turned public spaces into expensive, urban terrains for the rich and wealthy. The instrumental value of a large city in India today solely lies in creating urban infrastructure that will make it an economic powerhouse. This can only happen if the city becomes a servicing information hub. In recent times, India’s central government has decided to invest approximately USD150 billion into the development of smart cities through public-private participation which, according to its mission statement, “…is to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart outcomes.”

Indian cities where technology has become the principal vehicle for this integration are now emerging as management and servicing hubs for the global economy.

Capital’s hunger for space is reflected in the public policy of governance, which aims to create a business environment that facilitates the accumulation process without bureaucratic or structural barriers. One such notorious policy is the “Bhoomi-e governance” project, which sets out to digitize all land records and titles in the state of Karnataka (Thomas 2012, 103-104). This project is touted as one of the most successful e-governance projects in India, providing information about any piece of land including ownership, tenure and land-use pattern at the click of a mouse. On the other hand, the whole information business sector has provided corporations with an incredible database to assist in planning for future expansion. This was never truer than in the case of districts adjacent to Bangalore, where land prices have steadily increased with the growth of information industries.

20 https://smartnet.niua.org/content/2dae72ca-e25b-4575-8302-93e8f9366bf6
An ethnographic study by Benjamin, Bhuvaneswari, Rajan and Manjunatha entitled “Bhoomi: ‘E-Governance’, Or, An Anti-Politics Machine Necessary to Globalize Bangalore?” has produced two sets of findings:

First the digitization of land records led to increased corruption, much more bribes and substantially increased time taken for land transactions. At another level, it facilitated very large players in the land markets to capture vast quantities of land at a time when Bangalore experienced a boom in the land market. These consequences have come about via the centralization of both land records and management away from the village panchayat\(^{21}\) to the district level. (Benjamin et al 2007, 3)

As an e-governance project, “Bhoomi” has made land into a prime commodity for real estate development by the process of outsourcing and by IT services companies. This facilitated the creation of IT and biotechnology corridors across Karnataka, bringing smaller cities like Mysore within the ambit of neoliberal development of information capitalism.

### 2.5 Class, Subjectivity and Technology

This section turns to an investigation of how class has been used to explain the globalization process and the advent of new digital technology. This part of the review does not include the various strands of scholarly debate on class and class consciousness in relation to the Indian working-class experience with postcolonial economic development. Indian discussions of class in the postcolonial era will be addressed in the conclusion to this study, focusing especially the ways in which the peasant population’s subalterneity is a hindrance to the development of working-class consciousness.

While previous studies are mostly concerned with the post facto conditions of the working class defined by informal, unpaid and insecure under-employment in the global digital “vortex,” this study begins at the “construction of the everyday” life experiences amid this precarity within a structure where “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx 1848). Paul Willis suggests that these experiences, which he calls “the creativities of everyday,” are “indissolubly connected to, dialectically and intrinsically, wider social structures, structural

\(^{21}\) Local council of elders
relations and structurally provided conditions of existence” (2000, 35). The present research is less about what global digital capitalism is or how the working class could be organized against the neoliberal bloodbath; rather, it focuses on how this digital vortex is experienced by the working class, these cheap labourers of the high-technology cities. Understanding their experience using empirical and ethnographic methods is crucial to determining the meaning of class consciousness, which does not have a priori standing. According to E.P. Thompson, class is “a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness” (2013, 8). Class is not a sociological or economic category, but a social experience rooted in the common conditions of work and life “largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter voluntarily” (Thompson 2013, 9). Class involves identity formation through resistance to capital and the experience of resistance creates class-consciousness. According to Thompson, consciousness formation is “how the experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms” (2013, 9). Class in itself derives from production relations between labour and capital while class for itself, defined by the expression of class interest, is subjective — an experiential realization, which is not what it should be, but rather what it is.

Thompson critiques the positivist tendency of treating class “as a thing,” a fixed sociological category that determines consciousness. His theoretical understanding is that “consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way” (Thompson 2013, 9). Against this reading of class-consciousness, he proposes to treat class as a “historical phenomenon,” not “as a ‘structure,’ nor even as a ‘category,’ but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (Thompson 2013, 8).

Besides the commonality of lived experience as a way of defining class, there has been a rich set of studies in the last two decades that analyzes class based on the structure of economic exploitation in capitalism. Exploitation is borne out of production relations wherein a capitalist employs a worker to produce a commodity. The capitalist’s objective material interest is to earn profit while that of the worker is to earn wages for survival. Erik Olin Wright, a principal proponent of this perspective, argues that the exploitation-centered
approach measures and analyzes the material interests that structure exploitation. One way of defining this exploitation is through quantitative measurement of phenomena such as the wage-profit gap; skewed allocation of resources in favour of the rich; and private property. While Thompson discusses workers experiencing this oppression only through the everyday grind to survive in conflict-ridden social relations, Wright suggests that an account of both interests and experiences is essential for structural analysis (1989, 207). Over the years, the definition of capitalism as a surplus value-extraction machine has not changed, but the system has developed into a complex organizational and technological structure. Class formation in workplaces often does not crystallize into two distinct sets of interests and classes – the workers and the bourgeoisie. Rather, different interests of the working class overlap and create conflicts and stress. Wright argues that, to accommodate the complexities of capitalism, the two-class model at the heart of Marxist theory is simple, but insufficient for understanding exploitation, especially in light of the rise of middle-class professionals and experts in the system (Wright 1989, 348).

Thompson’s and Wright’s approaches both inform the attempt to understand the digital world’s workforce, which is rendered vulnerable by contractual/part-time jobs and whose “workplace relations and practices” generate material interests as well as lived experiences, in turn constituting the concept of class (Wright 1989, 207). Class is materially structured and experiential in nature, as one interviewee in the next section indicates.

The dominant critical academic works on media, information and technology today seldom use the concept of class as an analytical tool to explain the restructuring of the global economy in terms of conflict between capital’s offensive against living labour through machines (fixed capital) for surplus appropriation and the working-class pushback for survival. Rather, globalization and neoliberalism are explained as the “technological enframing” of human relations, where the subjects’ positions are defined as those of “market actors – consumers, individual investors and entrepreneurs – across several dimensions of their lives” (Oksala 2015, para. 17). This is the neoliberal subject in the cybernetic world, where acceleration of production processes and financialization have turned subject-agency into fragments of multiple identity defined by the consciousness of “homo oeconomicus” (Brown 2015).
This line of thinking is apparent in Wendy Brown’s recent book, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, in which neoliberalism is not construed “as a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism or an ideology that set loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class” (Brown 2015, 29). Instead, she join[s] Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices and metrics to every dimension of human life. (Brown 2015, 30)

From this, Brown concludes that “this governing rationality involves …. ‘economization’ of heretofore noneconomic spheres and practices, a process of remaking the knowledge, form, content, and conduct appropriate to these spheres and practices” (2015, 30-31).

This is the biopolitics of neoliberalism, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in *Empire* (2001), where class is replaced by the idea of the “multitude.” Post-Marxist theorists such as Hardt and Negri posit that, in the era of “global circuits of production,” factories are no longer the centres of subject formation. Instead, capital has crossed the spatial boundaries of factories and entered into our “life process,” obliterating the differences between workplace and home, state and civil society, production and reproduction. Hardt and Negri see neoliberalism as the change of spatial configuration, which means

…the relations of capitalist exploitation are expanding everywhere, not limited to the factory but tending to occupy the entire social terrain… The dialectic between productive forces and the system of domination no longer has a determinate place. (Hardt and Negri 2001, 209)

Here, replacing class with “multitude” as the potential revolutionary force that can challenge the Empire’s ubiquitous presence is an attractive alternative discourse on social revolution. The dispossessed multitude, the labouring subject of immaterial production, carries the historical mantle of resisting capital’s appropriation of subjectivity. Multitude is “a new proletariat and not a new industrial working class” of the post-Fordist world where robots, the Internet and microelectronics are the dominant forces of production (402). Multitude’s location is not limited to the circuits of production within the factory walls of waged labour;
it also exists in the social worlds of non-waged (housewives), productive (software coders), non-productive (exotic dancers) and unproductive (social networking) labour. The power of multitude lies in its desire for free access to and control of the information as well as a communication system that runs on its labour. The subject of a “collective telos” is born through the experience of empowerment and agency. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude has the necessary resources to liberate itself from the yoke of the “society of control” as “the necessary weapons reside precisely within the creative and prophetic power of the multitude” (65). The multitude is the dispossessed body whose desire is freedom from the job cages, and the immediate experience of disempowerment and work-slavery would lead it to revolt against the social order. As one of its principal arguments, Empire contends that contemporary capitalism is constituted not only by industrial factories, but also by social factories created by affective labour. This ignores that, in the historical evolution of capitalism “from handicraft industry to the factory system to machinofacture” (Silver 2003, 19), capital’s (re)production of social relations has never been limited to just production spaces. Instead, it extends across society as a whole. Otherwise, there would not have been any reproduction of capital.

In Empire, the passage of the production system from factories to “machinofacture” is not considered a continuity of capital-labour contestation; rather, it is seen as two distinct phases of the production process where the revolutionary function of social revolution was transferred from the working class to the multitude. Hardt and Negri’s notion of the multitude as a revolutionary force in the age of cybernetic capital involves a collective subject whose will is freedom from the networks of control created by the Empire. As Tom Nairn says, “Hardt and Negri’s ‘multitude’ should not be confused with the working class, or any ethnic and national group. It seems to mean humanity in general – ‘the “multitude” is many-coloured, like Joseph’s magical coat,’ but the coat hides an increasingly common will, summed up by the authors as ‘democracy’” (Nairn 2005).

Some authors (e.g., Huws 2003; Federici 2012; Dyer-Witheford 2015) have recently argued for the primacy of class’s role, actions and resistance in understanding the operations of cybernetic capitalism, particularly with respect to the female and global experiences in the workplace. Ursula Huws explains how digital technology has reshaped the traditional female
labour force, both in the factory and at home, in *The Making of a Cybertariat: Virtual Work in a Real World*, which discusses developing a radical strategy for future struggles by the “cybertariat” against global digital capitalism. In his work, *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex*, Nick Dyer-Witheford asserts that automation is a result of “contemporary capital increasingly subordinating the reproduction of variable capital (humans) to that of the fixed capital (machines) of which the capitalist class is the personified representative” (2015, 196). Beginning with this premise, he argues that, while capital derived from technology unleashes gigantic productive forces that create a “planetary working class,” capital at the same time sows the seeds of its own disruption by “eject[ing] dangerously powerful workers from work and globally recruit[ing] new sources of cheapened labour while relentlessly ramping up the speed and scope of its commodity circuits” (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 15).

As Jack Linchuan Qiu’s *Working-Class Network Society* (2009) suggests, capitalism can also work by creating a new social relationship between the machine and the working class. Poor Chinese workers who come to cities to work in electronics factories, cyber cafes, cheap mobile phones, messaging services and high-Internet penetration create communication links that connect the “everyday existential demands of workers, working families, and working-class communities for such indispensable needs as employment, child care, and health” (Linchuan Qiu 2009, 10). If technology, social networks and just-in-time management theories have the power to create machinic enslavement and thus conformism, they can also create the possibility for a rebellious subject position. Linchuan Qiu states that a new working-class network society is developing in Chinese urban areas. He suggests that, although the Chinese state uses ICT as the main instrument of accumulation, it has also played a significant role in politically empowering the “have less” population. Workers have created and maintained blogs “during their collective action against the multinational corporation, or the protests of cyber café operators … against unreasonable regulatory measures imposed by the state” (Linchuan Qiu 2009, 243).

This literature review demonstrates that there are multiple ways to analyze the far-reaching consequences of social, political and economic changes caused by the spread of computers and electronic communication in tandem with economic globalization. We can
view these new developments as part of a technology-induced revolution, ushering in an era of infinite possibilities to make the world a better place by enhancing productive capacity as well as happiness, security and power at the individual level. This celebratory view of the new global space argues that the radical transformation of the capitalist order, a combination of new economy and technology, creates an empowered workforce. Workers are now more informed and better educated and are therefore more skilled and specialized. The presumption is that this increased and deepened skill set allows more opportunity to secure gainful and meaningful employment, which is tied to advancement and recognition.

What this scholarly body of work misses, however, is that digitalized and globalized workspaces and cultures “…do not just unify or homogenize, but also [fragment] and [heterogenize], creating new kinds of difference” (Dirlik 2016). In the Indian context, just as new employment opportunities open in high-technology offshore industries, so too do new forms of discrimination and hierarchies across gender, caste and class take root in workplaces and in urban life. The “new economy” does not always provide good jobs as even jobs which perform the core business functions in IT industries are flexible in nature. Contract labour and part-time employment are common features of this type of precarious employment.

How does this fragmentation affect the formation of working-class rights, solidarity and class consciousness? This study argues that class as a structural category as well as lived cultural experience are crucial to understanding these workers’ everyday struggle in high-technology capitalism. As a productive force, the new technology has facilitated the integration of local economies with the global market, rearranging the existing social and economic relations between the owners of the means of production and the workers, as Marx aptly describes. I would argue that, in the “global circuits of production,” new methods of producing commodities do not only dismantle old factories and lay off workers, but also create new productive enclaves where labour is cheap. This leads to a simultaneously “creative destruction” – decomposition on the labour side as well as recomposition of class relations through a new pool of proletariat from the general population who are still outside the circuits of commodity production, distribution and consumption.
2.6 Conclusion

Through quantitative and qualitative surveys and interviews, I intend to narrate the struggle that workers face in terms of aspirations and mobility in their workplaces and in their everyday lives. Their journey from villages to cities, ultimately ending in precarious labour, is intricately woven into India’s neoliberal economy and IT sector. This intertwined relationship involves workers who are drawn into the consumer spectacle, individualism and economic mobility – technology’s promise – but who instead meet graveyard shifts, long hours, subsistence wages and minimal social services – technology’s reality. In this research, working-class agency is not predetermined; indeed, it is spontaneously created within any given social relation. If this holds true for the “old world” of the industrial era, then it is no less the case in the digital world of the Information Society. Capital creates a working class, but its subject formation is a tortuous journey of struggle, negotiation, contestation, accommodation and grievance about their states of being in the process of making their own class destiny. It is a historical process of conflict between labour and capital through which working people become aware of their identity as a class that is able “to think and to value in class ways” (Thompson 1978), which are typically contradictory to capital. Based on this theoretical perspective, I met my interview subjects and attempted to understand how their everyday lives can be narratives of social class as well. Most interviews were individual stories of gaining a foothold in the neoliberal world; however, as an interviewer and a theorist, my challenge was to dialectically link the subject position expressed in these interviews to the larger social structures and to connect that structure back to the individual. This reciprocal relationship is critical if one hopes to understand why Facebook bus drivers voted to form a union; why fast-food workers across the United States walked out of work, demanding an hourly wage of $15; and why the future of India’s IT service workers, though in many ways bound by conditions not within their control, remains indeterminate.

22Steven Greenhouse, “Facebook’s Shuttle Bus Drivers Seek to Unionize” (Oct 5, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/06/business/

Chapter 3
Research Methodology: Quantitative and Qualitative Survey

3.1 Background
The proliferation of informal and unorganized sectors of labour is one of the Indian economy’s most important features. These sectors account for more than 90% of the workforce and 50% of the country’s GDP. A vast majority of the workers in this sector “…must work to survive even if the work they can find generated only below-subsistence incomes” (Ghose 2016, 140). The opening up of the Indian economy in the last three decades has led to two important developments. First, a series of economic reforms resulted in the growth of employment in the organized sectors, particularly in new areas like IT and financial services; however, the economic liberalization that drove such job growth added another layer of employment in the organized sector outside formal employment. The formalized positions are joined by regular-informal and casual employment, wherein there is minimal government intervention and the absence of collective bargaining. In recent times, job creation in the organized sector is mostly in this type of flexible employment rather than secure, permanent jobs with benefits. In his study on “Globalization, Growth and Employment in India,” Ajit K. Ghose finds that, between 2000-2010, “…the growth of informal employment in the organized sector was larger than that of formal employment, so the share of formal employment in total employment declined very substantially” (2016, 146). Recent years have seen an acceleration of this trend,

…indicating a faster growth of employment in the informal sector. Thus, the country is currently in a state of ‘Informalisation of the Formal Sector,’ where the entire increase in the employment in the organized sector over this period has been informal in nature. (Singh 2014. 5)

There are very few macro- as well as micro-level industry-wide studies on the long- and short-term ramifications of this new development on labour, employment and society in general. This is especially true of the IT sector, which contributes around 8% of India’s GDP as the fifth-largest industry in the country. The support-service workers in the Indian IT industry are one telling example of the informalization of employment and casualization of the workforce in today’s world of globalization and neoliberalization.

There has been no academic or industry study or survey about support-service workers in the Indian IT industry, although there are some estimates about the number of workers in this sector – a number which ranges from 1.2 million to 1.8 million workers. There is an underwhelming body of work about their lives and working conditions. Based on qualitative and quantitative data of the 106 informants working in the IT industry across five Indian cities, this research examines the everyday lives of support-service workers in India’s IT industry using the mixed-methods methodology in an attempt to understand the challenges such workers face in a challenging industry at a challenging moment in technological history.

### 3.2 Mixed-Methods Research

To capture the life stories of a section of unorganized workers whose labour has contributed to creating one of the most successful industries in India’s economic history, I used the mixed-methods methodology. The research connects the quantitative and qualitative survey findings to draw inferences about daily lives for support-service workers in the IT industry. The quantitative data of the sample captures the socioeconomic statuses of these workers’ past and present conditions while the qualitative interviews represent the voices that are struggling to change their living conditions in the hopes of better careers and better lives. Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative data connect the economic lives of these workers with their experiences of living and working in a modern world.

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25 https://www.statista.com/topics/2256/it-industry-in-india/
26 This is based on the estimate by various human resource analysts associated with the IT industry. According to them, 10% to 15% of indirect employment in the IT industry is held by support-service workers. The total number of indirectly employed individuals in India’s IT industry as of 2016-17 is 12 million: https://www.statista.com/statistics/320729/india-it-industry-direct-indirect-employment/
In the last few decades, there have been rich academic studies on the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research methods (e.g., Brewar 1994; Creswell and Clark 2011; Brannen 1992; Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird and McCormick 1992). These theoretical discussions have resulted in the development of the mixed-methods paradigm in research. The mixed-methods model combines the relevant strengths of qualitative and quantitative procedures and techniques in the investigation of research problems. The mixed-methods model can be useful when the

…quantitative results can net general explanations for the relationships among variables, but the more detailed understanding for what the statistical tests or effect sizes actually mean is lacking. Qualitative data and results can help build that understanding. (Creswell & Clark 2011, 9)

Besides this complementary aspect, another positive contribution of mixed methods is that, by integrating and interweaving quantitative data with qualitative narratives of everyday life, each reinforces the presence of the other (Bryman 1992).

3.3 The Relevance of the Work

According to John W. Creswell, one of the ways to mix quantitative and qualitative data in mixed methods is “…by connecting them from the data analysis step of the first source of data to the data collection step of the second source of data so that one source builds on the other or helps to explain the other…” (2008, 527). My research uses the socioeconomic demographic data generated from the paper-based quantitative questionnaires to examine the extent of relation between the socioeconomic situations of the support-service workers and the perspectives, observations and experiences narrated by the workers about their living conditions, elicited through in-depth face-to-face interviews. The qualitative data that the interviews generate – the reflection on their daily life experience in the urban milieu – are not meaningful or relevant unless their intimate relations with the quantitative aspects of everyday life are recognized. As a result, quantitative data is my first source of information and interviews are my second source to understand the multiple levels of relationships between the economy and globalization on one hand as well as social practices and identities of these workers on the other. Any other research method based solely on quantitative or
qualitative components could not have captured the complexity of these social interactions. Since one of my research questions enquires about the effects of the globalized economy, workplace and technology on the culture and tradition of workers, mixing qualitative and quantitative methods is ideal for establishing the nature of interaction between economics and values. From a social theory point of view, I argue that cultural values, norms and beliefs cannot be understood without an understanding of the economics that drive the society. As Raymond Williams states, “…the economic structure and the consequent social relations [are] the guiding string on which a culture is woven, and by following which a culture is to be understood” (1983, 269).

3.4 Data Collection

The first portion of my fieldwork was quantitative data collection using survey research to collect the necessary information. The choice of survey research as a data-collection method is based on the theoretical understanding that “a quantitatively oriented questionnaire could be used to generate general understanding of a set of related questions, to identify interview questions for deeper qualitative investigation, and to identify possible interview participants” (Julien 2008, 846). This is relevant to my mixed-methods research design whereby the quantitative sociodemographic information helped to structure the interviews that constitute the second part of the fieldwork. In addition to the advantage that surveys have over other data-collection methods (e.g., focus groups, ethnography, records and documents), it also has the ability to engage a targeted section of the population in concrete detail through quantitative structured questionnaires as well as open-ended conversations. As Blackstone says, “survey research is probably the best method to use when one hopes to gain a representative picture of the attitudes and characteristics of a large group” (91, 2012).

For the fieldwork, I enlisted the help of three female research assistants (RAs). The RAs were doctoral students in sociology from two Indian academic institutions, recruited through a common friend. Their backgrounds in sociology as well as their ability to speak and write in more than one Indian language (besides English and Hindi) were the reasons for selection. Their knowledge about Indian social conditions and their good conversational skills have also fostered insightful and effective interactions with the interviewees. I conducted a survey of 106 workers divided into three employment categories: (1) Housekeeping: cleaners,
janitors, servers and cooks in food courts; (2) Security: workers who monitor the movements of visitors and guard IT companies in technology parks; and (3) Car and bus drivers who ferry managers, engineers, software developers and call-centre personnel between their homes and offices. Fieldwork was done in and around software technology parks located in five Indian cities: Bangalore, Calcutta, New Delhi and its National Capital Region (NCR), Pune and Hyderabad, where more than three-quarters of the Indian and foreign IT companies are concentrated. All cities have multiple parks and special economic zones (SEZs) dedicated to IT (software, hardware and call-centre) activities. Bangalore and Delhi-NCR, which house the larger share of IT companies, contributed two parks each in my sample whereas the rest offered one park each. All parks were chosen based on the information provided by Software Technology Parks of India (STPI).27 In Bangalore, I chose International Tech Park at Whitefield and Salarpuria Infozone at Electronics City, Hosur. In Delhi-NCR, I chose DLF Cyber City at Gurgaon and SEZ at Sector 26, Noida. In Calcutta, Hyderabad and Pune, the selected locations are Software Technology Park at Sector V, Hyderabad Information Technology and Engineering Consultancy City (HITEC City) and Hinjewadi IT Park, respectively.

The fieldwork was carried out in two phases between August 2014 to October 2014 and January 2015 to March 2015. The research falls into two sections: the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative interviews. The first section was the written, structured quantitative questionnaire divided into eight sections, which the workers were asked to complete. The questionnaire was available in two languages, Hindi and English, and its sections are described below.

3.5 Quantitative Data
3.5.1 Demographic Information

The aim is to gather quantifiable data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample such as age, gender, marital and education status, religion and caste, mother tongue and other languages spoken, respondent’s income and nature of job and family income.

27 “Software Technology Parks of India, is an autonomous body set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India in 1991, with the objective of encouraging, promoting and boosting the Software Exports from India” – https://www.stpi.in/11011.
3.5.2 Family History

This section focuses on the social and economic background of the worker’s family. Here, the questions involved the educational status of parents, the family size including siblings, the principal earning member’s class, the family’s total income and the places in which the respondents lived or worked to date.

3.5.3 Information on Current Members of the Household

All family members are not currently living with the respondents; some (e.g., parents, siblings or spouses) are still living at the family’s original place of residence while some siblings have migrated to other places for work or education. When close family members are not living under the same roof, the pertinent question is whether the worker is obligated to provide financial assistance to such family members. Also, one important question addressed other family members’ employment status and nature of work, including a spouse if the informant is married.

3.5.4 Educational Achievement

This section is about the level of education and challenges the workers faced while in school or college furthering their studies. These questions were meant to discover the financial and social barriers, if any, which led to dropping out of school.

3.5.5 Skill and Training

For those working under precarious labour conditions, one way to move into a role with better prospects is by acquiring technical or non-technical skill sets. Here, my purpose is to gather information on how many workers in the sample have undergone any kind of training pertaining to their present job role, who financed the training (state, family or self-funded) and any barriers the respondents faced in pursuing such goals.

3.5.6 Everyday Life

Information about everyday life is perhaps the most crucial element of my research. These questions seek insight on the living conditions of support-service workers, including their access to health-care services, modes of transportation and related costs, use of mass media
for everyday information and entertainment as well as association with any social organizations (e.g., trade union, religious group, sports team).

3.5.7 Personal Finance

This section deals with the workers’ financial status (i.e., wealth, assets and savings). Since financial health for poor workers is also dependent on the state’s welfare programs, questions about the kind of monetary and non-monetary support they receive from the government were also posed to the respondents.

3.5.8 Employment History

Here, we look at various aspects of past and current employment, working conditions of the workers, age of their first entry-level job in the employment market and whether they are looking for new job opportunities.

3.6 Interviews

The in-depth interviews were conducted in two rounds. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Since the nature of the interviews was open, some interviews ran for more than one hour, depending on the willingness of the interviewees to continue conversation. In some cases, the participant’s time constraints shortened the interview session to less than half an hour. Based on the responses to the first round of the quantitative questionnaire, some initial questions were posed to participants to initiate a broader unrestricted conversation. They were asked questions based on demographic and personal information gleaned from the quantitative questionnaire they had completed earlier. While conducting the interviews, my RAs and I began with casual conversations to establish a certain level of comfort with each interviewee.

The second phase of my interview sessions targeted social outliers in the sample. In my research sample, social outliers are respondents who stand out in the sample as a result of their different social and economic positions compared with those of their co-workers. These outliers included upper-caste workers, divorced or separated female janitors, security guards with university educations and unionized workers. These are workers whose various and particular advantaged or disadvantaged social conditions distinguish them from the sample mean in terms of social demographics. The purpose of interviewing them a second time was
to find out whether social differentiation results in somewhat different articulations about their everyday lives compared with their colleagues. Second-round interviews were quite in depth as respondents were asked specific questions related to issues that set them apart from others in similar positions of employment. If a worker is a union member, for example, questions include those related to reasons for joining a union and whether union activities have a positive impact on their individual experiences in the workplace.

3.7 Sampling of Cities and Informants

The Indian IT industry is spread across 15 cities, although the number changes every year with more cities taking on initiatives to build IT hubs. For the fieldwork, the major metropolitan IT hubs were divided into three categories: large, medium and small-medium in terms of employee numbers, revenue and the number of software technology parks in each. The criteria for choosing the number of cities and the sample size in each city were based on purposive sampling methods of representation by industry size and geographical location. While applying the non-probability sampling method, the basic statistical premise was not overlooked; given the constraints of time and money, the larger size is indeed better. I did not decide my sample size at the outset of my research. Rather, I tried to maximize the sample size based on my available six-month time period and research budget. Five IT hubs were sampled: two large, two medium and one small-medium. To obtain pan-Indian representation, hubs were chosen from all four of the country’s geographical regions. Bangalore, the top IT destination in the southern region, is the first choice, followed by Delhi-NCR (which includes Gurgaon and Noida) in the north. These are the top two IT business activity centers in the country. Pune in the west and Hyderabad in the south were selected as the two medium-sized IT hubs. In the east, Calcutta is the fifth location with a share of around 10% of India’s national IT revenue. Bangalore and New Delhi contributed 25 respondents each while 20 participants were selected from both Pune and Hyderabad. In Calcutta, the sample size was 15. The total number of respondents was 106.
Table 1: Sample Distribution among the Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>No. of IT firms</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida (NCR)</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My research design was (a) to choose a sample of five hubs representing cities from large (two), medium (two) and small (one) categories and (b) to have city representation from all geographical regions in India to capture the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the working population. Although in the post-liberalization period, the rural-urban migration to a city is not strictly limited by geographical constraints, there are still cities where major sections of the population are from a particular ethnic or linguistic community as they are from the region that surrounds the city’s central location. Also, the cities in the sample represent a fair cross-section of the companies involved in the IT business. Though every effort was made to include subjects with the demographic characteristics of social groups employed in support-service jobs in each city, the quantitative data in the present research is not representative on its own. This is because the definition of a purposive sample is a non-representative subset of some larger population.

The 106 participants for the mixed-methods research were identified through purposive sampling (Teddlie and Yu 2007; Etikan, Musa and Alkassim 2015). A purposive sample concentrates on people with particular characteristics that are relevant to the research project (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2015). According to Teddlie and Yu, “purposive sampling

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28 National Capital Region
techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies and may be defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions” (Teddlie and Yu 2007, 77). Purposive sampling is used when the population size is unknown or when it is difficult to contact potential participants because of factors such as security, secrecy and geographic location. Unlike probability sampling (e.g., random sampling) where the probability of choosing a sample from the population is equal, purposive sampling obtains a non-representative subset of a larger population, in this case Indian IT workers. Also, that strategy “… can be useful when the researcher has limited resources, time and workforce” (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim 2015, 1).

The purposive sampling method was fitting for my research because of the lacking credible industry data on the population size of support-service workers. There is no primary source that enumerates this category of worker or any third-party research that estimates how much of the population is composed of this type of employee. The response to enquiries made with the National Association of Software & Service Companies (NASSCOM), the industry body that represents Indian IT and business process management (BPM) companies, suggested that support-service people working for IT companies might constitute 10% to 12% of the total number of indirect employment workers in India’s IT industry.

Another reason for choosing purposive sampling was the difficulty in accessing study participants at their workplaces using formal correspondence. The population of interest is vulnerable and subject to a high degree of job insecurity. Movement in software parks is tightly controlled by surveillance cameras, access cards and alarms. The access to these interviewees was difficult, since neither the IT companies nor outsourcing firms would normally allow workers to discuss the conditions under which they work. The only alternative was to meet them at their residences, company parking lots and eateries; hence, most interviews were conducted outside the workplace.

I visited places where support-service workers assemble before and after work – tea and food stalls, pubs and eateries, community and public meeting places, hangout zones, transportation corridors and union meetings. These were places where male workers congregate to discuss the realities of everyday life; however, female workers do not typically attend these get-
togethers for entertainment and relaxation. To obtain the sample of female workers, I employed two approaches. First, I requested information about the female workers from their male colleagues, who provided me with their residence vicinities. Based on the information, I called on them at their residences accompanied by a female RA. I also recruited some female workers while they were leaving their workplaces after a shift. The female RAs approached them for an interview. Depending on their availability, the location of the interview would be decided according to their preference. My conversation with the workers led to introductions to their friends, relatives and neighbours who sometimes belonged to the same profession. I made acquaintance with the majority of my informants via informal connections which produced candid conversations; however, I did not include all willing participants in the research.

Although best suited for qualitative research, stratification of targeted samples leads to a certain degree of randomness, which is useful when the research is dedicated to extracting both qualitative and quantitative data.

3.7.1 Gender and Age Representation

Respondents were divided into strata by gender and age, which is accomplished when

… the researcher first divides the group of interest into strata and then selects a small number of cases to study intensively within each stratum, based on purposive sampling techniques. This allows the researcher to discover and describe in detail characteristics that are similar or different across the strata or subgroups. (Teddlie and Yu 2007, 90)

For gender representation, the sample is divided into the proportion of male-female participation in the workforce, which is 66:34. In the case of age representation, the sample is divided into two groups: over the age of 35 years and equal to or less than the age of 35 in the ratio of 7:13. This is based on the 2011 Indian Census report.29

29 According to the 2011 Indian census, 65% of the Indian population is below or equal to the age of 35.
Table 2: Gender Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi, Gurgaon &amp; Noida</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Age Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age &lt;35</td>
<td>Age &gt;35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have used the World Bank data\textsuperscript{30} on the ratio of male-female participation in the Indian workforce to stratify my gender sample. The report suggests that the ratio of female-to-male labour force participation is approximately 34:66 across all the sectors and categories of the Indian economy. That said, a large percentage of the female labour force is employed in part-time or occasional work in both rural and urban areas. Considering only the working-age (15 years to 59 years) female population, the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) was approximately 27\% in 2016 according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).\textsuperscript{31}

Another estimate was made by the recently published \textit{India Employment Report 2016: Challenges and the Imperative of Manufacturing-Led Growth}. In the report, Ghose argues that, by extrapolating data from the population census in both 2001 and 2011 as well as a National Sample Survey (NSS) of employment and unemployment, the female LFPR in 2015-16 is less than 22\% if only non-subsidiary full-time jobs are considered (2016, 5). The issue becomes complicated if one considers an important trend – a declining female labour force participation within the working-age population over the last decade. One explanation is “…rising household incomes, as illiterate and near-illiterate women from the poorest households withdraw from poor-quality jobs (mainly casual labour and unpaid family work) in agriculture” (Ghose 2016, XIX).\textsuperscript{32} The data represent a trend for the entire economy, but do not help to understand the impact of changes on each of the horizontal sectors. It is possible that, in some industries, the trend of labour participation is positive, but offset by negative trends in other sectors. On the whole, however, it is negative. In my study, more than 75\% of the female respondents are migrants who were either unemployed or subsidiary workers in rural areas who moved to the IT industry. Whether this is a blip caused by my sample selection is difficult to know without a sector-by-sector, detailed study on labour force participation.

\textsuperscript{30} \url{http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FM.ZS}.

\textsuperscript{31} It is not clear if the figure of 27\% includes only full-time workers or full- and part-time workers: \url{http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=IN}.

\textsuperscript{32} ILO argues that one of the important reasons for this low rate of participation is “cultural attitudes and social norms about women in the workplace” – \url{http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/comment-analysis/WCMS_204762/lang--en/index.htm}. 
The second part of the fieldwork involved conducting the interviews three months later, which were then followed by interviews with a select group of respondents from the first phase. In this phase, I interviewed 20% of the participants in each of the five cities, specifically those who agreed to participate in a second round of interviews. I did not overstep my existing ethics protocol as I neither violated any inclusion criteria nor created potential risks or inconveniences to the participants. The total sample size of 21 is distributed across the five cities as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample Distribution among the Cities (Second Phase)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Quantitative

There has been no large-scale study on the socioeconomic background of workers in support-service jobs in the Indian IT Industry. The sample size of 106 is too small to represent a 1.8 million strong workforce; nevertheless, the quantitative information revealed through this research provides some details about characteristics of the Indian IT labour force.

The quantitative analysis describes the socioeconomic status of the 106 support-service workers at IT parks in five Indian metropolises. The purpose of this quantitative (close-ended) analysis is to describe the socioeconomics of everyday existence for my respondents. In my research, descriptive statistics about everyday life are one of the keys to understanding
the material conditions of these workers, along with their life stories and personal experiences, with in-depth interviews. The function of the quantitative method in the sample is to enrich the meaning of the lived experience of these workers. The core assumption is that the numbers would help to situate the socioeconomic conditions of these subjects. This facilitated building the interview process with some basic questions. For example, if the interviewee has stated that his average weekly number of working hours is more than 48 hours and he/she has a five-day work schedule with no overtime, it opens up questions on the nature of labour relations in the trade and its relationship to precarious labour condition. The numbers helped in the formation of the questionnaire to understand the lives and working conditions of these workers.

3.8.2 Sample Characteristics

In my sample of 106 workers, there are 69 males and 37 females. The mean age is 31 while the median age is 29.

Around 90% in the sample are literate. In the 2011 Census, the literacy rate in India was reported at 74%. The male and female literacy rates are 82% and 65%, respectively as per the census data; therefore, the percentage of literate persons in my sample is higher than the national average. Compared with other semi-informal sector jobs (e.g., security guards at shopping malls), the IT industry prefers some level of literacy. When I spoke to recruiters, such as G4S and Sodexo, they revealed that they always recruit those with at least school-level educational qualifications.

3.8.3 Education

Table 5: Level of Education of the Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Secondary</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the sample, 36% of fathers have no formal education while only 5% are graduates and 22% and 31% have attained primary and secondary education, respectively.

Table 6: Education of Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid/Primary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Diploma</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Education of Mother

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid/Primary</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of mothers, 60% did not have the opportunity to attend primary school while only 2% have graduate degrees or degree diplomas.

Compared with their parents, the present generation has somewhat more educational access and achievement. Only 10% of the sample did not have any school education while 42% have attained a secondary-school education and 22% have a post-secondary education.

#### 3.8.4 Migration

Fieldwork showed that 77% of the workers have recently migrated from the rural hamlets and semi-urban places to the metropolis, where they now work. For the rest (23%), it is their parents who migrated years back. The rural to urban migration in search of better employment is an important characteristic of the post-globalization period. In the decades between 1981 and 1991, 1991 and 2001 and 1901-11, the net rural-urban migration was 19%, 21% and 21%, respectively. The NSSO (2001, 2012) data show that the motives for migration fell into two categories: searching for jobs or searching for better employment. In the case of married couples, “male and female migration to urban areas are related as males move for employment and for better employment prospects whereas females follow them as a consequence of marriage or move later as soon as the male migrants settle down” (Bhagat 2014, 15).

Irrespective of the reasons for migration, a substantial proportion of female migrants constitute the workforce in urban areas. In my sample, the respondents are considered
migrants if they are the first generation in their families to have moved from their villages to urban localities. Some females in the sample who had migrated were working as housewives, but joined the urban workforce once they were in the cities.

3.8.5 Income

Table 8: Income from Current Job

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8654.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>8000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>18900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average monthly income of the surveyed workers is Rs 8655 (approximately CAD 173). The median income is Rs 8000 (approximately CAD 160).\(^{33}\)

Table 9: Monthly Family Income

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>13280.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>11000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>35500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{33}\) CAD 1 = Rs 50
The monthly family income is the family’s total income contributed by members who belong to the working-age population (15 years to 59 years). The mean income is Rs 13,281 (approximately CAD 265) and the median income is Rs 11,000 (approximately CAD 220).

3.8.6 Working Hours

Table 10: Average Weekly Working Hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48-54 hours</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-60 hours</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 60 hours</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample, 33% of those surveyed work more than 60 hours per week while 24% and 43% work 54 to 60 hours and 48 to 54 hours per week, respectively. Indian labour laws stipulate that, in regular employment, a person of working age should not be made to work for more than 48 hours in a week and more than nine hours in one day.

3.8.7 Benefits

In terms of benefits, 40% of the workers do not have provident fund, 38% have no health coverage and 75% do not receive a bonus or any supplementary allowance for their labour.

---

34 A retirement benefit plan for the public the private sector employees
3.8.8 Extended Family Occupation (Principal Earning Member)

Table 11: Extended Family Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landless Peasant</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Farmer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business (Large or Small)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this sample, extended family is defined as close family members (e.g., parents and siblings) living in separate households whose major source of income is the work in which they are engaged. In certain cases, some financial help and sustenance is provided by their
sons or daughters who are employed. For the majority of support-service workers, their parents and other family members live in rural areas. The rest of the extended family members live either in a different city or under a joint family system in the same city where the workers are employed. In almost all cases, the principal earning member is the father supported by children and, at times, the spouse. Table 11 suggests that 43% of the principal earning members are peasants with average holdings of less than one hectare of land. This is followed by those who are classified as working class (34%). Only 11% have occupations (e.g., white-collar job, small- or large-business owner or farming over five hectares of land) that can offer a fair standard of living.

### 3.8.9 Extended Family Annual Income

Table 12: Annual Income (Extended Family)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Income Range</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Rs 10,000 or Less</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs 10,001 -15,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs 15001-20,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs 20,001-58,320</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Rs 58,320</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Around 41% of the workers come from families that live below the poverty line. While I acknowledge that there are various contending estimates about deciding the criteria for
identifying families living in poverty, here I used the Rangarajan Report on Poverty\textsuperscript{35} to the Government of India as the basis of estimating the poverty line. According to the report, a person is considered to be living in poverty if his or her monthly per-capita consumption expenditure is less than Rs 972 per family in rural areas and Rs 1,407 per family in urban areas based on 2011-12 prices. By this definition, the annual poverty line for a family of five is Rs 58,320 (approximately CAD 1166). Based on this estimate, as the majority of the workers’ families still live in the rural areas, 59\% of those in the sample come from families above the poverty line.

3.8.10 Children and Fertility Rates

The majority of workers who are married, divorced or widowed (93\%) have one or two children. The rest (7\%) have four or more than children. This is a big shift compared with the previous generation. In this survey, 52\% of the workers reported that the average number of siblings is between three and five. The sample supports the 2011 Indian Census data. According to the Census data,\textsuperscript{36} the total fertility rate (TFR) has declined from 5.2 to 4.5 during 1971 to 1981 and from 3.6 to 2.4 during 1991 to 2011. The TFR in rural areas has declined from 5.4 to 2.7 from 1971 to 2011 whereas the corresponding decline in urban areas has been from 4.1 to 1.9 during the same period.

3.8.11 Religion

In the sample, 88.7\% of the workers are Hindu while 7\% are Muslims and 4\% are Christians. The 2011 Census puts the religious composition of the Indian population 80\% Hindu, 13\% Muslims and 2\% Christians; thus, Hindus and Christians have a higher presence in the sample than the national figure.

\textsuperscript{35}http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/Rangarajan-defends-poverty-estimates/article11257188.ece
\textsuperscript{36}http://www.censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Report/10Chap%203%20-%202011.pdf
3.8.12 Caste

Table 13: Caste

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Upper Caste</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Backward Class (OBC)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste and Tribe (SC/ST)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample, the upper caste (Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya) accounts for 36% of workers followed by OBC at 33% and SC at 17%. There have been some recent studies on the relationship between caste mobility and employment, especially based on the 2011 Census. As Sonalde Desai and Amaresh Dubey argue:

Recent debates surrounding the inclusion of caste in 2011 Census have served to crystallize the competing narratives about social stratification in Indian society. One side holds that historical fault lines along caste, tribe and religious lines persist and may

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37 Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India: http://in.one.un.org/task-teams/scheduled-castes-and-scheduled-tribes/
well have been aggravated in modern India; the other side asserts that, while caste remains an important dimension of modern social life, its relevance is mostly limited to selection of marriage partners and has little importance in shaping material inequalities. (2012, 40)

Between these two contrasting perspectives, my sample suggests that there has been some positive mobility for low-caste workers from precarious, informal employment to organized, blue-collar jobs. This may be a result of state intervention in the form of affirmative action in the last few decades. In the case of upper-caste workers, a sizable section is now working as manual labourers, which may not have been the case in their parents’ generation.

3.9 Summary

(1) The majority of 106 workers (61%) comes from poor working-class and small peasant families.

(2) There has been substantial improvement in support-service workers’ family income after moving to the city. Around 41% of those who were living under the poverty line, mostly in the rural areas, are now above the poverty line after moving to an urban location and beginning work in IT.

(3) Though the mean and median income for support-service jobs of individual workers are approximately CAD 175 and CAD 150, respectively, all work more than 48 hours every week without overtime and a sizable number does not receive health-care and other benefits from their employers, either companies or contractors.

3.10 Qualitative

The qualitative part of my research centres on the interviews. The format of the qualitative study comprises open-ended interviews. According to Julien,

… [Open-ended questions] may challenge respondents with opportunities for self-expression or elaboration. Open-ended questions may challenge respondents because they are more demanding and time-consuming to answer; however the data obtained are typically richer than generated from closed questions. (2008, 846)
Since we did not have a prepared questionnaire, but only an understanding of the area we could highlight based on the quantitative responses, some questions moved our discussion beyond the scope of the study into areas we did not anticipate. This has enriched our interview content, especially if the matters discussed were outside our understanding or expectation. During the conversations, the interview questions targeted six major areas of respondents’ lives: labour conditions, gender issues, rural-urban migration’s role in shaping worker consciousness, importance of education for their children, the use of modern gadgets like mobile phones and computers as well as hopes and aspirations. The areas I chose are broadly related to my quantitative questionnaire. Since the questions are open ended, not all areas are touched upon during the interviews because of time constraints or interviewee interest in one particular issue compared with the others. The responses to the quantitative part also determined the importance of a particular area for discussion over others.

Since I attempted to keep the conversations as informal as possible, sometimes we unknowingly entered into relatively private and personal issues. Though it was awkward and embarrassing at times, especially when the female workers shared the aspirations of their mothers-in-law for grandsons, which led to subsequent discussions about reproductive issues, we gained valuable insights from these kinds of discussions. The aim is to elicit responses in a free-flowing discussion that would reflect the workers’ lives and experiences in a modern, technology-infused environment. During interviews, I tried to interconnect the relationship of the worker’s lived experiences with the material world.

Below is the sample of questions – not exhaustive, but relevant to the research objective – that we (I and the research assistants) asked different workers depending on the agreed-upon topics to address with the support-service workers.

- How have things changed – family relations, financial stability, children’s education, etc. — after joining the IT industry as a worker?
- If the participant has migrated from the rural area: What kind of different living experiences exist between your present state of urban location and your rural residence in your earlier life?
- Do you want to go back to the villages?
• For a married female worker, we asked whether her husband shared domestic work and valued her work at home.

• Given the kind of job you are doing, what is your expectation for the future in terms of your economic and social mobility? Where do you see yourself in next five years?

• How can you best fulfill your future goals: through your current job/getting a new job/having children attain a higher education that could enable them to get a good job/a lottery ticket/family property, etc.?

• In your office, you have seen the software and hardware engineers working in creating products for the IT industry. What factors do you think helped them find work in the IT industry while earning a good salary and perks?

My analysis of the interviews is based on specific themes. According to Braun and Clarke, “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (2006, 82). In a nutshell, my two research questions enquire how support-service workers make meaning of their “living, working, entering into social conflict and intercourse, and so forth” (Yovel 2012, 8) in an alien urban world mediated by technology. The question privileges certain themes in my data over other issues raised by the respondents. Based on the connections between the qualitative data set and my research questions focused on five themes:

(a) Labour Relations

(b) Gender Relations

(c) Technology

(d) Rural-Urban Migration and Dichotomy

(e) Education, Hope and Aspiration

The qualitative data began with thematic analysis and transcription in order to read and reread interview content of each participant, keeping in mind my thematic preferences. In the second stage, after completing the transcription and familiarizing myself with the content, I manually coded the interviews of each worker under each relevant theme. The coding
method that I followed is theory driven, whereby I approached the data with my research questions in mind (e.g., gender relations or labour relations). After completing the coding, I analyzed the data relating it to my research questions.

3.11 Research Limitations

A number of impediments were encountered while conducting fieldwork and these affected the study’s findings. Study participants belong to a vulnerable segment of the population in terms of social and economic conditions. Their job conditions are far from ideal as their employers are always looking over their shoulders to prevent any kind of “subversive” activities that might hamper existing labour relations. There were obstacles to gaining access for interviews as some employers would not allow me to talk to their employees in the workplace. On more than one occasion, I was ejected from IT parks by security guards or threatened with legal action. In the event that I could not meet up with these workers at the workplace, I met interviewees at either their residence or some other discreet location. The purposive sampling method helped me to find participants based on my selection criteria, but there was always an air of suspicion, a fear of “what would happen if my employer knows that I am talking about the demand to increase my wage,” or “what’s the guarantee that you would not tell the employer about my activities?” There were sometimes hesitations and abruptly ended conversations, in which subjects declined to speak any further. I tried to create an air of confidence, but I was not always successful as an outsider. Because of the risks and stress inherent in the situation, responses may not always have been from the heart, but rather what the interviewee believed the world wants to hear. This is a problem with ethnography as a method of research, especially in a tense and uneasy environment.

In the Indian cultural setting, interviewing female workers is not an easy task for a male researcher, and this is even truer when the discussion takes on gender issues, such as family or marriage. To preemptively attack this problem, I selected a female RA; however, I was sometimes unaccompanied when the RA was unavailable and female interviewees had no other time to meet. In those instances, it was necessary to skip some important gender-related questions.
Language was another hurdle. India is a multilingual country with 22 national languages and, although Hindi and English are the official languages, a large section of the population, especially those with little education, speaks only their mother tongue. In the five widely dispersed metropolises where fieldwork was conducted, there was great linguistic diversity among participants. Some conversed in Hindi or English, but most preferred their mother tongue. The quantitative questionnaires were available in two languages: Hindi and English. For workers whose mother tongues were different and those who were familiar with either Hindi or English or both but had below-average writing proficiency, the RAs often filled up the questionnaire on their behalf based on their answers. This could have led to a plausible, but inaccurate registration of the responses in the questionnaire. We tried to address this issue through audio recording the responses; therefore, whenever we found any discrepancy in the data, we went back to the recorded responses to check.

In the case of qualitative interviews, the possibility of unintentional errors is of a different kind. Since I speak only Bengali, Hindi and English, my RAs acted as interpreters when necessary as interviews were conducted in seven languages: Bengali, Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Marathi. The assistants then transcribed and translated the interviews into English. In multi-lingual ethnography, translations and transcriptions sometimes lose the thematic and symbolic elements of one culture when converted to another language. Cultural practices can be misinterpreted or lost in translation. To minimize these issues, I collaborated closely with the local RAs during the oral and written translations of the interviews. Together, we tried to interpret the meanings of the participant’s spoken words in the recorded interview in relation to her/his overall narratives about everyday life experiences. This involves connecting the subject’s narratives representing particular cultural phenomenon to their social settings. This interpretive approach provided an approximation of their intended meaning in relation to their overall social practice. A loss of fidelity in translation is an unavoidable limitation to this kind of research. The alternative – conducting interviews in only Hindi, Bengali or English – would have severely limited the ability of many sample population members, thereby weakening the results of this work considerably.

Lastly, there are inherent limits in generalizing based on quantitative data derived from only106 survey responses; however, through interviews, observations, quantifiable data and
secondary literature, I set out to challenge the established institutional claim that the everyday lives of labourers in the Indian IT industry are about the hegemonic triad of freedom, flexibility and innovation in the digital society. It is more than that. The interviews of technology-sector support-service workers suggest that technology and globalization not only provide them employment and a new space to live – these also create new kinds of differences, precarity and uncertainty. This is particularly true for workers’ everyday struggle against contractors, corporations and various other hegemonic relations in an increasingly privatized urban space.

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Chapter 4

Individuality and Social Relations in Capitalist Modernity

This chapter addresses the research question on the changing social relations that shape everyday experiences of IT support-service workers in India’s urban social milieu. My interviewees feel their lives are caught up in the maelstrom of change. As one female security guard, Aparna Dey (female, age 26) mentioned, “…everything is changing…there’s been a drastic change. I feel that in the next two years, things will change even more. I don’t know what people after us will do, the way of life for them.”

An overwhelming majority – over 90% of the sample – are first-generation industrial workers and, for many (almost 60%), coming to the metropolis was facilitated by their job at an IT firm. They were previously living in their traditional family settings in rural or semi-urban villages, surrounded by poverty, informal labour and non-economic obligations. New communication technologies promised jobs with monthly pay, which would lead to a lifestyle that had only been a distant dream for most labourers; however, it would be simplistic to argue that these workers were merely part of a traditional social system infused with feudal values before joining the IT sector. Rather, Indian villages, rural hamlets and semi-urban localities have their share of post-colonial capitalist development with a fair bit of capital infusion in agriculture, transport and agro-based industries. Despite this, individual and family lives continued in much the same way as their parents and grandparents had lived. These workers had traditional mooring, but their lives were also connected to commodity production. There were occasional disruptions, such as the arrival of multinational cosmetic brands in local shops. For many the “desi” (indigenous) face creams remained the preferred choice because they were affordable and consumers were not “experienced ” enough to replace “use value” with “brand value.” The scenario changed post-1990 with the launch of India’s new economic policy, liberalization, globalization as new ITs brought economic transformations in the way that goods are financed, produced and marketed. The villages did not remain unaffected by this new development. Though the spread of capital is still

38 In the last two decades, besides IT, the construction and textile sectors have been the largest contributors to the urban job growth that has led to the massive migration of people from rural areas. https://www.pressreader.com/india/business-standard/20170419/281986082430882
unevenly distributed across the rural regions for historical and cultural reasons, there has been profound progress. As Dipankar Gupta argues,

There is a certain resistance in accepting the fact that the Indian village is undergoing major changes, not just economically, but culturally as well. The reluctance in coming to terms with this reality arises largely from the widely prevalent belief among intellectuals that the Indian village is timeless and unchanging and that the Indian villager likes nothing more than living in a rural setting. These notions need to be revised, not just for the sake of factual accuracy, but also because of the imperatives of the planning and developmental process. (2005, 751)

Changes can be measured by the fact that

…more than 40 percent of the rural population is engaged in non-agricultural occupations today and the number is rising rapidly. A substantial part of this population consists of rural labourers who do not own land but do not find enough opportunity for agricultural work (Chatterjee 2008, 59).

These are rural labourers who are migrating to urban areas in search of jobs as informal labourers. Some landless farmers made their way to work as support-service staff in the technology enclaves where the new business model of outsourcing and offshoring IT services opened employment opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled migrants. Moving to a city is also an opportunity for them to explore a different way of living, away from suboptimal living standards that many faced in their villages of origin.

How do we understand these transitions? In what respect have the economic policies of globalization in the Indian economy resulted in new cultural developments? Is everything just about moving forward or do these workers look backward, too? Do they try to engage in some kind of adjustment and negotiation between the past and the present? Above all, can the changes they experience be couched as a linear movement from traditional or “feudal” values to a more “progressive” ideology of capitalist modernity?

Based on my research questions and the interviewees’ narratives, I have categorized the changes in social relations addressed into three areas: (1) gender norms; (2) labour relations;
and (3) the use of technology. The remainder of this chapter examines the meanings of such changes through a close reading of the workers’ stories about daily life in connection with their jobs at technology parks.

### 4.1 Changing Gender Norms

I met Sera (female, age 23) while she was checking a visitor’s briefcase at her workplace in Bangalore’s White Field area, one of the software hubs in India’s Silicon Valley. Unlike many young Indian women who are brought up traditionally, Sera does not shy away from speaking with unfamiliar people. Perhaps her job managing visitors’ movements at the main entrance taught her to be more sociable with strangers, so she did not seem surprised when my female RA caught her in the middle of her duties. When the conversation’s purpose about was relayed to her, she was reluctant to talk and initially declined, but then promised to meet us outside the technology park after work without committing to an interview. The next day, we waited for her outside the gate, hoping that she would have some time for us. To our surprise, Sera approached us and whispered that she wanted to share several things about her family and work. Even before we could find a place to sit and chat, she began pouring out her story. She complained about her workplace culture and wage rate as well as shared how offended she is by her male bosses’ misogynist jokes in front of female guards. She asserted that, as a woman, she does not feel sufficiently respected in society. When asked why she did not initially want to speak, Sera says,

> Maybe this is the first time in my life I am complaining about anything. My parents always tell me to be a good woman, never complain. Nevertheless, everything has a limit. I need to have a decent wage and a job free of harassment. The supervisors speak extremely rudely with the female staff. Our contractors are so worker unfriendly – that they do not even pay for our uniform allowance, we have to buy our own uniform.

As a woman whose upbringing in a traditional Tamil society was informed by the values of a caste-based patriarchal society, Sera’s demands for respect and better working conditions meant ignoring the centuries-old community-sanctioned definition of a “good woman” – always compliant and submissive to societal norms. Sera admits that she never had the
courage to speak up to her superior about her grievances. She had only confided her discontent to people with whom she feels she can connect. One reason for this is apprehension about losing her job, which she needs to run her family and provide financial support to her parents as “This city is expensive and only husband’s salary is not enough.” Her spouse works as a front-office executive at a telecommunications service provider.

Like Sera, some of the other female interviewees suffer from workplace harassment and discrimination. We asked Jaya (female, age 26), a housekeeper, “As a young woman, do you feel secure at your workplace?” This is Jaya’s second job in the last three years at the largest software park in Pune. Jaya answers, “It’s not possible to feel secure, is it? If you are working outside, then you can’t feel secure.” After a pause, she continues, “There are men here, the way they look at you…” then her voice trails off as if struggling to find a way to describe her situation. She attempts to explain: “If we try to take any initiative, then [men] tell us that it is not proper to do it, and you should do it in a certain manner.” When asked what she would do if she had the choice between staying back home as a housewife or working outside, she raises her voice to drive home her point: “If my husband would’ve been [sic] earning enough then I wouldn’t even have thought about working. But, he doesn’t, so it’s not feasible to stay at home.” The job’s compensation drives Jaya to work. Once at work, women like her find that discrimination and harassment make the outside world an alien, unsafe space where their labour and sexuality do not garner respect and security.

Hema (female, age 27), a security guard from Pune, intimates the extent of the discomfort women experience in these work environments on a daily basis:

This problem is common everywhere, no matter what company you go to. I cannot begin to tell you how hard it is every day, to work and at the same time to keep yourself safe from these people. And I have to face it every day. Because, if you don’t listen to them, you cannot come to work from the next day on, so we have to face these things, for our children.

Most of the time, the affected women either ignore abusive remarks or, if these comments go beyond their threshold of patience, they share their pent-up anger with a loved one or
someone they trust to keep the information private. These women cannot speak about these issues in a public forum for fear of their employer’s reprisal, not to mention the possibility of being identified as “too sensitive” by male colleagues and supervisors. These fears prevent female employees from seeking recourse in the form of a formal or informal complaint about their treatment in the workplace.

Labour unions could be a useful avenue in such situations, but since the unionization rate in my sample is less than 2% and these unions are mostly concentrated in just two cities – Calcutta and Bangalore – there is not enough opportunity for unions to look into this important issue of gender discrimination. Hema is one of the few female workers who would like to form a union to address various workplace issues; however, there are no unions in Pune’s IT delivery centres. In the software companies where these women work, there are sexual harassment policies which call for greater gender equality, but these policies apply to their employees only, not contract workers. As such, support-service workers cannot take part in the internal complaints committee (ICC).

The interviews included 37 women, 20% of whom raised the issue of insecurity and disrespectful behaviour in the workplace. The majority of the remainder either did not share if they faced workplace harassment or said that they had not experienced it at all. However, reports by the National Commission of Women (NCW) and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) suggest that there has been a noticeable rise in sexual harassment cases in the

39 The sample reflects the state of unionization across all professional groups in the IT industry as reported by various studies in the last few decades. In recent times, however, there have been some movements to create unions in workplaces, especially among entry- and mid-level software professionals whose jobs are in danger because of (1) protectionist policies of President Donald Trump against outsourcing and (2) displacement of programming jobs by advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and cloud computing – (1) http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/ites/sacked-it-employees-approaching-unions-for-support/articleshow/58780601.cms 2 Nidhi Bisht, “Trade Unions in Indian IT Industry? An Employees’ Perspective,” The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. 46, No. 2, October 2010; and (2) Amandeep Sandhu, “Why Unions Fail in Organising India’s BPO-ITES Industry?” Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 41, No. 41 (Oct. 14-20, 2006), pp. 4319-4322.
40 Ernst and Young’s 2015 report on Reining in sexual harassment at the workplace in India argues that, although it is stipulated by law that every company which employs over 10 or more full-time employees must have an ICC, only 40% of Indian software companies have a system in place to address issues about sexual harassment. http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-reining-in-sexual-harassment-at-the-workplace-fids-survey-2015/$FILE/ey-reining-in-sexual-harassment-at-the-workplace-fids-survey-2015.pdf.
workplace and “70% women don’t report workplace sexual harassment.” This is not an anomaly between the representativeness of the sample and the situation on the ground. It is plausible that some women did not face harassment or they may not be conscious of what constitutes non-physical harassment. Even if they are aware of harassment definitions and boundaries, they may not ready to discuss their experiences with an outsider. The objective situation is that any conversation about sexual harassment in the workplace in India is still taboo. If this is so for middle-class working women, it is even more so for poor female labourers. The fear of a manager’s punishment, uncertainty about consequences and anxiety around stigmatization by neighbors, family members and colleagues may deter these women from talking about the issues candidly.

Aside from the perils of sexuality-based discrimination, the IT industry boom has opened up new job opportunities for many poor Indian women whose life accomplishments had previously been measured only by their commitment to household chores. Young (married or unmarried) women arrive in the cities fresh out of their cocooned joint-family existence only to realize that many of their values and beliefs do not fit with urban living conditions. They grew up with the familiar notion that the home is a private, female space while the world outside is the man’s domain. In short, men will be breadwinners and women will be homemakers.

This arrangement often does not work in the new urban situation as the financial strains of maintaining a family often force women to work as security guards, caretakers or fast-food servers in the technology sector. The double burden of work for these women, which includes taking care of the family as well as earning money to cover family expenses, often challenges their received notion of womanhood – that is, subservience to their financial provider, the husband. This is reflected in their conversations on family life.

One of the research questions asked whether married male workers share in household chores. Almost all male partners stated that they do not participate in matters related to the shared domestic space. Few (less than 5%) said they take care of the children when their wife

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is busy cooking or washing clothes. The general response of the married women is that sharing the household work would be ideal in a situation where both the husband and the wife are working, but the traditional patriarchal culture does not sanction this practice. Cultural and religious notions understand the husband as guardian of the family, leaving it to a man’s discretion whether he would like to participate in household chores. Women, on the other hand, do not have any option since housework is clearly gendered. Latamani (female, age 46) is originally from Hyderabad and now works in housekeeping. When asked about her husband’s role at home, she told us that “I got married to my own brother-in-law who always backed me and [he] takes care of me. It would be good if he helps me in cooking or washing clothes, not everything you get in life.”

Women’s social role is primarily to be a homemaker and, if men share household work, then this is reflective of his goodness. This is the cultural norm that our respondents inherited from their parents and communities. The idea that the family sphere is a woman’s enclave while the public sphere belongs to men is one that the female interviewees learned very early in life, in much the same way as they become familiar with dolls. This idea of gendered training has been naturalized to the extent that few women have or are allowed to have a different opinion. There have been some murmurs of dissent, but it is limited to expressing hope that someday their husbands will take part in domestic work.

But hope may not be enough in the face of practical life situations. Most of the married women in the sample have children to care for in addition to household chores. After an eight- to 12-hour workday, fatigued and exhausted, they return home to their domestic duties. Several told us that this routine is unsustainable in the long run unless their husbands step up to assist them. The women’s longing to be a “good wife” is often challenged by the family’s financial contingencies, the obligatory condition for becoming the new proletariat of the IT industry. To be or not to be a submissive, compliant and domestic wife is never a choice; rather the possible course of action is to sublimate their traditional beliefs in accordance with the requirements of modern life and then wait for better days.

Sera, for example Sera, demands a fair share for her labour at work, but does not bother much about her unwaged services at home. In fact, she expressed that she does not expect her husband to come home from work and help her with the dishes because “In [her] family [she]
did not see this happening, it is not in our culture.” Pam (female, age 29), a security guard from Assam, also asserts, “Sometimes I feel very tired. I hope he understands this. The work pressure is increasing every day and then coming back from the duty and start cooking immediately is not something I like.”

Whether it is Sera, Pam or Latamani, this interplay between their ontology, consciousness and social reality produces a qualitatively different subjectivity (i.e., a “knowing subject,“), a personhood that neither totally rejects nor accepts the past identity, but interprets the past based on new social and economic conditions that force them to make necessary adjustments with the ethos of family life to enter the public space. To remain confined within the four walls of their homes is to bury their heads in the sand, risking losing their lives to oblivion. To be part of the new social structure defined by flexible labour, communication technology and mobile capital presents the agonizing experience of feeling torn between past and present.

But the new social dynamic has its charms, too. Paid work provides money for sustenance and expenses such as high tuition fees for children studying in private schools, which would otherwise not be possible. The public space also offers workers the freedom to purchase a plethora of commodities, including cosmetics, fancy clothing or feature-filled mobile phones. Previously, these poor women’s basic needs were food, water and shelter; now, they can afford to buy beyond what they need and into what they want. This desire may manifest as the luxury of having a mobile phone, television and an occasional fast-food meal.

For example, some women who had been using homemade sanitary napkins now buy safe and hygienic ones from the pharmacy for themselves and their daughters, even if it stretches their meagre income. As Savitri (female, age 42) shares, “…We used to use cloths back in our time. But now we use sanitary pads. We are aware of the fact that cleanliness affects our health.” Having income, however little, does afford some possibility for advancement.

The decision to leave behind the past is a result of the Indian state’s communication initiatives about bettering women’s health and advertisements from pharmaceutical companies focusing on how sanitary napkins help to ease hygiene and mobility problems during menstruation, especially for working women. This transition is also a result of
conversations in public spaces with female colleagues and friends as well as health workers and doctors at Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) hospitals. Regular work, even precarious work, enables some financial freedom to exercise individual choice. These choices can be empowering to working women.

The meaning of wellbeing, as taught by their parents and school teachers, has become a contentious, unsettled issue. There is excitement to emerge from private family life and beyond the axis of primary relationships that was previously mapped out by the intersections and coordinates of family, spouse and the local village community. With such freedom and anticipation, there are also anxieties, dissatisfaction and anguish. Savitri is happy that her alcoholic husband left her, relieving her of the duty to feed him every day, but she is lonely in the city as close relatives cut off their relationship with her. City life has thus been hard on her as

It’s been eight years since my husband abandoned us. Since then, I have taken the responsibility of my family and have been taking care of my children … I have worked my way through all these years. I have worked for daily wages in farms, in building constructions, carrying bricks and soil, etc. As we grow old, we will have difficulties in doing such jobs as our body wears and tears and does not support such jobs. During that period, I got to know about jobs in housekeeping from someone and shifted to this.

Here, I introduce two unmarried interviewees. Aparna Dey (female, age 26) is single, but in a relationship. Abha (female, age 24) who, at the time of my first interview was going through a troubled marriage, had filed for separation when we returned for the second in-depth interview and now lives with her daughter. Her parents still reside in the ancestral village. The two women live 2,000 kilometres apart – one in Calcutta and the other in New Delhi. Both work as security guards at IT campuses. Aparna works as an outsourced employee in a

42 ESI is a social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers. The employee provides 1.75% and the employer 4.75% of the wage in every wage period: “The Employees’ State Insurance Act, 1948 provides a scheme under which the employer and the employee must contribute a certain percentage of the monthly wage to the Insurance Corporation that runs dispensaries and hospitals in working class localities.”

http://www.mondaq.com/india/x/50440/employee+rights+labour+relations/Labour+And+Employment+Laws+Of+India
software development centre and Abha works at a Domino’s Pizza restaurant in Nehru Place, New Delhi’s hardware retail hub. Both are from lower-middle-class families whose fathers were the only breadwinners and whose mothers raised the children. Both had to find jobs after finishing high school. With few marketable skills, they ended up as security guards, working 10 to 12 hours per day, six days per week, earning around CAD 175 per month with few workplace benefits. Both take pride in their self-sufficient natures, fending for themselves and helping their families.

A few months before the second round of interviews, Abha separated from her abusive husband and now has to look after her daughter and her extended family with insufficient income. Her parents did not support her as she had married the man against their wishes in the first place. Abha does not want to be a stay-at-home housewife like her mother, but her status as a divorced woman forced her to realize that she is the only one responsible for her daughter. This is her only choice as her family denies any responsibility.

Interviewer: What do you want your daughter to be?
Abha: I would like her to study much more than I did. I could not do much in life. I hope she gets a good degree and then a good job. And after that she can marry whenever she wishes to. There will be no hurry to marry her off. Nowadays, nobody marries too early. Many women stay single until they are thirty. I believe I married too soon. I should not have gotten married at such a young age. I really wanted to study further. I still do. I couldn’t, only because I didn’t have the money to continue my education. I was in the commerce stream in school. I would have needed private tutoring in the evenings to be able to study in college. My parents said they wouldn’t be able to help with the money and that if I wanted to study further I’d have to get a job. That would mean that I would come back from work at around eight. It would be too late to go to tutoring sessions. Had I been a boy, maybe I could have studied more. They can be outside on the streets as long as they like. Even if they return home at one a.m. in the morning, nobody will harass them. But a woman has always got to worry about stuff like this. We feel scared after eight-nine p.m. and think it is best to return home quickly.
Faced with various social stigma related to women who are divorced, Abha is not comfortable raising her daughter with the traditional values that her parents passed on to her. Her intention is for her daughter to do what she herself could not – be free to choose the way to live. Whether it is education, job or marriage, the decision will be her daughter’s. As a mother, Abha has little to say about these choices, beyond preparing her for a better future by providing emotional and financial assistance.

Abha is convinced that, if her daughter does not want to suffer like she did, she must go to university and then find a good job. This is one part of Abha: a modern woman demanding respect from society; however, there is another side to her. Later in the interview, we asked about her dreams. Without second thought, Abha answers, “I dream that I should not have to work and (can) stay with my daughter at home. I want to take care of her and spend my time with her. I want to be a good mother.”

For less-educated Indian women, the idea of a “good mother” is a symbolic representation of a woman who takes care of her family and rears her children without aspiring to work. Unfortunately, Abha cannot do this as she is committed to raising her daughter and readying her for a “good job” in the market. This means that she must earn and invest in her daughter’s education. Given her skill set, this is only possible if she works as she does now – in a job that does not require higher education and training. Her narrative suggests that she would like to be a stay-at-home mother, but the reality of her situation does not permit this as economic necessity forced her to join the workforce. Whereas her mother submitted to the tradition of motherhood, there is one important difference – her mother’s status as a housewife was already decided by her family, husband and community. There was no option, even if it meant living in squalor. For Abha, the notion of motherhood was a preference, an ideological affiliation; however, it is not enough. Modern institutions and the economic structure have thrust upon her the desire to see her daughter achieve what she could not. Even if she wants to be a “better mother” by staying at home, she cannot as there is a conflict between her modern aspirations and traditional beliefs. Sometimes, this role conflict can be bridged and sometimes it cannot as the tension and restlessness of the present keep the contradiction alive.
When we met Aparna, we realized that she is very aware of her life amid the whirlpool of social changes. She talked about the uncertainty she faces in her job and the changing relationships with her family members. I met her at a tea stall in Calcutta’s software enclave on the eastern fringe of the city. She was taking a break during her usual 12-hour shift to talk to her union representative about some work issues. She was wearing pants, common with female security guards in the Indian corporate sector; however, Indian women prefer to wear the saree or the salwar kameez when going out for work. A decade ago, there were almost no female guards, but this began to change with the opening up of security jobs for women in the service sectors, such as retail and IT. I asked whether she feels comfortable in the uniform. In traditional non-urban circles, women wearing shirts and pants are considered ultra-modern and westernized. It was not easy for any Indian woman to ignore these markers.

Aparna: Well, Sir, I don’t like this job but I have to do it. I’m searching for a better job.

Interviewer: Why don’t you like this job?

Aparna: Well, my job isn’t bad per se…but I never wanted to work in a job where I have to wear a uniform… [By uniform she meant the shirt and pants she has to wear during her duty hours.]

Interviewer: So, what did you want?

Aparna: I wanted a nice job…my previous job in the cosmetics industry…I had to dress well…the whole situation was much more likable. Initially I found it difficult to adjust to my current job but now I’m used to it.

Aparna: I had to dress well.

Here “dress well” does not mean dressed in expensive and fashionable clothes. For Aparna, it signifies a sartorial style that would not violate her society’s perception of a modest woman. She wants to leave her current profession and find another where she has the option to abide by the dress code approved by her family and society:

Interviewer: What kind of job are you looking for?

Aparna: Well, my current job isn’t bad but I’m searching for a better one, one where the location is more favourable…

Interviewer: So you’ve been searching for jobs as a security guard?

Aparna: No, I’ve applied for a job as a receptionist…I has [sic] to wear a dress here…
Interviewer: The uniform?
Aparna: Yes, the uniform, I won’t have to wear a uniform in that job.
Interviewer: So…as a receptionist?
Aparna: Yes…I’ve also applied for work in cosmetics…
Interviewer: As a salesgirl?
Aparna: Yes.

Three months later, I returned to Calcutta to conduct an in-depth interview with her. She had left her previous job and joined another security company, which serves a few multinational IT companies. She became neither a receptionist nor a sales girl in cosmetics after all. I asked her why she had decided to leave her previous position and Aparna replied:

Aparna: I left, not because of any specific reason. They came to interview me here. They had called me from the NIS [her company] office and said that I should visit because they have a good job offer. Much better than what I would have earned being a receptionist or a sales girl. After all I don’t have English fluency.
Aparna: So, Sir [her current manager] had called me up from there [her new office] and said that a good job offer is available. If I was willing, I should pay a visit. I said I would consider. After all, I went for the interview near City Centre [a commercial place in the software technology park]. Sir didn’t ask me too many questions. He only asked if I could travel to and fro easily.

It is a “good job offer” that made her continue as a security guard in the technology sector; however, in a culture where leaving home to work in the outside world with men as colleagues is still considered a “fall” from the accepted notion of women’s modesty and dignity. As such, a good job as a security guard is also the beginning of an everyday struggle against a socially imposed meaning of decency.

Interviewer: Is your family satisfied that you are working here? What is their reaction?
Aparna: No. There’s no one in my family to object as such. And those who are there, like my brother and sisters, have no objection to my working as long as I keep myself safe. That’s their only objection. They have faith in me and know that I won’t do
anything untoward. That’s why I deliberately went and took a good look at the location first, today.

Interviewer: What do you mean by “keep myself safe?” Can you please explain?

Aparna: By keeping myself safe, I don’t mean being introverted or isolated from others. That is not what I mean. At work, one has to work and laugh with the others, even if sometimes, the person doesn’t want to. You have to adjust at your workplace. But by keeping myself safe, I mean it’s all right to chat and laugh. If somebody asks to have tea together, on some days, it’s all right to agree.

Interviewer: Does that mean keeping your family’s reputation intact? So that it is not lost?

Aparna: Yes, that is a must. Nobody should be able to say or think, at home or outside, that this girl is bad. It maybe that I…how do I put it? I like interacting—talking, staying in the company of other people. I’m like that. So, even here, honestly speaking, I’ve been in this profession for four years, and in the job I not only love my fellow staff members, but also the brothers in the housekeeping staff.

Interviewer: Like how?

Aparna: In any matter—special occasions, enjoying. I like taking part in these activities a lot. Maybe, it’s not appropriate to be overindulged in these because there’s a saying if you allow something to get in over your head, bad things might happen.

Every day when Aparna returns from work, she has to convince her family, relatives and neighbours—perhaps none more important than herself—that she has kept herself “safe” from the allures of big-city life. And it does not stop there: she also has to convince her employer that she is a disciplined and obedient worker who is always ready to rise to the demands of her workplace: “At work, one has to work and laugh with the others, even if sometimes, the person doesn’t want to.” Like a slackwire artist tenuously walking a rope, Aparna tries to balance the traditional values and beliefs she inherited from her family and community with the demands of the urban industrial world to be more flexible in accommodating new ideas and ways of living. As in the lives of other female workers, Aparna’s everyday existence is divided between the home and the outside world. There is a palpable conflict between the two centres of her life and the tension cannot be resolved by simply discarding one in favour of the other.
The job in the IT sector enables her family to have more than a hand-to-mouth existence and it also sows the seeds of a new subjective feeling which was unknown to her mother or grandmother: the status of financial independence. The money allows her to realize that she can have her own choices and desires without seeking confirmation from her elders. The money can also help her make some crucial decisions, such as whether to marry or live with her boyfriend, as she does not have to depend on her spouse’s income. Aparna calls this a “good life,” which her mother never experienced. She does not want to be like her mother – taking care of her children while her husband looked after the family’s financial needs – because Aparna does not accept this division of labour within families. When asked how important financial independence is to her, she responded: “I have a habit of treating people. I feel like giving something to someone. Every month after getting my monthly salary, I’d treat people to whatever they wanted to eat. I am like that. Losing this would be a big deal.”

We asked why Aparna thought financial independence was so more necessary for women in the modern world when our mothers’ generations never needed it. She replied,

Aparna: No, it wasn’t. Slowly, everything is changing.

Interviewer: What kind of a change is this?

Aparna: From all spheres. In case of salary, people nowadays earn much more than my father used to. As the times are changing, everything’s changing. I’ve heard that earlier, our mothers didn’t wear anything but saris. Nowadays, we’re wearing everything – jeans, tops, churidars\(^\text{43}\), everything. But in some simple middle-class families, other family members may say that you shouldn’t wear anything that looks bad. You can wear jeans, but act accordingly. There are many families like that even today. I’m not saying all are like that. So, in that sense, there’s been a drastic change. I feel that in the next two years, things will change even more. I don’t know what people after us will do.

Interviewer: They may not want to marry.

Aparna: Yes, they might say there’s no need, at last they’ll say, they’ll live in together.

\(^{43}\)Churidars, or more properly churidar pyjamas, are tightly fitting trousers worn by both men and women in the Indian subcontinent. The churidar is usually worn with a kameez (tunic) by women or a kurta (a loose overshirt) by men, or they can form part of a bodice and skirt ensemble (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Churidar).
Interviewer: That’s happening now itself.  
Aparna: It’s happening now; it’ll happen even more in the future. They might say that they’ll live together, there’s no need to marry, because everybody wants to live independently now.  
Interviewer: Independent, meaning?  
Aparna: Independent meaning, there’ll be nobody to scold and interfere in anything, like where we’re going. Like, parents ask where we’re going that late at night, or not to wear something, or not to eat something – this tendency is gradually decreasing.  
Interviewer: But you’re saying that there should be a limit [earlier in the interview] to everything.  
Aparna: A hundred times yes. I don’t know about other families but it’s still there in my family and I’m following that.  

On the issue of financial freedom, the “limit” does not work for Aparna. What happens if there is a “limit” on how Aparna spends her money, placed especially by her future in-laws? She says that it is her money and nobody, even her in-laws, is permitted to ask questions about the way she chooses to spend what she has earned:  

Suppose I work after I get married. I’ll keep a part of the income for myself, a part for my family and then comes the issue of giving to the in-laws. Some in-laws will hold a grudge and say that I give money to my parents. But, why should they complain? It is my money and I have every right to share it with my parents if there is a need. Does that mean I can’t contribute after I’m married? I can’t accept that.  

Aparna is interrogating one of the core patriarchal values of the Indian joint-family system: once a woman is married, she must abide by the family norm that married women do not have any independent existence except as a member of her family by marriage.  
Interviewer: If men can give it, why can’t women?  
Aparna: Yes. Men like my boyfriend will give part of their income to their parents if required, so why can’t we, as women, give money? After all, they’re also my family just like my husband’s family…So, if the mother-in-law thinks that even after working the girl can’t give her income to her family, she is wrong. She shouldn’t think that way.
As a working woman, Aparna wants to control how to spend her hard-earned money. Social customs say that a married woman belongs only to her husband’s family and, thus, she has no say over her own labour and income, but she does not subscribe to this belief system. The financial independence gained from waged employment has provided women like Aparna with a degree of autonomy and freedom that is otherwise absent in her family, where women are not allowed to work outside the home. But the subjectivity of individual choice and desire has its limited applications only in matters of money and work culture.

In some other areas of life, Aparna accepts what her parents taught her, especially in terms of her relationships with other communities, such as Muslims. The cosmopolitan workplace where people from different castes and religions work together creates a sense of collegiality, but this seldom overcomes the traditional barriers of identity and community. When asked how she views her colleagues from other religions, Aparna says,

> The place where I used to work, there were Christians and Muslims. You won’t believe it; one Muslim boy at the call centre once brought “semui” [sweet vermicelli] for me. He offered me his food to me with love and affection and would I throw it away just because he’s a Muslim? I don’t accept that. I eat from everyone’s hand.

Nevertheless, when it comes to developing a personal relationship with a Muslim, Aparna would never entertain the idea: “No, because my mother used to speak to me frankly and she told me that it was all right to be friends with Muslims but not to fall in love with a Muslim. Punjabis and others are all right but Muslims, I don’t know why…” Although Aparna has worked with Muslim colleagues, she is not open to the idea of having a Muslim boyfriend. It is not that she is against modern values based on respect and individual choices but, as she says, “not everything in our tradition we should reject.” This complex blend of tradition and modernity and the resulting seemingly incompatible feelings present in Aparna’s story were also observed among the majority of other female workers we interviewed.

### 4.2 Class and Caste Conflicts

One of the talking points in interviews focused on individual mobility and workers’ perception about how it works. To understand this, we asked their opinions on why software professionals lead a better life than they do. Is it because of education or a prosperous family
background or some combination of the two? More than three-fourths of interviewees said that it is all about education and intelligence and fewer than 25% mentioned that class, caste, or status have a role in deciding the software employees’ economic fate. Can intelligence and hard work achieve all the magic of earning over CAD 100,000 without the help of expensive educational professional training and influential family networks? With a bit of prodding, our respondents shared all kinds of plausible explanations, centred on their real social situations such as their relative lack of opportunity compared with IT executives.

For workers like Pargat Singh (male, age 48), the future is bleak. His only hope lies with his children. Pargat is a security guard staffing the automated teller machine for technology workers in one of the plush software parks in Gurgaon. Life is hard for him and, with a family to feed on his meagre income, Pargat lives from one day to the next:

Interviewer: What do you want from the future? Do you have any dreams which you want fulfilled?
Pargat: It’s all just false hope, I’m too old to be harbouring dreams.
Interviewer: No aspirations…It’s all futile…but you have children!
Pargat: Well, what they’ll do or achieve is up to them.
Interviewer: Do you feel that they can make your life better?
Pargat: Well, my life is ok at the moment.
Interviewer: You’re getting your children educated; do you feel they’ll be able to do something with it?
Pargat: Yes, absolutely.
Interviewer: Will they improve your condition? Do you think their achievements and actions will help improve your status in society?
Pargat: See, every person yearns for a better life. I haven’t seen the future, so I don’t know what the children will do but we are trying to do the needful and providing for their education.
Interviewer: So you feel that there is a possibility that they’ll be successful in life?
Pargat: Yes, the possibility is always there.
Interviewer: Do you think you’ll be able to improve your situation on your own?
Pargat: I don’t think so…
Pargat has no illusion about what he can do with the rest of his life, but he still has some hope for his children – perhaps they would live up to the American dream of rags-to-riches stories. He does not have any fanciful imagination of becoming part of New Delhi’s prosperous middle class himself. How could he? He earns around CAD150 per month, which enables him to sustain his wife and two children in a windowless shack on the margins of the city. How did Pargat find himself in this situation?

Interviewer: What do you feel is the reason that these people were able to get ahead in life? Why were they able to get good jobs like that? Is it because they had money? Is it because of their training?

Pargat: The main reason is that the schools in villages aren’t able to impart quality education. The teachers there are incompetent. The children who go to English medium schools from the beginning are able to get a proper education.

Pargat clearly knows his status has something to do with the education system. His schooling did not provide the skills required to compete with software professionals, especially learning English, which is the passport to prosperity in his country. Most jobs in the IT sector demand a fair degree of English competence and, when asked if his lack of fluency in English put him at a disadvantage, Pargat affirmed that this was true. Here, he does not delve into the subject of the relationship between money, education and English; rather, we had to ask why he could not learn English. Is it only a result of teacher incompetence in the public education system? Maybe, but this is not the whole story:

Interviewer: But going to an English medium school is an expensive affair. So, if somebody doesn’t have the money, they can’t go to schools like that.

Pargat: The state of education in government schools is abysmal. The teachers there are incompetent. The bitter truth is that if you don’t have enough money, your children won’t be able to get ahead in life.

Pargat is validating the fact that many people working in new technology as programmers and managers have a private-school background, which was made possible because of their prosperous parents or family members who helped them.
Interviewer: So, it boils down to the money?
Pargat: Yes, employers value education, how will the children get ahead in life without quality education?
Interviewer: A good education is important…
Pargat: These jobs require brains, if you’re not properly educated, you won’t be able to do them. It takes brains to operate and work on computers.
Interviewer: So, it’s all mental work.
Pargat: If you want to start a business, you need money and brains for that too. You have to be smart to run a business successfully. If you have money, getting an education becomes easy.

Besides the issue of upward mobility, one important part of our conversations is whether interviewees belong to and are members of a union. If not, are they interested in creating a union? Except in the cities of Calcutta and Bangalore, unions are non-existent. In Calcutta, almost all workers belong to two unions: one affiliated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the other affiliated with the All India Trinamool Congress, the province’s ruling party. In Bangalore, less than 20% of the sample is under the union umbrella. Only a minority (25%) of non-unionized workers believe that a collective workers’ body, such as a union, can play an important role in securing better working conditions. This does not preclude the rest (75%), which are anti-union, though some support right-wing communal parties. Companies deploy various types of coercive and consensual mechanisms against unionization efforts. There are also structural issues, such as the contractual and outsourcing nature of support-service jobs, which seldom provides opportunities to form a union for the people. Workers are expendable at any time, so creating an organization with long-term membership is a formidable challenge. Although many workers are aware that a union would help them to address some of their workplace issues, organizational challenges are quite difficult. Major roadblocks include employers’ repressive policies, including termination of employment or threat of physical violence, scattered and dispersed workplaces as well as bureaucratic political leadership in existing unions.

Michael Lobo (male, age 45) is a chef at a fine-dining restaurant in a technology park in Gurgaon, bordering New Delhi. When asked how and why others had managed to advance
ahead of him as software professionals, Michael stated, “I attribute it to their studies. They have superior education. They had backup, they were able to do so well because of the support they had.” Michael works in a restaurant serving software executives and their families. He acknowledges that a union would improve his current situation of low wages, long hours and minimal or no benefits, but that unionizing is difficult:

Interviewer: Have you ever considered forming a union? Are you a part of any union?
Michael: No, basically, we don’t have a union.
Interviewer: Did you ever consider forming a union?
Michael: No, never.
Interviewer: Why?
Michael: Wherever I was working, the companies were privately owned. We didn’t have any unions because we didn’t work for the company itself. We were contracted employees. Contracted employees don’t have unions.
Interviewer: Did you feel the need to form a union?
Michael: Yes, most probably. We work hard yet we don’t get any benefits. Sometimes, actually not sometimes, even now, we think that we should have a union around.
Interviewer: The union will help you to get the benefits?
Michael: Yes.
Interviewer: Did anybody try to form a union?
Michael: No.
Interviewer: Forming a union is very difficult.
Michael: Yes, it’s difficult to form a union because just eight or 10 people aren’t enough. You require a big pool of workers to form a union.
Interviewer: What does your future look like, in terms of mobility?
Michael: My future, I don’t know…
Interviewer: I mean, how do you see…
Michael: It’s going down. It keeps becoming worse, no real future. Well, in the coming years, I don’t think we’ll be able to survive properly, well, we will be able to, if we get jobs, but I don’t think we will be able to lead the same lifestyle that we lead right now. Our salary won’t increase at the same rate at which the prices of products and groceries will increase. The things we use in our daily lives are becoming more
and more expensive but the salary is almost stagnant. At the most, our yearly increment will be Rs 200 [CAD 4] or Rs 300 [CAD 6], but not more than that. Uncertainty about the future and his irremediable working conditions as a continental food chef did not deter Michael from expressing his desire to be a part of a union, which could have improved his life. There is also an element of pessimism that does not sync with the idea of unionization. Union membership comes with an expectation of a collective struggle to improve life conditions. Michael does not believe that he has any “real future,” but he still looks forward to membership in a union. Maybe the idea of a union provides a glimmer of hope for achieving something positive in his life. When he talks about his past and the litany of issues he faces at his job, he does not miss pointing out that “Maybe if we have a union…”

Interviewer: Did you try finding work at any big hotels?
Michael: Yes, I did try at two or three big hotels, but I didn’t get it because of my education. The hotels want people who have studied Hotel Management. That isn’t viable for me even now, and much less back then, when my mother was the sole earner in the family. She wasn’t able to help us with our studies and now she is aged. Plus, the fees for the course in Hotel Management are too high for us. I cannot pursue it.

Interviewer: How do you see the future? There is no hope for the future?
Michael: No. I can’t say that I have a good future. Maybe our salary will be a bit better, but it won’t be enough for the future. Maybe if we have a union, we will have a better life.

Interviewer: Many of the people say that if you can succeed if you work hard……..
Michael: We are working hard, we work for 10 hours a day. I’ve been working for these companies for the last 12 to 13 years, but still our salary isn’t adequate. The working hours are very long. The working hours are long, we work hard, during the weekends we reach our homes around one or two at night, then we have to get up and go back to work in the morning. No rest. We don’t get proper rest.

Most of the time, non-unionized workers have no recourse to file grievances about poor labour conditions. Compared with many developing nations, Indian labour laws have some well-directed rules and regulations which could directly benefit these workers, especially in
the areas of minimum-wage regulation, contract condition, benefit and pension, etc. Nevertheless, implementing such policies is difficult as the inspectors are hands in glove with the employers. Sometimes it depends on the manager’s relationship with the worker to solve peripheral work-related issues, such as scheduling or sick leave. Workers lack the bargaining power to address more structural issues, like the violation of labour statutes. In situations like these, some workers have had to invent innovative practices. One example is provided by Sunil Shinde (male, age 27), who works in a Subway franchise in Pune’s technology park. As an employee, he is fairly satisfied with the way Subway treats him, but sometimes friction with employees leads to collective action, albeit a non-conventional collective action:

Interviewer: Are you part of any union? How do you fight for your problems and rights?
Sunil: There is no union of Subway workers anywhere. But we fight collectively to solve our problems and for our rights. We have unity among staff. If somebody has problem with salary, uniform etc. then we communicate with area manager. He tries to solve it. If he doesn’t, then we discuss it with owner. We go together to owner with our problem. We all tell him if you don’t solve this we all will resign. Then he has to listen to us and solve the problem. There is not written rules and laws to follow. But we know generally. And we fight for this collectively. It mostly depends on franchise and owners. Most of the time owners resolve the issues.

Interviewer: Were there situations of strikes?
Sunil: I haven’t faced situation like strikes in my two years in Subway. Our problems have been sorted by owners time to time.

We pushed further, asking “If the situation is not resolved according to employees’ demands, then what do they do?” Sunil did not answer our question, preferring to stay silent. Particularly on the issue of unions, we found that, beyond a few initial questions, non-unionized workers generally did not want to enter into any discussion about confronting their

employers with their daily working conditions. The fear of punitive measures, which are very real, may be hindering this dialogue or perhaps some workers in their first jobs in the organized sector have yet to come to terms with the idea of forming a union.

Among the few exceptions is Laxmi (female, age 28), a housekeeper at Google’s software development centre in Hyderabad. She is pro-union, although she could not find any opportunity to join one. In Hyderabad’s HITEC City, there were a few attempts to rally for signing union cards, but without much success. The workers do not want to be rude to their employers as they are at least “providing food in our mouth,” Laxmi says. One can view this worker-employer relation as a variant of the client-patron relationship, which is not unusual, but rather a carryover from the feudal past. Many workers in Hyderabad have roots in the village economy where, for a mid-day meal and a paltry daily wage, they would work for the rich landed gentry they venerate as “mai-baap” (mother-father).46 Laxmi ended the interview by saying that, although she understands the need for a union, her employer never crossed the line of decency,

Laxmi: I never thought of being part of a union because my employment is not permanent and housekeeping staff does not have a union. But they help each other. A few years ago when my husband met with an accident the housekeeping unit supported me economically and emotionally, for which I would always be thankful to them. I can never forget those disastrous moments in my life. It is important to have a union because it’s always good to look to someone when you are in need and you can rely on them.

Interviewer: Do you think it’s possible to fight against employer’s injustice and form a collective body?

Laxmi: It is possible to fight against employer’s injustice. The housekeeping staff knows every other worker in the company and if something requires us to form a collective body, we can. But the employers get along with us; they never treated us badly.

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46 For poor Indian villagers, the rural rich are the “mai-baap” (mother-father). The expression signifies the paternal relationship between the poor and the rich. The poor owe their life to the gentry as providers of food and shelter.
After a pause, she adds, “Except that everything is measured in money.” Laxmi favours a union not because she thinks that it is one of the workers’ inalienable rights to safeguard its interests (or perhaps she does, but this is not clear from the interview), but because unions are collective, social bodies within which fellow workers help each other in difficult times. For her, the care and emotional attachment absent in a society where “everything is measured in money” becomes a rallying point to form a union. Fellowship, as experienced in the traditional system, returns in a different form with different content within the modern urban centre’s institutional setup.

4.3 The Experience of Technology

One of the most profound experiences the workers have while negotiating the complexity of urban spaces is that, in digital technology, nothing is alien: everything is knowable if they are connected to the network. In the old world, the use of technology was mostly limited to the use of a bicycle or the radio. These simple technologies, whose operation is limited within a certain geographical space, did not make much difference to their comprehension of space and time. The mobile phone, personal computer and television have transformed cognition from a predetermined cultural and economic space to a global environment, made closer via digital technology. For Sachin Nath (male, age 25), a security guard in Bangalore, the joy of the Internet is in cross-cultural interactions “load[ing] songs and listen[ing] to them” as well as playing mobile games and chatting with Facebook friends to pass the time. The Internet has enabled him to access many services he had not even realized were available, such as the many varieties of music. Then, with a naughty laugh, he admits that the Internet has also changed his perception of women: “Well, women are evolving with the passage of time,” he says.

The Internet has introduced these positive elements into Sachin’s life through his mobile phone, but it can have quite dire effects as well. Aparna expresses her concern that the Internet is changing people, forgetting “the teaching of our parents and grandparents,” as consumers

…and are leading a different kind of lifestyle. They are not being able to understand what the consequences of these things might be. They aren’t thinking of the consequences. I’m not saying that their parents are teaching them these things, never. The parents
aren’t being able to know what they’re up to. For example, my sister’s daughter was fidgeting with her phone at 1:30am, on Facebook or something. I was asleep beside her so I gave her a good scolding and asked her what she was doing. She wanted my phone as well but then I scolded her. I told her that she had been told not to do these things so then, why was she still up with her phone. If we don’t scold her today, then she won’t be able to understand. The situation will only get worse, not better.

Aparna herself uses a mobile phone; therefore, she is not opposed to the usage of mobile phones. In fact, owning one is a necessity given the nature of her work:

Aparna: On my mobile phone, I just send and receive calls and messages. My phone activity is limited to that, honestly, because if I’m active on sites like Facebook all day, I won’t be able to procure my food. Washing the clothes and everything is done by me. So, if I stay active on Facebook all day like other boys and girls, it won’t work for me. A phone has both good and bad uses. With the help of a phone, no matter where we are or how far we are, we can call others in times of trouble.

Interviewer: So, you bought a phone only to fulfill the basic needs.

Aparna: Yes. It’s exactly that. Honestly speaking, my sister and my friends, we have a different level, a different way of thinking. But we are just as smart- we talk to five other people, we go to restaurants to eat, have we become bad because of that? No. Nowadays I am seeing, as the days are progressing, people are becoming undisciplined.

Interviewer: Undisciplined or independent?

Aparna: Independence is all right but this much isn’t right. If their guardians don’t control them now, they’ll become dangerous in days to come. Anyways, they are becoming like that.

Aparna is not averse to using technology insofar as it satisfies her basic requirements for living, but she is not comfortable using technology to foster a lifestyle which promotes recklessness and indulgence. We encountered this anxiety about technology’s effects across the gender and age spectrum. As Pranab Banerjee (male, age 45) tells us,

“The Internet has sped up everything. Any information that you need is now at the tip of your fingers. But on the other hand, some people use it for wrong purposes… some young children use it to watch blue [pornographic] films.”

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Another major issue is adoption of these new technologies, which is not equal because access is not equal. The following examples demonstrate that there are two barriers to new technology adoption: money and education. All interviewees except one have mobile phones which, for them, is the most important medium for text and voice communication with the outside world, especially parents and friends. However, only ten can afford Internet-enabled smartphones and only five of these buy Internet cards regularly.

With the arrival of Chinese-made smartphones in the market, the average price of a Windows/Android-based high-end phone has dropped to less than USD100, but even this is out of reach for most respondents. Besides mobile phones, radios and televisions, bikes and refrigerators are the other technological appliances that are most commonly owned by support-service workers. While all have radio at some point in their lives, around 90% watch television. In terms of news communication, television has replaced the newspaper, but around 15% of the literate workers still read a newspaper at work. Less than 30% use refrigerators.

In terms of owning computers, only one respondent has a computer at home, though some of the workers employed as security guards can type using the word processor as one of their duties is to key in visitor information. For some, the lack of college education impedes computer literacy, although affordability is a much more significant barrier. For these workers, the value of these devices relates more to managing their everyday lives than treating them as mere artifacts. For example, a mobile phone with voice and text capability is a basic requirement to connect with parents and friends or for official duties, such as scheduling office staff pick-up and drop-off times. Perhaps when these workers first bought their phone or watched television in a neighbour’s house, they were curious about the strange objects but, over time, these devices have become integral parts of their lives. As Majid

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47 “India has made progress towards its goal of bringing millions of people out of extreme poverty. However, despite these efforts, some 680 million Indians, or 56 percent of the population, still lack the basics of a minimum acceptable standard of living.” (“MGI India Consumer Executive Summary” in India’s tech opportunity: Transforming work, empowering people, McKinsey Global Institute, December 2014) - https://www.mckinsey.co
(male, age 35) shares, “We would not be able to survive without it.” He is a cab driver for Amazon in Hyderabad and his duty schedule is updated through his phone. Bibhas Das (male, age 26), a security guard in a Calcutta technology park, attempted to explain the role of technology at different historical junctures: “In the past the radio was providing weather information, very important for farmers, but now it is the television and for some it is the mobile phone.” Though mobile devices have become cheaper, it is still expensive to own one, especially if it is set up to browse the Internet. When asked if his mobile phone has Internet connectivity, Sujon Paramanik (male, age 32), a security guard in Calcutta says,

Yes it does have an Internet connectivity but I don’t really use it because, firstly, I don’t have any interest in it and secondly, because I don’t see any point in spending money on it. It doesn’t mean that I think that it isn’t useful but rather it’s something I can’t afford. I don’t even smoke. Making do with what I earn is very tough. I try to lead an austere life because my target is to raise my children well.

Television is also a major source of entertainment. Hemant Hazarika (male, age 29), a security guard from Bangalore, purchased a television set in the second month at his job:

Interviewer: Do you have a mobile phone?
Hemant: Yes.
Interviewer: Does it have Internet connectivity?
Hemant: No, I’m not really interested in the Internet and also I can’t afford it.
Interviewer: Not interested! But you can easily watch cricket if you have Internet.
Hemant: Well, there is a TV in the food court and while I’m in my room I watch the TV.

In the post-globalization period, market reforms in the telecommunications industry have led to a substantial drop in the cost of mobile phone ownership. India has some of the cheapest call rates with more than 1.16 billion mobile subscribers.48 Among the G20 nations, India leads in basic mobile internet usage.49 Clearly, the value of using a mobile phone has led to

49 https://qz.com/945127/internet-use-in-india-proves-desktops-are-only-for-westerners/
large-scale usage. As Dharmendra Prakash (male, age 26), a New Delhi security guard, shares,

Mobile phones are useful. We can be at one place and find out about everybody. Everybody in the village has a mobile phone. I use it to talk to people and for entertainment (songs and films). We have two at home, a Chinese one and a Nokia one. I leave one at home so that my family can contact me in case of emergencies.

Our final interview session in Bangalore was with Digamber Kumar Shukla (male, age 23), a security guard who came to the city to improve his English by studying at a local college. The money he makes from the job allows him to continue his studies and stay in Bangalore. Digamber carries a phone without an Internet connection. It is not that he cannot afford to buy Internet cards, but he prefers not to because he thinks, “Well, I’m not very good in English, so I won’t be able to use it properly. Plus I’ll end up wasting time and money on it. It’ll be an unnecessary expense.”

During interviews, I did not ask any direct questions about whether technology is a necessary evil or curse. Even if there had been such a question, it might have created confusion. On one hand, technology has disrupted people’s comprehension and sense of reality about time and space. This leads to trepidation about losing their connections with the past; however, they simply cannot avoid technology and also see its benefits. Mobile phones and television have become part of their social world, taking part in shaping their activities. These tools connect them with new music, trendy fashion and new people. Technology helps them discover the city and the world. As Majid, the driver Hyderabad says,

Yes I use mobile phone. I think this has become very essential in our life. Without them I will not survive. Technology is like water in modern life. Whenever you feel thirsty you drink water likewise whenever you face problems, we use technology to solve it.”

There is both an expectation and fear about technology, but ambivalence toward modern devices does not deter workers from using them. As Pam argues, “If technology improves my life condition, I will learn to use it.”
4.4 Conclusion

“What is rational becomes real, and what becomes real is rational” (Brecht 2003, 108)

The flourishing IT industry in the metropolis offers workers an escape from a life defined by poverty and drudgery. This is a drastic change from their part-time or seasonal employment on a farm or in a local factory where, besides long hours and unsafe working conditions (especially for women), workers depend on the employer’s mercy to receive even the legally mandated minimum wage. Based on their past economic situations, it is rational to opt for employment as an outsourced worker in the IT industry. The Indian IT industry boom is a direct result of economic globalization: the Indian market has become integrated with the rest of the world; the country has become a favourable destination for offshore technology services; and changes in labour laws have permitted global and local IT companies to outsource some of the basic facility management services to contractors and companies. The new economic situation was a ray of hope for workers who sensed a world of improved opportunities. The rational decision leads them into a reality that is profoundly different from all of their previous experiences. Their new relationships with urban space, employers and more-established colleagues (i.e., programmers, engineers and call-centre workers), which are mediated by digital automation, economic liberalization and workplace discipline, have whisked away familiar ties with their surroundings. In this situation, some interviewees negotiate their nurtured values and life codes passed on to them by history, family and community in light of the performative demands of modernity.

For some others, however, tradition “weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx, 2006). For these workers, the act of rationality to comprehend reality is a painful journey fractured by struggle, contradiction and ambivalence. These complex and varied sociological and psychological states reveal themselves in interviews through the narration of their everyday communicative experiences in dealing with spouses, children, employers, colleagues or even bus conductors. It is tempting to refer to the social transition of these workers as moving into a new stage of capitalist modernity from a state of traditional communitarian culture, “torn from community … in search of authentic values in a degraded world” (Lazarus 2016, 90). But this kind of theorizing does not do justice to the historical context and empirical evidence about the genesis of Indian modernity, namely the birth of
commodity production in the colonial period, its intensification in post-independence India and its complex relationship with the country’s long tradition of religious, ethnic and cultural diversity. According to Sudipta Kaviraj, “traditions, when faced with the challenge of entirely new structures like industrialism or electoral democracy, might seek to adapt to these, altering both the internal operation of traditional structures like caste or religious community and the elective institutions themselves… actual political experience in India followed the more complex trajectories of adaptation rather than confronting or acquiescing to modernity” (Kaviraj 2000, 156).

Unlike the tradition-modernity conflict that the country witnessed during the early years of independence, the nature of disruptions was different in the post-1980s landscape of globalization and its aftermath. Previously, the change was spasmodic in terms of its spatial and temporal characteristics. The social impact was uneven and varied from one place to another. The changes did not create singular, collective responses; however, India’s globalization story of the post-1980s era is different. Indian globalization, through its organs of change – digital technology and the neoliberal order – set the process of integrating the country into one economic entity. The state’s policy is to create a single, national market through the economic integration of provincial economies by dismantling tax and financial barriers to achieve an unregulated flow of goods and services across India. Hence, any social and economic changes will reverberate across the entire country. In terms of economic parameters, this is quite a formidable transition. As one pro-globalization writer points out,

> Things began to change with modest liberalization in the 1980s when annual economic growth rose to 5.6% and population growth remained at 2.1%; thus, income per capita moved up to 3.5%. This happy trend continued in the reform decade of the 1990s when growth averaged 6.3% a year, but population slowed to an average 1.9%; thus per capita income rose by a more respectable 4.4% a year, which when compounded over ten years meant that the nation was 50% wealthier in real terms in a decade. (Das 2002, 364)

One cannot ignore the scale of disruption that the Indian economy underwent in the post-liberalization era, which is unique to India’s history. A direct result of this transition has been migration from villages and semi-urban areas to the cities and metropolis to build the service
sector, which is where the IT industry created the most employment. The new working class, which migrated to the city from the outskirts, is absorbed into the global economic structure; however, this does not mean that their social responses to work-life experiences have been homogenous.

The present ethnography shows that workers have variegated responses to social and cultural displacements. Between universality of the global order and the heterogeneity of cultural experience, there are disquieting moments to grapple with mundane issues of life, such as bread and employment. These are the moments when support-service workers face the ambiguities and paradoxes of capitalist modernity’s promise of “equality, liberty and fraternity.” The solemn declaration of modernity leads to an incomplete emancipation – there are real changes, but the expectation of change is much more. As Manju (female, age 29), an outsourced housekeeper at one of India’s most venerated IT companies in Pune, reminds us:

> But salary is not good. We are hoping a raise in salary but they tell us to work for the same salary or leave the job. There is no proper monitoring system. Everything is in supervisor’s hand. They don’t send monthly reports in time so the payments get delayed. We meet sometimes with company authorities [Wipro] responsible for our payment. They listen to our problems and try to give solutions. We expect there should be someone from government or company side who assure our work and be responsible for proper payment so that we survive with these constantly increasing expenses in city.”
Chapter 5
Time, Place and Space

5.1 The Past

Apu: Mother! Mother! Mother!

It is night. Apu sits on the veranda in front of the bedroom hugging his knees, sobbing. The old man sits near him, smoking his hookah.

Bhabataran: Don’t cry, Apu. Parents don’t remain with you forever. Whatever had to happen, has happened. Now you should better perform the shraddha (last rites), and then stay on here (village). You’ll earn enough as priest.

In the morning, Apu sits near the bedroom door, sorting out his mother’s belongings. A storm is brewing and there is rumbling of distant thunder as Bhabataran comes in by the back door. Apu puts all his mother’s little possessions on a light quilt and ties it up into a bundle.

Bhabataran: My boy, where are you off to?

Apu: Calcutta.

Bhabataran: Why Calcutta?

Apu: I have my examinations.

Bhabataran: And your mother’s shraddha (last rite)?

Apu: I will take care of that in Calcutta, at Kalighat.

Apu jumps off the veranda, picks up the bundle and looks at Bhabataran. He turns away as the old man raises his hand to bless him. Thunder rolls outside as Apu goes out of the house carrying the bundle and his mother’s rush mat.

In the empty courtyard, Bhabataran stands watching as Apu walks away from the house. In his arms, wrapped in a quilt, he carries away his memories. His bare feet leave behind a familiar path as he goes past the pond, past the banana groves, under an overcast sky. ⁵⁰

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Aparajito is the second film of Satyajit Ray’s trilogy [Pather Panchali trans. Song of the Little Road (1955), Aparajito trans. Unvanquished (1856) and Apur Sansar trans. The World of Apu (1959)]. In Aparajito, Apu, the son of a poor Brahmin priest, decides to leave his home, cuts off his ties to the village after his mother’s death and embarks on a journey to the mercantile hub of the British Empire in India, Calcutta. The story is set at the beginning of India’s modernization and industrialization, imposed by the imperial British Raj via the East India Company through railways and intercontinental trade. The emotive social relationships that defined the Indian village experienced major social upheavals as a cash-modernity nexus challenged traditional life. For Apu, he cannot accept the prospect of living the rest of his life in the footsteps of his deceased father’s profession as a poor village priest. The village has become an anachronistic place for him; he is interested in the world beyond it, the city space that would satisfy his desire to know everything that is unfolding across the globe between the two world wars. Apu is enticed by the grandeur of Calcutta – its buildings, palaces, cosmopolitan culture and learning institutions – which slowly undermines the attractions of what now seems to be a quaint village life, a life that his ancestors had lived for generations. But Apu’s break with the past is never quite final. The separation does not disconnect him from his childhood memories; rather, his city life is always infiltrated by memories of village life, love, simplicity, community affection and his mother’s rush mat. These recollections cannot take Apu back to his village life; however, the thought of the past amid the complexities of metropolitan life, ridden with unemployment, uncertainty and excitement, enables Apu to interpret the past and present not in terms of an absolute ranking of better or worse. Instead, he creates future possibilities through these differences. In the final episode of the trilogy, The World of Apu, Apu returns to the village to meet his son for the first time. The final shot depicts Apu once again on a familiar journey but, this time, he is not leaving the place of his birth and upbringing alone – he is returning to the metropolis, Calcutta, which has now become his home. His son will grow up in the city, not in the village.

5.2 The Present

Almost 85 years after Apu moved to Calcutta, one of my interviewees, Sarathi (male, age 25) decided to leave his village for a different metropolis, Bangalore, to escape the difficult living conditions and support his family. Unlike Apu, Sarathi was not a studious boy. This,
coupled with his family’s lower-caste status, meant that education was not an accessible option. Sarathi is a housekeeper for a foreign IT company in one of Bangalore’s technology parks. After explaining his reasons for migrating, his story is like most other interviewees – an almost universal account of why the poor in India leave their roots and venture out for a better life.

Sarathi shared that he chose Bangalore to escape from hunger and back-breaking menial jobs. Unlike Apu, he did not come to study and become a learned man; his entire objective is to earn money. The commonality between Sarathi and Apu is that both have made cities their homes with little possibility of going back to their villages. However emotionally tiring, Apu and Sarathi decided to respond to the call of modern urban life to fulfill their desire for knowledge and survival, respectively. Sarathi justifies his migration to Bangalore by comparing his village existence with his present job in terms of his economic gains:

The difference is that then [life in village] my livelihood was difficult to meet the family expenses. After coming to Bangalore, I can give my father some money. Sometimes, he borrows money from others but knows that his son can pay that money off. They are little better off now as they could buy things which they could not earlier.

The phrase “better off now” deserves some attention as it signifies something more than mere subsistence living. For Sarathi, life is “better off” when his parents can afford goods and services that they could not previously possess rather than when he can live with little material attachment. Like Sarathi and others across the spectrum of my interviewees, the meaning of “better off” has been defined by the city experience.

Anupama Bharati (female, age 29), a security guard at Domino’s Pizza in New Delhi’s Nehru Place – a hardware/software hub – succinctly provides the meaning of “better off”:

Here, we have a good life. My husband and I have ensured that we have all things of need in our house. Everything we need is available in the city. Had we been in Farrukhabad, we would have had nothing.

City life is realized through mobility, commodification and the use of modern technology. Anupama’s life is never “better off” without them. The feeling of “better off” focuses on money saved in the bank, which allows for material comfort, a good education for the
children and the possession of consumer goods. Finally, Anupama shared that the heart of a good living is finding jobs that are not available in villages:

We would not have had good jobs. The only kind of job available there are government jobs, and we were not educated to have government jobs. There are no big businesses or many other job opportunities in the village. We would have had no life.

Sarathi argues that his idea of the “good life” is attainable with individual strength and hard work, even if that life looks different than those of software professionals:

… I should also work hard, and save some money in the bank. I should get my child also educated. Are we any less than them [software people]? God has given me also vision and strength, there’s everything, so why should I not work hard? Am I blind, why should I beg?

One finding of my research is that the global digital space chips away at the notion of physical place(s) because capital-led development of massive productive forces (digital technologies) erases physical boundaries of space. In his book, *No Sense of Place*, Joshua Meyrowitz describes the way in which the flow of information in media can “override the boundaries and definitions of situations supported by physical settings” (1985, 37). Meyrowitz cites the role of mobile phones as a media device that can shrink distances and create new conversational spaces as

When two friends speak on the telephone, for example, the situation they are “in” is only marginally related to their respective physical locations. Indeed, the telephone tends to bring two people closer to each other in some respects, than they are to other people in their physical environments. (Meyrowitz 1985, 38)

Castells takes this idea one step further in *The Rise of The Network Society*, in which he argues that

…the new communication system radically transforms space and time, the fundamental dimensions of human life. Localities become disembodied from their cultural,
historical, geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows and substitutes for the space of places. (2000, 406)

Replacing place with space also has political economic dimensions as place can be controlled from anywhere in the global space (e.g., functional networks). This sets the stage for flexible accumulation via “accelerations in turnover times in production, exchange and consumption …” (Harvey 1989, 291). The place(s) I refer to are the distant rural, semi-rural and semi-urban localities from which the facility management workforce in the Indian IT industry have migrated; however, I refer not only to the destruction of the physical place, which we know is part of the neoliberal policy of replacing farmland with SEZs or “accumulation through dispossession” (Harvey 2007). Castells adds that

…space of flows” has both cultural and economic dimensions as electronics signals alter the way we are used to live. Flows are not just one element of the social organisation; they are the expression of processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life (Castells 2000, 442).

The “space of flows” process also involves the erasure of the symbolic meanings associated with physical spaces – “commonplace associations of security and stability, the homely and familiar” (Nadeem 2011, 29). These are now largely supplanted by workers’ aspirations to actively participate in the spaces of urbanization and digitization, construed as “a realm of freedom and uncertainty and possibility” (Nadeem 2011, 29). My interviews suggest that support-service workers have a more nuanced relationship with their new spaces in the city rather than unbridled enthusiasm for these spaces in which they now work and live.

As I interviewed facility management workers, memories of their native homes and traditions often work against any unconditional acceptance of the norms and values of the present, defined by an accelerated city-space lifestyle. Suhashini Rai (female, age 32) works as a janitor at the Hewlett-Packard Enterprise Company office in Gurgaon, New Delhi. When asked how she would differentiate her village days from her current life, she responds:

Well, people in the cities don’t really care about your caste but people in villages give a lot of importance to it. The societal behaviour in villages is very different from the
societal behaviour in cities. Village society places many restrictions based on caste, such as restrictions on dining.

While this perceived lack of judgment is a benefit to city living, not all the workers I interviewed felt similarly about their new spaces. One example is Anjali (female, age 28), a married woman who plans to return to her native village in Orissa\(^{51}\) one day. She says, “Yes I like my place, I like my village, have all my relatives there. Here, I came for my husband and my son. If I can go back to my place I will surely go.” Among the 35 female interviewees, only two women expressed their desire to return to their ancestral villages for reasons that resembled Anjali’s. One interviewee misses the comfort of extended family relationships because, as she laments, “The togetherness I used to enjoy during religious festivals and everyday life is missing here. When I was at my village in Orissa we used to celebrate all festivals and rituals, here we can’t do that because we don’t have time and extra money for that.” Anjali, who once worked in the fast-food section of one IT park in Bangalore, believes that coming to the cities “has not improved my life but it has changed. Yes, we are earning more and I can send my son to an English medium school but I am suffering from some health issues which I did not have during my village days.”

The interviews included two questions relating to urban living and traditional rural life: (1) in your experience, what is the difference between city and village life? And (2) would you ever go back to the village after working here in the cities? All 106 respondents across gender, age and caste have their own personal experiences of living in a village or have heard stories about their parents’ lives in rural areas. The narrative shared by these participants is that new jobs in the metropolis have helped them move out of grinding poverty, enabling them to provide a formal education for their children and to enjoy some social mobility. For such workers, the city is a better place to live as it has taken care of their basic material needs of food, shelter and income, however minimal they may be. This is a definite improvement over life in a village where the absence of food security often leads to hunger and death.

Of those surveyed, 80% belong to scheduled or lower-caste groups and 5% are Muslims, which is a minority religious group in India. For all, the cities have opened up a slew of job

\(^{51}\) One of the states in Eastern India.
opportunities in the informal and formal sectors, which are almost non-existent in a village, especially if they are from marginalized groups. Bina (female, age 45), whose primary job at Nehru Place – an IT hardware hub in South Delhi – is to keep it neat and tidy, offers an insightful comment that sums up the viewpoint of a majority of survey respondents:

[In the villages] the Brahmins will make us work in the fields, work in the house, look after their cattle and then only pay us a paltry sum. It simply isn’t enough for my children. And food isn’t the only thing, we need clothes, we need money when we get sick.

Bina is a widow with four children to tend to on a small monthly salary of Rs 4,500 (CAD 90). She would prefer never to return to her village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh (800 kilometres from New Delhi) from which she migrated 12 years ago as “In the city, [she] can at least earn enough to feed [her]self and [her] children.” As Manju (female, age 34), a housekeeper from Pune tells us, “In the village, if a woman takes any initiative or earns money or runs her house, people start harassing her…That’s not the case here, it’s freer. It feels like you are trapped when living in the village, you live a scared existence.” The opposing view of the village as a more humane place surfaced from time to time during the interviews, but survey results indicate that very few wish to return to their ancestral place.

Among male respondents, almost all (98%) want to stay in the cities. A few, like Kishore (male, age 29) and Dharmendra Prakash (male, age 26), want to settle in their small towns because towns and villages are also experience fast-paced changes. For them, the old villages now represent new business opportunities.

Hemant Hazarika (male, age 24) discusses his big-city experience, the reasons for migrating and the things he misses from his past life – towns, family and friends. Hemant migrated from the Northeast state of Assam and, after working in some IT centres, has settled in Bangalore as a security guard. Unlike many of his colleagues, poverty did not push him out of his hometown; rather, he saw migration as an opportunity to earn money and settle into a better life. He graduated grade 12 and is taking life as it comes. When asked why he came to Bangalore, he answers, “My friends told me there is a good job opportunity here. I’m earning Rs 15,000 (CAD 300) here, if I did the same job in Assam I would only get Rs 5,000-6,000
(CAD 100-125). That’s why I came here.” We followed with a question about his life after working in Indian IT parks – had it improved? Hemant affirms,

… I was not poor there [Assam]. I had all that I wanted. After coming here also I’m doing well. I bought a TV, fridge, changed so many mobiles, clothes I like, food that I want to eat. I’m doing really well after coming here. But only thing I miss is the lifestyle. I used to go out with friends there. Here I only work, no entertainment.

Hemant wants to leave this job after a few years. His ultimate goal in life is to leave Bangalore and “…open [his] own mobile phone shop in [his] village, as more and more people have started using mobile phones.” Dharmendra Prakash (male, age 26), also a security guard working in Gurgaon, New Delhi, also wishes to go back to his home village and set up a bike repairing shop.

For workers like Anjali, Dharmendra and Hemant, escaping the 24/7 grind of global capitalism, nostalgic memories of village life laced with love and togetherness offer temporary relief. The disconnected city life in relation to the consumer spectacle of smart cities, swanky cars and the gated high-rise buildings often makes them long for their distant homelands: “Not here, not here but somewhere else.”52 At some point, almost all workers interviewed showed some kind of ambivalence to their new urban life. Such moments usually arise when they discuss the high cost of living, inability to provide better education to their children and the lack of people with whom to talk and share intimate experiences.

Unlike Anjali or Hemant, most interviewees share only brief reflections of discomfort with their current lives, arising from poor working conditions and their hankering for material wealth. However, these people would never replace the city as a space with the village in their imagination. Anupama accepts that life in the capital is far better than back home in her village, but it is not without its problems:

I do not think there is anything that is worse. Life is busier here. In the village, you can rest your body; you can eat and sleep in peace. Here, people do not have time to eat

their meals, as they have to work. They have no time to socialize with relatives or go on vacation. But, in all other spheres, city life is better than rural life.

Kamal Hasan (male, age 35), a driver in Bangalore, echoes these sentiments:

I was in a really poor condition before I joined this job, now I’m managing my family expenses quite well. We are leading better life than in our native place, but still we are in financial problem. Now we have good clothes, good food, home appliances etc.

It would be tempting to identify Kamal and others in my sample as modern-day representations of Apu. Like Apu, they will likely never return to their village to settle; however, the reason they embarked on the journey to the centre from the periphery is different. Knowing and experiencing the changing world drove Apu to Calcutta, a symbolic representation of a space in which modern values flower through new scientific discoveries and social changes, creating a new meaning of life and completing the transformation from a village boy to a modern man. In Apu’s version of modernity, the village remains an entity that is entirely distinct from the city. For these workers, the journey to an Indian metropolis was about survival – food and shelter to provide a “better life” – and less about their aspirations to modern ethos and culture. The city represents the ultimate escape from penury conditions that village life offered. This village-urban migration is significant because the old conceptualization of a village as a place of stasis and peace has lost its meaning. For people like Dharmendra and Hemant, a village is a new urban space, a territory ready to be modernized as a global space ready for business.

Some workers I interviewed try to circumvent the harsh reality of the money economy through a spiritual undertaking of mysticism whereby “mahanagar” (metropolis) becomes the seat of “mayanagar” (illusion). This is how Shivam Jha (male, age 58), a driver for a software executive in Noida (a New Delhi suburb), describes the capital city. He is well versed in Hindu religious scriptures and he hails from a conservative “Maithil Brahmin53”

53 Maithil Brahmins form part of ancient Vedic Brahmin. Maithil Brāhmīns are a part of Panch-gauda Pañchgauḍa, a group of highest-ranking castes, who still strive to follow rites and rituals according to ancient Hindu canons (http://www.mithilatimes.com/maithil-brahmins/)
family. His monthly salary is approximately Rs 12,000 (CAD 240), which supports his wife and four children. He lives a hard life, working 12-hour days in the most expensive city in the country. When asked about his social experience in the capital, which has a population of 18 million, he looked at me with an air suggestive of an old person whose life is still anchored to the mores of communal village life, even though he has lived in one of the world’s most populous city for 40 years. Shivam explains,

Our relationship with our village is a relationship from birth. It is our homeland, our “janm-bhumi” or birthplace. We associate it with our parents and family elders. In a metropolitan city (a “mahanagar”), nobody is anybody’s father, brother, or relative. People are only friends. It is a “mayanagar” (a city of illusions). The gods could not save themselves from maya\(^54\), how can we expect to save ourselves from it? Here there are always people eating, sleeping, walking, and working. The city is always alive, all twenty-four hours. The roads are never empty. According to our holy book, this is what a maha-mayanagar (a big city of illusions) is!

Like thousands of his neighbours, Shivam did not choose to move to the capital city voluntarily. The journey was made for expediency’s sake, based on the need to survive and provide education for his four children. The little parcel of land that he inherited from his father was not enough to support his family, but separation from his ancestral place also meant alienation from traditional practices and belief systems. Even so,

…this does not mean it is bad. This is natural. A mayanagar has its own existence with respect to which its inhabitants have to adjust and mold themselves. People have to give up their families and way of life from back home. Now one has to do as the city demands. In a way, even I have lost my traditions. Today my mother is alone in the village. If something were to happen to her I would not be able to help her immediately, I would not be able to take her to hospital or look after her. I have lost touch with my home and my fields. So yes, even I have lost much of what I came with.

\(^{54}\) Maya, (Sanskrit: “magic” or “illusion”) a fundamental concept in Hindu philosophy, notably in the Advaita (Nondualist) school of Vedanta. Maya originally denoted the magic power with which a god can make human beings believe in what turns out to be an illusion. By extension, it later came to mean the powerful force that creates the cosmic illusion that the phenomenal world is real (https://www.britannica.com/topic/maya-Indian-philosophy)
But I am still trying to hold on to most of our traditions. I have not lost everything completely. We teach our children that men are born to protect women, not devour them. When we leave the house in the morning, we do so with a prayer that we mustn’t hurt even an ant.

When asked how modernity has changed his life, Shivam surprisingly replies,

Nothing much has changed. Those who are educated now do not believe in superstitions. The less educated still does. However, when it comes to customs that have been handed down for generations, people bow to their culture. People are of course free to do as they please as this is a free country. But in our culture, we still bank on the advice of our elders. Therefore, things haven’t changed lot. But of course we spend a lot more now than we did before. Before we did not have DJs, now we do.

There is neither sole denial nor acceptance of modernity in Shivam’s perspective, but there are elements of modernity that stand out in the mix of the old and new – money, freedom and disc jockeys (DJs). These have not changed Shivam’s life dramatically, but they have created a fractured existence which neither supersedes the old village life nor totally embraces the new city existence. This ambiguity, expressed through mystical interpretations of life, could be the representation of a social position in a hierarchical Hindu society where Shivam’s status as a Dharmendra in still holds some social weight, honour and prestige in a village society.

Unlike Shivam, most interviewees neither have a literate family background nor belong to upper-caste groups; the majority also lack economic security in the form of land ownership in the villages from which they migrated. They address the ambiguous realities of urban living in straightforward, rational and pragmatic ways in contrast with Shivam’s approach, which aims to offer a religious-philosophical twist to the harsh struggles of everyday life. This ideological framing of reality could soften the sharp edges of life in a metropolitan city for a migrant. Given the rise and consolidation of Hindu right-wing forces in present-day India, it is possible that Shivam’s religious and philosophical interpretation of city life could become an alternative approach for other interviewees to understand their lives. This could lead to a conservative reaction to the impact of global capital. How this tendency unfurls in the near
future is more than mere conjecture; rather, the modernity-tradition dichotomy is mediated by the social contradictions at a particular historical juncture. This resonates with Walter Benjamin’s sixth thesis from “On the Concept of History” in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which addresses the ways in which the ruling class can use traditions to consolidate power:

> The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it (Benjamin, 1940).

### 5.3 Toward a New Place and Community

The everyday lives of migrant workers are largely concerned with their uncertain futures. Any kind of unforeseen event, such as family health emergencies, natural disasters or civil unrest, would either leave them at the mercy of pawnbrokers or compel them to tighten their belts. They survive by working hard to obtain the basic necessities of life and hoping that their long hours of work will pay off, both literally and figuratively. It is not out of love for metropolitan experiences that most participants do not consider returning to their rural lives or small towns. While sipping his evening tea outside the main gate of Noida’s HCL Technologies (HCL) software delivery centre, Amrinder Singh (male, age 32), a bus driver who ferries HCL software developers, categorized village and city life in some familiar binaries:

> Well, the village is good because it has pure air and pure water and life there feels nice. The city is also nice. People can lead a good life in the village but because there aren’t any industries and factories there, people are forced to come to the city, to Delhi, to find work. People come to the city for money. In the city, every item is adulterated but in the village, every item is pure, pure milk, pure ghee. People in the villages live longer, many of them live till the age of 80. For me hundred percent of my life in the village is better than life in the city, but because of the poor employment prospects in the village, I have to live here.
Amrinder’s depiction of both village and city life is a combination of myth and reality. The death rate in Indian villages compared with cities is high because peripheries lack adequate health-care facilities and suffer from rampant poverty. These factors, coupled with rural unemployment, drive migration. The portrait of a rural setting as an idyllic place disappears when these poor workers reflect on the difficult beginnings they endured in their birthplaces.

One representation of this big picture is the work-life story of Kamal (male, age 28). Three years ago, Kamal migrated from Pavagada Taluk (district sub-division) in the Tumkur District of Karnataka to Bangalore and currently works as a security guard at Oracle Corporation (Oracle). Kamal works eight to 10 hours per day and earns less than CAD200 per month with very few benefits, but believes he is in a much better situation now than his days in Pavagada Taluk. When asked why Kamal moved to Bangalore:

Kamal: I couldn’t find any job in my native village and my family is also poor, my father was doing agriculture, I don’t want to continue my father’s occupation, I have a sibling he is also working, some of my friends told me to work here, I also wanted to work here (Bangalore) only, so I came here.

Interviewer: Describe your family life and education.

Kamal: I’m from a poor family; though we were not starving it wasn’t sufficient enough. I have studied till matriculation. My father is a farmer, and we have very less agriculture land so is income. After my education I had to find a job, so I left my native place.

Interviewer: Did you move from a state of poverty to a state of possessing some material goods after joining the work as a support-service worker?

Kamal: Yes, financially I was dependent then and it was difficult for me to buy anything earlier, now I’m much better off. I have bought TV, fridge, washing machine, mobile phones, good enough cloth, etc.

Interviewer: Do you see any possibility of change from the existing everyday living conditions?

Kamal: Yes, I think so. Because my poverty has reduced to some extent. But I can’t tell surely. Because I have seen lots of ups and downs in my life that’s why I said like that.

Interviewer: What’s your ultimate wish in your life?
Kamal: I want to find better job than this and be settled in life.
Interviewer: Have your living conditions improved after coming to the city?
Kamal: Yes, in our native village I was leading my life with financial difficulties, now my financial condition has improved. My living condition has improved after coming here as I told you I bought whatever I wanted, having food I like, and send some money to my parents also.

Having moved to the city very recently, what makes these workers’ experiences unique compared with those in other service industries (i.e., retail) is their proximity to digital professionals and a globalized workplace environment. This instills an aspiration to become part of the middle-class, skilled workforce that they meet every day on cyber-campuses. But, at the same time, their lives are in a constant state of uncertainty. If they suddenly lose their jobs – workers repeatedly reiterated that their current jobs are not secure – there is no alternative. They are underqualified for better jobs in the technology industry such as programming or working as a contact-centre executive, which makes them vulnerable. Working in facility management jobs, no matter how low paid these are, is the only feasible way to survive in a city. Going back to join the semi-employed rural working population is never considered a viable alternative; once they are entrenched in city life, they often believe that they cannot return home. For these workers, the village no longer exists as they once knew it.

5.4 At the Cusp of Rural-Urban (“Rurban”) Life

A small percentage of workers (only 2%) in my sample want to return and spend the rest of their lives away from the alien city’s humdrum at some time in the future – maybe after their children are settled in the city – but they will be there not simply to represent their father or uncle’s “rural rustic” lifestyle, but rather as “Rurban”55 individuals. I met Dharmendra Prakash at a swanky software technology parks in Gurgaon that houses some big names in technology, such as Oracle, General Electric and Wipro Limited (Wipro). Like most security guards working as outsourced employees, stoutly built Dharmendra, whose job is to guard the Oracle office gates, earns Rs 7,500 per month (CAD 150) with four days of paid leave.

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per month and 12 days of casual leave per year. He belongs to the other backward class (OBC) according to the Indian Government’s system of class categorization. In terms of social and economic status, OBCs are below the general/upper castes, but above the Dalits56 and the scheduled tribes. Dharmendra is one of the few fortunate workers in this job with employer-provided medical insurance. He migrated from his village in Uttar Pradesh, one of the country’s most populous states, after completing his college education in search of a living, as had his brother two years earlier. He is one of the few interviewees who still wants to go back to the village after he makes enough money in the city.

Interviewer: What will you do if you’re presented with the opportunity to improve your life?

Dharmendra: Mam, everybody wants to be successful in life. Everybody wants progress in life but the real problem lies in determining which line of work is best suited for a person to achieve success. In my line of study and work, it’s very tough for somebody to be successful.

Interviewer: What do you think is the way to achieve success? Do you think it can be achieved via hard work?

Dharmendra: In the NCR [National Capital Region], the only way to progress in life is if you have connections or if you have experience.

Interviewer: One can’t progress without that…the people who work in big companies, how did they get jobs like that?

Dharmendra: It depends on your college. It depends on your level of education. Nowadays, a simple BA or MA degree counts for nothing. One must go to a good school and get a good education. We did not have the financial resources required for me to get a good education.

Interviewer: You had said that you would leave the city and go back to your village. How do you feel about that thought now?

Dharmendra: A person usually has a target in life. As long as the target is not achieved, what must be done must be done. Since my goal hasn’t been achieved yet, I need to stay here for one more time.

56 The word Dalit means broken. The Dalits are part of the scheduled caste (SC) community and represent those Indian castes who over the years have been subjected to untouchability.
Interviewer: What is your target/goal?
Dharmendra: I have some loans to pay and I want to build a bank balance. One needs money to set up a business. I want to set up a bicycle shop in my village. It will be for both repairing bicycles and selling new ones. It should do well, because there is good demand for cycles. Most people don’t have motor vehicles and even if they do they also usually have a bicycle. There is good profit in a cycle-business.
Interviewer: How many years will it take you to set this up?
Dharmendra: At least two years. I have to be in Delhi for at least two years. I need around a lakh of rupees (20,000) to set the business up.

Dharmendra’s dream is to set this bicycle shop up in his village rather than returning to farm his family’s small plot of land.

Interviewer: But your father too has a bicycle shop, right? Have you thought of joining him?
Dharmendra: No, I haven’t because a business in partnership will always be a partnership, it will not solely be yours. You have all the control over it. You can start and stop it as you please. And there are always problems within families. So, I want to open my own shop.

Interviewer: Why do you want to go back to the village? Is village life better than in the city?
Dharmendra: The village is good, as long as we can provide food for ourselves. Here in the city even if one cries aloud no neighbour comes to help you. Back home one has many old friends and acquaintances who are willing to help. The village is greener too. There is not as much pollution as there is here in the city. Here, there are just buildings everywhere.”

5.5 Urban Education as Social Mobility

Mahesh Shinde (male, age 23) earns around Rs 8,000 (CAD 150) per month as a “shift in charge” at a Subway franchise in Pune’s Hinjewadi IT district. Although he is of lower caste
and a supporter of B.R. Ambedkar, he also supports a right-wing Hindu nationalist party Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS). When asked why he supports a primarily upper-caste party, he replies, “My brother is in that party, that’s why...,” and continues, “If anyone has any household problems, or problems with education...[MNS] help[s] whether you are a member or not.”

Here, Mahesh’s caste affiliation did not determine his political ideology; rather, his preference is determined by his close relationship with an elder sibling and the community service that is offered by MNS, which helps to ameliorate everyday issues of the people. Mahesh’s grandparents still live in their native village farming a five-acre plot of land, but he came to study commerce in Pune and is now in grade 12. He began his career as a “sandwich artist” at Subway and his ultimate ambition is to graduate with a degree in hotel management. In the meantime, he wants to avail himself of the opportunity Subway provides to move from an entry-level position to a managerial role at an outlet through a worldwide online examination.

Interviewer: So you want to be a manager?
Mahesh: Manager. The managerial course is through Subway.
Interviewer: Do they provide the training?
Mahesh: Yes. It’s a common exam held all over world.
Interviewer: How are the exams held? Computers?
Mahesh: Yes, It’s an online exam.
Interviewer: In English?
Mahesh: Yes.
Interviewer: Are you provided any training for that examination?
Mahesh: Yes, they provide training at the Subway office.
Interviewer: Would you like to stay in the city or go back to the village?
Mahesh: City.
Interviewer: What will you do with the five acres then?
Mahesh: It’s not a major source of income.
Interviewer: You will stop farming then?

57 Dr B.R. Ambedkar is the principal architect of India’s Constitution and fought for the rights of the untouchables (Dalits).
Mahesh: No, once my grandmother passes, my father will go there. I’ll stay here and help my father from here, by sending money.

Interviewer: Which aspects of city life do you like most?
Mahesh: People who wish to earn money don’t usually stay in the village.

Interviewer: So you would like to work as an employee but you don’t feel like opening up a business in your village?
Mahesh: It’s hard to sustain a business in the village, there’s a high chance of incurring losses, especially if there aren’t sufficient rains or other similar factors.

Mahesh’s family does not earn enough money to provide the appropriate opportunity to move up the employment ladder; therefore, education is his only method of achieving prosperity. The belief that only education has this power to equalize is reinforced after witnessing what the comparatively high-paid skilled information jobs can offer in IT enclaves. There is a stark contrast considering India’s poor record of promoting the primary and secondary education system, particularly in rural areas. Kishore Kumar (male, age 24) drives a bus for an IT services company in Gurgaon, New Delhi, and earns around CAD300 per month after working 12 to 14 hours per day. Kishore believes that, if he were as educated as software professionals, he could have made much more money; however, his life has not flourished in the way he had hoped because his parents could not afford schooling past grade five, so he was forced to learn how to drive a bus.

Interviewer: Why do some people get jobs which pay a lot of money while some aren’t able to get jobs like here in IT parks?
Kishore: They are highly educated. If I was as educated as them then I too would have found a job that pays really well. The atmosphere in the villages isn’t very conducive to studying. Villagers don’t put much importance on studies. People in the villages are more concerned about work like those in the fields or looking after their cattle.

Interviewer: But even in villages many people do manage to get highly educated. Is it because they had more money?
Kishore: Well, in my family or in my village, there isn’t anybody like that. Because there isn’t anybody like that, people don’t understand that getting a proper education is extremely beneficial. This was how it was back in the day. Anybody who did manage to make it big, shifted to Delhi. Nobody stays back in the village.
Like many other participants in my research, Kishore and Mahesh view education as the best course of action to escape a poverty-stricken village life. The individual’s perception of city life is shaped by industry and business in the high-technology capital space, but life in a village is infused with traditional cultural and religious practices. The juxtaposition of urban and rural life could spark tensions, especially if community life is structured with layers of hierarchical power relations as in the case of caste and gender relationships. Pursuing a modern education could create a different kind of space beyond traditional hierarchies, which is often highlighted by interviewees. Some express that, “Mainly my education is responsible for this unfortunate situation I am now at. If I had better education, the situation could have been better. My family was very poor in Usmanabad so I couldn’t attend school” or “…because of the level of education I have, I’m not getting any better jobs than this.”

For those at the bottom of the hierarchy, education is possibly the only way to climb the social scale and escape designated social ranks. Seeing their software colleagues, Kishore, Mahesh and their friends are convinced that, if only they had proper education, they would have achieved what the skilled workforce in their workplaces have managed to achieve – a comfortable and respectable living.

5.6 Changing Role of Female Work in Urban Life

Like their male counterparts, most female workers (whether they were born in the cities or migrated later in life) decided that working in technology parks is a much better option than working in a rural community, where women might work as housemaids in rich farmers’ houses or as domestic household managers. For most of the women we surveyed, the attractions of working in technology parks include fixed working schedules with some benefits, such as provident funds and use of medical facilities in government-run ESI hospitals. Besides economic benefits, the independence, empowerment and pride in earning their own livelihood in a comparatively safe working environment on technology campuses have redefined women’s individuality. For the female workforce, workplace unionization at some parks has provided a semblance of job security, which was missing in their previous

58 A small town in the state of central Maharastra.
59 Manju (female, age 32), a housekeeper at Wipro technology centre in Pune.
60 Debashish Das (male, age 24), housekeeper in Metalogic, Calcutta.
jobs. Anjana Roy Choudhury (female, age 24) works as a cook for a software delivery enterprise in Calcutta. She is a union member who feels that, because of her affiliation with the union, the outsourcing company will not risk laying her off without due cause.

As poor working-class women, Durga (female, age 35) and Lakshmi (female, age 34) work as housekeepers for IT companies in Calcutta and Hyderabad, respectively. Durga is from Nepal, where her elderly father is a marginal farmer and her younger brother is seeking employment. She was married at 15, began working at 18 and had worked as a housemaid in Oman as well as for a rich family in New Delhi before coming to Calcutta. She is a widow whose husband died after suffering from complications associated with serious alcoholism. Durga’s job in Calcutta has provided her with eight hours of daily work, although her relatively small salary of Rs 5,200 (CAD 125) barely meets her needs as she must send money to her parents in Nepal and take care of her only son’s education. Still, Durga thinks her life in the city is much better compared with her previous jobs. Durga maintains, “I like my life in Calcutta. I have a good job in the office…I like working there. Compared to working as a maid, housekeeping in an IT company is safe and have fixed hours of work. In a house it is too much work with no extra money.”

Lakshmi comes from a nearby district in Hyderabad. She is the mother of two children, aged 15 and 12. Her husband once worked as a mason in the village. Following a road accident that left him disabled, Lakshmi moved to Hyderabad in search of work to finance her children’s education. She now works as a housekeeper in HITEC City, earning around CAD150 per month. Lakshmi argues that moving to Hyderabad, one of the largest IT areas in southern India, is the best thing that ever happened to her as

Hyderabad is a good place to live as I have a steady income and secured life. I like my work and nobody has anything to say about the kind of work I do. The people around me are good. They helped me gather money to get medication for my husband and I am really thankful to all my colleagues about that.”

On the other hand, she describes village life as a sort of hell in which she could not find any employment. Lakshmi comes from a pot maker family which, in terms of caste hierarchy, belongs to a scheduled caste. She recounts that it was difficult for her parents to raise four
children, which is the reason she had to drop out of school and support the family. In her village, she worked as an embroiderer, although she never earned enough to provide what her family needed. Work in HITEC City has provided Lakshmi with a sense of freedom to choose a future that was simply impossible in her hometown. Nevertheless, when asked if she would like to go back to her village, she answers, “Maybe but ever it happens it would be after my retirement.”

Durga and Lakshmi have carved out their own space to live based on the job opportunities provided by technology companies in highly individualized workspaces. Unlike rural areas in which communities are closely knit and activities are always monitored by neighbours and family members, the IT environment of the metropolis can offer women a chance to exercise their individuality and personhood in relative anonymity. Of course, as we have demonstrated, female workers also face issues related to gender relations within a technocratic urban setting, which have somewhat undermined traditional patriarchal values.

In rural areas, women’s freedom is restricted by strict codes of gendered cultural norms. In megacities like Bangalore, Calcutta, Hyderabad or New Delhi, informal and unspoken patriarchal structures decide women’s position. In the city, it is much safer for women to work and travel because pressure from civil society, mass media and legal authorities can prevent violence against women to a certain, albeit limited, extent. Traditional family values in cities could not explicitly prevent women from working outside the home. Workplace culture in a market society seldom cares for the age-old value system that requires women to be away from home during specific periods of the day and to always return home before dusk. The very real need for survival in the city is too demanding to sit at home and wait for a suitable groom.

This is what Meghla (female, age 22) learned when she finished a basic computer course after her grade 12 standard graduation from a South Delhi government high school. I met her at a Coffee Café Day outlet at Nehru Place, New Delhi, one of the largest computer accessory and hardware markets in north India. Meghla shares,

We are from a Gujjar family, the simple fact is that we are supposed to stay inside the home for most of the time in the villages. There are a lot of restrictions which are placed on women, that doesn’t happen here in Delhi. Yes, my father wants me to be
back by 9 at night. But sometime I am late and he has to expect that. Otherwise I could not work.

5.6 Social Reproduction amid Contradictions

Interviews with IT facility service workers suggest an “ambiguous and contradictory” experience, which “provokes a malaise, a profound dissatisfaction, an aspiration for something else” (Lefebvre 1988, 80). There is neither total affirmation nor total negation of their present lives in the city, but there exists a continuous struggle to define new social spaces created by digital technology.

Here I connect Lefebvre’s “everyday life” with his inquiry into the creation of social space in the age of global capital. In The Production of Space (1991), Lefebvre argues that the places where communities reside are socially produced, by which he means there are no predetermined locations of social relations and feelings based on past codes, concepts and messages. Rather than treating places as timeless, static frames, they are constituted by evolving social relations within the context of global capitalism. The social production of place is caught between capital’s singular need to expand its value and workers’ need to produce. These needs are “what you have to do” (Wright 2005) to make a living. Socially reproductive choices are based on possibilities offered to the subjects of the social structure.

For example, Dharmendra’s future plans are contextualized by the meanings of commercialization and monetization, which have changed from the idyllic version of primordial ties in community life to a more possessive, individual attitude as capital turned global via neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s. As globalization picked up momentum in the last two decades through digital networks of banks, investment portfolios, commodity markets, social media, etc., Indian villages and rural areas have been immersed in the accelerated logic of capital. As capital made deep inroads in these communities, over time, communitarian values and possessive individualism started to complement each other. For the individual, it has become a matter of negotiating survival in an exchange economy where money takes precedence. The acceleration of money circulation made possible by digital production creates new hope and opportunities, along with discontent and unhappiness. The result is the creation of new identities of belonging that are not entirely disconnected from
past, but injected with new values. This state borders the line of rejection and acceptance of the present without committing to denouncing either completely.

Here, I disagree with the existing post-colonial development studies, especially those of Arturo Escobar and Partha Chatterjee. The problem with their understanding of consciousness about community and place is that it ignores the role of capital in destabilizing any age-old experience of both community and existence. These authors also do not take into critical consideration how people respond to this dislocation by capital. Contrasting relations between the local (community) and the global (capital), Escobar says,

> While it is evident that “local” economies and culture are not outside the scope of capital and modernity, it also needs to be newly acknowledged that the former are not produced exclusively by the latter; this place specificity…enables a different reading of culture and economy, capitalism and modernity. (2001, 141)

Escobar also states that “the marginalization of place in European social theory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been particularly deleterious to those social formations for which place based modes of consciousness and practices have continued to be important” (2001, 141).

Chatterjee plays off this idea in support of place-based community consciousness in his essay, “Community and Capital” (2012), in which he argues that community-based actions and political mobilizations in post-colonial countries like India create an alternative to civil society. Chatterjee refers to this as political society in The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics (2004) to denote the sections of the population that are underprivileged compared with elite minorities. Despite having formal equality within the elite sections, such people are members of underprivileged groups that the state discriminates against based on their economic and political positions. As Chatterjee explains,

> Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state. (2004, 26)
Thus, Chatterjee argues that these people live outside the hegemonic ideology of corporate capital and civil society.

The subjects in my research, according to Chatterjee’s classification, belong to a political society whose consciousness cannot be mapped by modern capitalist relations. As one post-colonial scholar sympathetic to Chatterjee’s argument notes, “While undoubtedly subjugated by larger forces, they are not passive and fatalistic beings who unquestionably accept their lot and cannot imagine a different present or future” (Sharma 2010, xxv). In short, these are people who, by virtue of their “otherness” within the global capitalist culture – marked by their folk ways and different kinds of social practices (heterogeneous, religious, communitarian, non-instrumental) – are not subjugated by the dominant script of globalization. In response to Charles Taylor’s essay, “Modes of Civil Society,” Chatterjee posits that “…community is not easily appropriated within the narrative of capital. Community, by definition, belongs to the domain of the natural, the primordial” (1990,130). I would offer an alternate understanding of community and place – community is not fixed and primordial, but is a formation of social space through “encounter, assembly and simultaneity” (Lefebvre 1991, 101), which is positioned between productive forces and relations of production.

As Gupta reminds us,

> When India became independent, almost 50% of the economy was rural; the latest figures tell us it is barely 14% now … Agriculture is not outside market forces, nor do farmers want it that way. This is because almost all villagers are now tied to the market for their needs and are not self-sufficient, as many peasant myths go. Not only is there now an increased dependence on cash crops, but also, as a consequence, a greater reliance on chemical inputs and pump sets. (2015, 37)

As globalization picked up momentum in the last two decades through digital networks of banks, investment portfolios, commodity markets, satellite television, mobile phones and social media, Indian villages and rural areas have been immersed in the accelerated logic of capital. As capital made deep inroads into these communities, community-based values and individualism became more complementary over time. The individual must negotiate
survival and social reproduction in a globalized exchange economy in which money is of paramount importance.
“Whistling into the Typhoon”

…the very simplified notion of the creation of the working class was that of a determined process: steam power + the factory system = the working class. Some kind of raw material, like peasants “flocking to factories,” was then proceed into so many yards of class-conscious proletarians. I was polemizing against this notion in order to show the existing plebian consciousness refracted by new experiences in social being, which experiences were handled in cultural ways by the people, thus giving rise to a transformed consciousness. (Thompson 1976, 4-5)

6.1 Proletarianization and Class Consciousness

In her book, Forces of Labor, Workers’ Movements and Globalization Since 1870, Beverly J. Silver argues that Marx’s Capital Volume I can be read “as a history of dialectic between workers’ resistance to exploitation at the point of production and the efforts of capital to overcome that resistance by constantly revolutionizing production and social relations” (2003, 19). The ideal construction of class consciousness – a spontaneous outcome of the masses joining capitalist factories, which leads to workers movements – must be reconstructed in favour of a much more complex and nuanced understanding of how class consciousness is made and remade in the history of working-class struggle. Silver claims,

Marx’s formulation has been the just target of extensive criticism in labor studies literature, especially insofar as it has formed the basis of the so called master narrative - a generalized linear structure in which proletarianization necessarily leads to class consciousness and (successful) revolutionary action. (2003, 19)

Rather than a linear model of transition theory, wherein passing from the state of “class-in-itself” to “class-for-itself” is determined only by the economic structure at a particular historical juncture, Silver proposes that a reading of Volume 1 of Karl Marx’s Capital
“suggests a much less linear progression of working class power, and one that resonates strongly with contemporary dynamics” (2003, 19). According to Silver, the working class is continuously composed, decomposed and recomposed by capital’s incessant drive for endless accumulation of surplus value in existing and as well as newly created areas of production. This making and remaking of class opens “new agencies and sites of conflict…along with new demands and forms of struggle, reflecting the shifting terrain on which labor-capital relations develop” (Silver 2003, 19).

In the context of my research, Silver’s theoretical understanding of class (re)formation (class in itself), spurred by structural changes brought on by globalization and productive forces (digital technology), has significant bearing on the way in which support-service workers deal with their new “experience of living, working, entering into social conflict and intercourse…” (Yovel 2005, 8). These workers are the new proletariats of urban India. In this last chapter, I examine whether the social meaning of these interviewees’ journeys through struggle, negotiation, contestation, accommodation and complaint can be decoded in terms of class formation (i.e., “to think and to value in class ways” (Thompson 1978)). I also examine whether, in a country like India, class identity is subsumed by primordial relations which were these workers’ birthright, thus foreclosing any possibility of class-based emancipatory politics. The above analyses are significant, especially since my research subjects work and live in a post-colonial country where, according to post-colonial theorist, Dipesh Chakrabart, there is “…the ever present possibility of fragmentation along lines of religion, language, ethnicity, and the like” (1988, 220). This chapter seeks to interrogate this claim in the light of my present research.

### 6.2 The Languages of Class

Over the years, many studies on labour and labour movements in India have focused on relationships between the working class and pre-capitalist identities, values, beliefs and sentiments (Chakrabarty 1988, Joshi 2005, Bagchi 1985, 1990 and Bahl 1993). Indian labour struggles in the form of a strike, bargaining for better wages and benefits or protests against various injustices at the workplace have been shaped by ideas based on pre-capitalist cultural moorings and ethos, whose ideological ties to social hierarchy and inequality cannot be ignored. The workers’ personal identities are based on traditional, cultural values, which
partially or wholly influenced their role and involvement in the movement, which then directly or indirectly decided the success or failure of their struggle. Modernity demands a definite separation of the private and public spheres. Workers’ trade union demands for equality and rights are based on modern principles of freedom and justice; however, how does this work in a cultural setting in which identity is driven by primordial interests, which highlight the concept of collectivity rather than class interests? Chakrabarty sets the boundaries of this debate by asking:

What happens, then, when we have a “working class” born into a culture characterized by the persistence of precapitalist relationships (or by the absence of notions of “citizenship,” “individualism,” (“equality before the laws” and on on)? How does this condition effect in capacity for class and revolutionary action? (1988, XIII)

In the next few sections, I summarize major trends in the theoretical debate on the impact of cultural and social fragmentation on Indian labour movements and to what extent the traditional hierarchical culture among the workers anticipated the formation of class solidarity in India. The debate is a reaction to earlier teleological and deterministic assumptions in writings concerned with labour movements in India, in which authors suggest that the industrialization of the Indian economy would replace community consciousness with class consciousness.

The starting point of this discussion was Chakrabarty’s work on the lives and struggles of Bengali jute mill workers in Rethinking Working-Class History, Bengal 1890-1940. Here, Chakrabarty argues that universal categories like “working class” and “working-class consciousness” are often intercepted by primordial loyalties, such as caste or religion and other distinctions by birth. Taking the example of labour movements among jute mill workers during the early 20th century in colonial period, Chakrabarty argues,

In the jute worker’s mind itself, the incipient awareness of belonging to a class remained a prisoner of his precapitalist culture; the class identity of the worker could never be distilled out of the precapitalist identities that arose from the relationships he had been born into. (1988, 218)
Certain factions of the Marxist social history academic circle assumed that class antagonism would automatically gravitate toward class solidarity, replacing all kinds of primordial consciousness. Reflecting on the Indian Marxist labour history writing, Chakrabarty writes,

Marxist historians in India, like their counterparts elsewhere, often begin with the expectation that the capitalist factory, in its ideal construction, should act as a powerful agent of social change by dissolving the old particularistic ties of peasants/tribals who are drawn into the factory as workers and by replacing these ties with more universalistic ones such as those of class. (Chakrabarty 1988, 21)

According to Chakrabarty, worker identity is always embedded in pre-capitalist values anchored in religion and community, which capitalist social relations cannot substitute with universal modernist categories such as class, equality and citizenship. Chakrabarty views this argument as more valid in post-colonial countries like India, where a worker who joins the industrial labour force in cities “was not born into a ‘bourgeois society,’ but belonged rather to a culture that was largely pre-capitalist” (1989, 4). The working class remains fragmented and divided in their struggle against the state and the owners of the means of production because of “…pre-bourgeois relationships seriously affected these workers in respect of their capacity to constitute themselves into a class by developing the necessary kinds of solidarity, organization and consciousness” (Chakrabarty 1989, 4).

Nevertheless, Chakrabarty also does not want to posit the relationship between class and culture “in a web of immutable, unchanging loyalties that social scientists sometimes classify as ‘primordial’”(Chakrabarty 1989, 218). But this did not satisfy his critics, who argued that Chakrabarty reified the culture of peasants and tribes who became migrant workers in the cities. His cultural turn in explaining the labour movements did not sufficiently deal with the social impact of the fast-changing economic and political scenarios on their everyday lives. One of Chakraborty’s important critics, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, argues that Chakrabarty accepted the “orientalist” logic of culture as “…the dominant organizing princip[le] in everyday life” and “This neglect of the economy and the state precluded the sustained analysis of class formation in Indian society” (Chandavarkar 1997, 182). The result of this omission is the absence of any discussion on production relations, except identifying and characterizing Indian society as traditional and thus pre-capitalist or pre-bourgeois, ignoring
even the possibility of modernity and industrialism producing a different kind of experience to create class solidarity. Chandavarkar continues,

This [pre-capitalist] character is identified not by an examination of the history of Bengal’s production relations but by the absence of the properties of capitalism…Thus ‘pre-capitalist relationships’ are identified by the absence of notions of “citizenship,” ‘individualism,’ ‘equality before the law’ and so on and by the absence of ‘formal equality’ and the ‘formal freedom of contract’. Bengali society, indeed Indian society, was now represented as England’s proverbial Other. (1997, 183)

In his important study on workers in the cotton textile industry in Mumbai (Bombay) (Chandavarkar 1994, 1998, 2004), Chandavarkar looks at the history of class formation and disintegration in terms of growth and shutdown of textile factories as the market reorganized its business strategy in response to various exogenous (i.e., technology, new labour laws, etc.) and endogenous (i.e., labour militancy, cost of production, etc.) factors. The migrant workers who travelled from nearby as well as far-off places had diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Chandavarkar’s case study on workers in Girangaon, a suburban enclave with the largest concentration of mills, demonstrates how the labourers’ work and culture actively constituted the social relations within and outside factory compounds. His understanding of class is informed by political and business conditions which generate fractures, sectionalism and divisions on one hand, but unity and togetherness on the other. There were disharmonies among the workers but “…close connections are forged in the neighborhoods most extensively in conditions in which the survival strategies of its residents force them to draw heavily upon their friends and relatives” (Chandavarkar 2004, 124) The solidarity and conflict among the workers were contingent on how social and economic uncertainties in urban spaces arrange and rearrange workers’ lives. Chandavarkar’s research reveals that, in India and elsewhere, “The social relations of Girangaon were constituted primarily by its daily tensions and conflicts and increasingly by its experience of political and industrial struggle. The making of Girangaon was in a fundamental sense an explicitly political process” (2004, 124).

Chandavarkar treated class as a “descriptive category,” investigating how workers react and strategize depending on outside interferences in their lives. Depending on real-life situations,
workers change their modus operandi. Here, class is defined only as an economic unit that tries to maximize its gains based on constraints. As Chandavarkar says,

…the terrain upon which the Indian working class, perhaps any working class, fought its battles was determined by its opponents and, therefore, their forms of action reflected not their level of consciousness, but the range of options available to them inside a particular economic and political conjuncture. (Chandavarkar 1998, 75)

Chitra Joshi’s work, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories*, argues that Chandavarkar’s “…class solidarities are contingent: forged at one moment, they could disappear at another” (Joshi 2005, 8). She further argues that, for both Chakrabarty and Chandavarkar,

…at an everyday level, in day-to-day relationships at the workplace, workers have no agency. In Chandavarkar’s framework, business decisions crucially affect strategies of labour deployment and relationships at the workplace, while for Chakrabarty the pre-modern outlook of the workers and traditional relationships of hierarchy shape the culture of work. As opposed to linear conceptions of change in conventional Marxist writings, many recent writings deny possibilities of change and allow workers no agency in shaping their culture. (Joshi 2005, 8)

Joshi’s book examines the lost industrial world of Kanpur, once the thriving industrial centre of North India and the home of migrant workers from neighbouring districts and villages in Uttar Pradesh. Like Chandavarkar and Chakrabarty, Joshi’s work deals with migrant labourers and their journey to the industrial city between the colonial and post-colonial periods until the beginning of the 21st century in India. However, according to Joshi, working-class agency means more than recording the “…mass upsurge when existing hierarchies and structures of power are turned upside down” (2005, 12). She narrates the everyday struggles that the workers face in every moment of their survival. These struggles may appear to be a negotiation with and adjustment to the alien forces of capitalism, but the appearance is often deceptive. Below the surface of accommodation, there are craters of resistance. Building on James Scott’s idea of “hidden transcripts,”61 Joshi contends that,

Workers act in their daily life in small ways, resisting pressures as well as submitting to demands, being silent at times and vocal at others, confronting to rules as well as negotiating them, and through small acts of self-assertion seeking to retain their sense of dignity. (2005, 12)

According to Joshi, working-class culture is not handed over from the past as predetermined and insular or immune to any changes; instead, it is always open to negotiation and resistance mediated by the structural conditions that inform workers’ lives. Therefore,

…work norms within the factory were continuously negotiated and the culture of work [are] always acts of resistance: they reproduced and reaffirmed, just as much they resisted, dominant structures of power and authority. Yet public gestures of submission could coexist with private and hidden transcripts of resistance. (Joshi 2005, 12)

Joshi claims that labour historians “need to understand both transcripts” – that resistance is intertwined with the act of submission and accommodation. While in Chakrabarty’s case, class resistance is lost in the norms and values of the traditional world, Chandavarkar writes about resistance sans emancipatory politics. I would argue that, for Chandravarkar, social conflict lacks any long-term continuation; conflict seems to depend on the calculations by the actors (working class) after weighing the advantages and drawbacks of the struggle’s likelihood for success in resolving the conflict. Workers think only of the present situation through gain-and-loss analysis, which never concludes with class determination.

### 6.3 Making of the Working Class

The Indian debate on the process of class formation under capitalism has been part of larger academic enquiry which, over the years, is searching for a better theory that will neither succumb to the teleological assumptions of economic determinism nor valorize the fragments, thereby ending the possibility of emancipatory politics of the working class. E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* is one of the important works that strives to connect the historical and universal category of class with the particularities of workers’ cultural experiences. Thompson’s strategy is that, without losing sight of the structural relationship between labour and capital, one must focus on how the working class processed its cultural experience within the field of labour-capital relations, which resulted in
class solidarity. According to Thompson, “Class happens when some men, as a result of common experience (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed) to theirs” (1965, 9).

For Thompson, class is not only an affiliation with a structure or category, “but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (2013, 8). Class is a social relation, “a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness” (Thompson 2013, 8). At the heart of the issue, Thompson agrees with Marx that class experience – class for itself – is “largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily” (1965, 9). At the same time, Thompson argues that class experiences in productive relations “…are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms” (1965, 9), such that economic and values are on equal footing in a dialectical relationship (Johnson 1978, 91). This coupling of workers’ experience in factories with historical and cultural consciousness provided as escape from and rally against the teleological assumptions that agency forms only through economic relations. As experiences are mediated by diverse cultural and historical differences, “…the consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way” (Thompson 1965, 9).

In Thompson’s view, economic relations are a set of objective facts that situate a person’s class in relation to ownership structure (class in itself). This is never separate from the class outlook based on exploitation, individual needs, shared interests, grievances and experiences that lead to the formation of a social class; however,

…economy is present mainly through the category of “experience”; economic relations exist in the feelings expressed by members of the class. The economic as a set of objectively present relations only appears in an attenuated form, through the cultural, through the “inward of experience.” (Johnson 1978, 91)

In Poverty of Theory, Thompson goes on to define the creation of class in terms of common interests and antagonism, stating that “Classes arise because men and women, in
determinative productive relations, identify their antagonistic interests, and come to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways” (1978, 298-299). Perry Anderson’s Arguments in English Marxism (1980) takes a cue from Thompson and argues that “Class consciousness here becomes the very hallmark of class formation.” (Thompson 1978 41) According to Anderson, this separation of class from “… its objective anchorage in determinate relations of production, and identify with the subjective consciousness and culture” (Anderson 1980, 42) leads to the theoretical position that, “…the absence of a class ‘culture’ automatically puts in question the very existence of class itself such as in 18th century England (Anderson 1980).

In The Making of the English Working Class, Thompson reveals how Chartism – the demand for political rights of equality – embodied the working-class aspiration for “social control over their conditions of life and labour” (1965, 828).

But why did the aspiration for social control lose its way in the mirage of labourism and welfarism post-1840s? Perry Anderson argues that,

… what are probably the two most fundamental dimensions of any working class- its objective composition as a social force and its subjective outlook as a political force – we are obliged to conclude that the English proletariat was in no way essentially made by 1832: or if it was, its first “incarnation” was to be strangely, systematically inverted by its second. (1980, 46)

Anderson adds, “But if the same class could be made by the 30s, unmade after the 40s, and remade during the 80s, how ultimately satisfactory is the whole vocabulary of making itself?” (1980, 47).

6.4 Making of the Indian IT Proletariat

To this point, I have traced the major theoretical debates on the issues and barriers working against the formation of working-class agency. In the last section on the support-service workers in the Indian IT industry, the main focus of my research, I highlight the extent to which these scholarly debates diverge or converge with my findings.
My research, based on interviews with support-service workers, does not provide any teleological or deterministic conclusion that these workers will eventually emerge from their pre-existing consciousness to form a class-based solidarity. This indeterminacy is based on the distinctly Indian social and economic situation. Unlike the English working class, the Indian working class lacks the cultural heritage of modern liberalism that shaped English class consciousness:

…The factory hand or stockinger was also the inheritor of Bunyan, of remembered village rights, of notions of equality before the law, of craft traditions. He was the object of massive religious indoctrination and the creator of political traditions. The working class made itself as much as it was made. (Thompson 1965, 2013)

Thompson determines that the basis of English workers’ class consciousness is the industrial revolution and English liberal tradition. The contradiction between the evolving economic structure of “…[the] evolution from artisanate to proletariat” (Anderson 1980, 45) and the consciousness of freedom and equality in English society led to class formation through the Chartist struggle for universal suffrage and agency over their own lives.

In the context of support-service workers in India’s IT industry, though, what contradictions do these labourers face in their everyday experiences that can create opportunities for class action in the future?

### 6.5 Class Formation of Indian Support-Service Workers in the Tech Sector

I was born in Assam so I feel a link to the place but Delhi has a lot of job opportunities. There are a lot of big companies here in Delhi. It’s not the same in Assam, there our only option is to farm. Here you can do any job and still save up some money.

(Asthana, an interviewee)

One of the significant insights uncovered through my survey research is that, for a sizable section of the support-service workers, they are mainly concerned about the present state of

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62 Assam is one of the states located in northeastern India.
their life as well as individual and familial survival strategies: their income and expenditure, working conditions and, for those with children, budget management to provide good English-based education. The decision to send their children to English medium schools is a response to their perception that the correlation between an English language-based education and a good job is very high in today’s urban knowledge economy. These workers believe that improving their family’s financial status involves their children becoming “officers” in technology companies. Almost all respondents who have children preferred the English education system over a vernacular medium-based education. When asked the reasons of their preference for English as the medium of instruction for their children, one interviewee, Jaspreet Kaur (female, age 28) explains,

I never got a proper education that is why I want my children to study properly, I want them to make use of their education. And this is possible only in schools where the madams teach English. The English teaching will help them to earn money and make progress in life.

Money, individual progress and new job opportunities are at the heart of my interviewees’ day-t-day life stories. Most of the time, they direct the conversation on matters associated with their private needs and interests. Occasionally, workers show less interest in conversations about issues such as the importance of trade unions, religious beliefs, spiritual values and community ties, than in their everyday financial problems. They mostly refer to their personal interests, work, family, concerns, practical matters and financial problems in relation to the information and communication world, where they work and socialize.

While it could be argued that these labourers are too embedded in the values of individualism and self-interest, the underlying reasons are not so simple. The survey respondents were mostly interested in conversations that revolve around material, immediate needs. Some spoke about their family lives and spousal relationships, which are quite personal conversations to have with relative strangers. Even some married female informants complain about the discriminating behaviours of their in-laws, one of the reasons they do not wish to return to their ancestral villages.

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63 Female school teachers.
Perhaps one way to explain their range of interests is reflecting on how they manage their city lives in the face of relentless demand to conform to the rules and standards of globalized urban spaces. The private interests, identities, grievances and feelings about their new work and lives constitute a large part of their individual subjectivity wherein the material “needs, new needs, and human reproduction” (Williams, 1977, 29) in cities is overbearing. Behind those narratives of individual stories are also occasional struggles that workers face in connecting their past with the uncertain present and future. The globalized informational world has presented a fractured world in which modern individual ideas and the desire for new fashions, consumer goods, brands, smartphones, laptops, shopping malls, etc. actively create new meanings that are antithetical to – or at least questioning of – traditional values and beliefs. This reveals the contradictions between the inner code, which is hierarchical and patriarchal in nature, and the individuation process of modernity.

When asked if he believes in a caste system, Aloknath (male, age 52) who guards a private bank’s ATM facility at one of Gurgaon’s cyber parks, replies yes:

Interviewer: You’re a Kshatriya,\(^{64}\) correct?
Aloknath: Yes.
Interviewer: Do you have any friends who belong to a lower caste?
Aloknath: No.
Interviewer: Do you eat with friends from a lower caste?
Aloknath: Do you mean, eating, interacting etc.? All of my friends are of the same religion and caste as me.
Interviewer: What will you do if your children marry somebody who is from a different religion or caste? Will that upset you?
Aloknath: Well, um…I’m sure that they won’t do that without my permission. Both of the children have been taught to respect their parents and to listen to them. They won’t take a step like that without assent from the elders. Sir, values are learnt from the parents. The values that people have in the villages is different from the values which people have in the cities. The children’s actions will be guided by which values they choose to follow.

\(^{64}\) Kshatriyas belong to the upper caste groups in Hindu society.
Interviewer: Do you feel that the values are changing? You’ve been in Delhi for a long time now, how have the values changed?
Aloknath: Nobody follows the caste system any more.
Interviewer: How do you know that?
Aloknath: Well, Punjabis are marrying Muslims, others are marrying people from other castes, and nobody seems to care about the caste system any more.
Interviewer: People of different castes dine together too.
Aloknath: Well, when they don’t have a problem with marrying outside their caste then dining with people from other castes shouldn’t come as a surprise.

Despite his disapproval of modern city culture and its apparent failure to align with traditional values taught in the peripheries, Aloknath has to live and work in Delhi otherwise he would not be able to provide a quality education for his children as he says, “The schools in villages aren’t able to impart quality education. The teachers there are incompetent. It is the same with the government schools in the cities.” Aloknath takes pride in his caste and would be displeased if his children enter an inter-caste marriage; therefore, either Aloknath has to sacrifice his material needs and return to his village to preserve the cultural values he believes the city lacks or he must accept societal changes that may not be in tune with his value system.

Another aspect of working in the new world is the reality of informal employment amid irregular and casual employment structures. With very little state support, everyone is left to themselves for sustenance. Aloknath is aware that “This is self-centred society where no one helps me to solve my problems. I have to take care of myself and family…I am too old to hope anything better than what I am doing now.” However, Aloknath maintains hope for a better life despite the dire circumstances in which he finds himself as “…every person yearns for a better life. I haven’t seen the future, so I don’t know what the children will do but we are trying to do the needful and providing for their education.” Aloknath is convinced that he could not improve his financial condition on his own, but his children might be able to help him achieve this with a better education and improved prospects for life.
Despite his upper-caste position and his hope for a better fate for his children than his own, Aloknath has lived in the city for the last decade. When asked why he felt he had not reached the place of stability to which he aspires, he answers,

To be an industrious worker is not enough to earn good money. One has to be educated and enterprising. City life provides that opportunity which I missed out. These jobs [computer jobs] require brains, if you’re not properly educated, you won’t be able to do them. It takes brains to operate and work on computer.

Aloknath is an individual who owns his failure – the reason he has not been able to capitalize on advantages of urban life is his lack of sufficient education. At the same time, he complains that those around him did not help him navigate difficulties. Based on traditional ideas, Aloknath expects a more communitarian approach whereby community members extend their helping hand to compatriots in times of difficulty, but he also acknowledges and accepts the ideology of individualism in modern capitalist society. This dichotomy has an important ramification in a space where the individual as a subject or agency means the construction of the self “as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor a part of a larger social whole, but an owner of himself” (Macpherson 1988, 3). My current research may challenge Macpherson´s theory of possessive individualism – that is, that workers have come to see themselves only as individual entities moved by the mantra that “all depends on me” or the ideology of individualization of social problems. The survey demonstrated that, while their lives are mostly centred on individual desires to gain foothold in the competitive urban capitalist economy, there is also the visible pain of isolation from their respective communities. Most of the time, they expressed this sadness when talking about their financial conditions as assuming sole responsibility of survival with no support from the community is an overwhelming burden that is difficult to accept. There are elements of possessive individualism among support-service workers in India’s IT industry as far as managing their individual lives or appreciating more freedom in the cities compared with village life, but they also expressed dissatisfaction with the alienating conditions which leave them alone to deal with the financial and social stresses of survival.
The principal contradiction here is, while social and economic relations based on individualism and individualistic identities shape workers’ everyday lives – including choices about their needs and desires – their low wages and benefits do not build the financial capacity to fulfill any current or future goals. There is always a wide divergence between the dream and its realization, which breeds resentment against the working conditions they face on a daily basis. Satish Chauhan (male, age 32) is a security guard from New Delhi. Satish works with 10 other security guards to manage security for a software company. His gruff voice could not hide his anger toward his current condition as he says, “I don’t think I deserve this kind of job where it is even difficult to support my family after 12 hours of work every day. There is no help from the ‘sarkar.’ We have to manage everything by ourselves.” After working for nearly two years for an outsourced security solutions company, Satish has a monthly salary of Rs 10,000 (CAD 200) that can only cover the cost of his food and basic necessities in New Delhi, an expensive city. When asked why Satish continues to work in Delhi, despite these shattering realities, he asks, “Where will I go? Everywhere we have to work long hours for this money.”

This frustration about the widening gap between precarious life and the longing for a more sustainable life is echoed in the majority of these interviews. Rishang Singh (male, age 24), a soccer player who left his home in Imphal, the capital of Manipur in northeastern India bordering China to pursue his big-city dreams, seems to share Satish’s disappointment and helplessness. Rishang ended up becoming security personnel for a software firm in Pune, a job for which he is paid CAD 150. He shares his fears that he will never attain the lifestyle that software engineers enjoy and reminisces about his days playing soccer in the village:

…I was such a good player, I was making a name for myself and then I was forced to leave it abruptly. It is a depressing thing, isn’t it? I was in the local newspaper. Yes, in Sangai Express. I had scored two goals in a match. I have saved the clipping. I had it laminated and have kept it at home. I’ll show it to my son and tell him to achieve what I couldn’t.

---

65 In Hindi, “sarkar” means government.
Then, Rishang was silent for the next few minutes. He decided to migrate to find job prospects to help provide financial assistance to his family. I met Rishang outside his company’s gate before the start of the night shift. The company cars were lining up outside campus to drop off the well-dressed software developers. For a moment, his eyes focused on one developer who was wearing a Ralph Lauren t-shirt. Without shifting his eyes, he says, “My Lacoste [shirt] is fake, bought a week back from a nearby shop.” Attempting to return to the survey, Rishang believes that the government should step in to raise salaries for workers like himself, arguing that “These companies earn so much, why can’t they give us some extra money. Also the government should regularly check whether the companies are giving the benefits as required by the laws.”

For support-service workers, the desire for assistance derives from their experience with the traditional cultural system wherein the bonds among community members create solidarity and togetherness. In the Indian traditional culture, however, this unity is always fractured by vertical divisions as communities are organized along the lines of religion, ethnicity, caste and language. Patriarchy and hierarchy also have their own distinctive places within particular identities. The cities also witness these divisions and subdivisions, which continue to operate regardless of geographical boundary; Aloknath’s interview is a case in point. Still, the old customs, beliefs, values and norms are not directly transferred to the individual, but are continuously mediated through an individual’s demands to survive in a competitive global economy.

How does this mediation take place? Kamal Hasan’s story comes to mind. Kamal Hasan (male, 32) migrated from an unnamed rural hamlet in the state of Karnataka to Bangalore in order to work as a security guard. To supplement his insufficient income of Rs 6,000 (CAD 120), his wife decided to join the housekeeping staff at a nearby software company. During her tenure,

My wife decided to join the union when it was confronting the owner for some extra money as overtime pay. I told her not to be an active member as that would mean less time at home. Don’t think I don’t help her in her household work. Yes, I help her in fetching water, getting vegetables and groceries from market that’s all.
When asked if he believes that Indian society discriminates against women, he lays bare the ambiguous nature of his journey from a traditional village to a modern, upscale metropolis:

“I don’t think so, everyone has their own problems. Man also struggle so much to take care of the family same as a woman, but as far as freedom is concerned, yes, a man has much more than a woman but it is not discrimination. We are following it from ages ago.” He is aware of gender equality, but Kamal Hasan sees this issue through the lens of his traditional Hindu patriarchal culture. Their family needs money to survive, so he cannot oppose his wife’s decision to have a job even if he disagrees in principle; however, he did not encourage her to join the union as that would mean less time for her at home. Here, the conflict between the need for capital as well as the desire to maintain the traditional roles of women as housekeepers were negotiated through a pragmatic arrangement. This is an example of how workers’ consciousness, which is informed by pre-capitalist community consciousness and fragmented by primordial identities, may have a limited impact on their ability to address the frustrations and discontent inherent in their sub-optimal working conditions.

The interviews reveal that workers are immersed in conflicts and negotiations with their contractors, managers, the state and a host of adversaries, who stand against their desire for a decent life. One wonders, if that is happening – which respondents did corroborate – why they did not raise the issue of unionization in the workplace as a tool to address their dissatisfaction. In many cases, support-service workers were not too keen on taking up initiatives to build a union in the workplace or even take on the challenges of everyday union activities. Most who work in a unionized environment (less than 4% of the sample) are passive participants, except in situations of gross violation of contracts, such as non-payment of wages and job termination. Here, too, workers typically abide by decisions made by their leaders, who are largely professional union activists designated by provincial union bodies. The final results may not be in workers’ best interests, but outcomes are rarely contested in any case.

One reason for the absence of working-class solidarity in the form of unions is structural, namely low unionization rates, established unions having smaller footprint in the informal sector and so on as the previous chapter on “Individuality and Social Relations in Capitalist Modernity” elucidated. Many workers are also like Moinuddin, Zakir, Dinesh, Chandra and
Hema, who are not part of a union, but wish to be if the opportunity arises. Dinesh, who drives Dell Corporation employees between their homes and offices in Hyderabad, says,

Trade union is something every kind of employee should have. It gives you identity and support in need. But we do not have a trade union. As an outsourced worker it is difficult to develop a union as I don’t know how long I will be here.

Satish’s understanding of a union’s purpose provides a contrasting view to Dinesh’s:

My friends and I are not happy with the wages and we talk lot about it but then we go back home and start preparing food. After all I have to take care of myself and my family. We don’t have a union here and I don’t think a union can do much. All political parties are same. We will lose our jobs if we show our disagreement with the employer’s policies. They [the union leaders] will do nothing and will go away.

The survey reflects this jagged consciousness about class, solidarity and action. Some workers expect to solve their precarious labour conditions by leaving their jobs and returning to their village to start a new business while some others believe that forming the union to build up labour struggle and resistance could challenge business owners.

Is this something incongruous that while the everyday experience is one of exploitation and suffering under vulnerable employment conditions, the workers can’t perceive their bleak social existence through the prism of class relations? The optics of the struggle remain centred on the individual, although these workers do experience friendship, love and concern for their fellow workers, roommates and colleagues. Nevertheless, support-service workers do not perceive the management of the present and planning for the future through the lens of collective effort and class solidarity; rather, they view these issues as resolvable via individual initiatives. The consciousness of participating in a workers’ collective to improve their work and living conditions in order to enhance their bargaining power against the owners’ managerial machinations is painfully remiss.

In my survey research, “immediate experiences” do not necessarily create disobedient subjects. Temporal moments may lead to episodic outbreaks of ill feeling which prompted respondents’ expressions during their interviews, but this seldom represents their desire to
take control of their life. Their action is based on contingency, thrust upon them by global capital and mediated by technology. Actions may be taken in denial, but many are also taken in affirmation. This is the abstraction brought on by the logic of “Aufhebung” (i.e., “the act of superseding” whereby “denial and preservation, i.e., affirmation are bound together” (Guha 2002, 2). Support-service workers in India’s IT industry are not denying everything that capital has brought to their lives, but it is difficult for them to affirm how beneficial capital – and the technology that drives it – has been in their lives. In a static sense, action may not always take the form of class, collective actions but “old memories, personal enmities, fears and hopes, prejudices and illusions, sympathies and antipathies, convictions, articles of faith and principles” (Marx 1852) could constitute class subjectivity amid the everyday experience of contentious negotiation with employers.

Debashish Das (male, age 24), a housekeeper for an IT firm in Calcutta, mentions that, in terms of his future in his current role,

Look, in India, it can be said that labour is available at the cheapest rates. In that context it may be said that the people who are at the top (software managers) will always get higher salary. No matter how hard you work or toil in the sun, your salary is always bound to be less than theirs. Thus, it can be seen that brains brings you more money and honest labour and hard work does not always reap the necessary economic benefits.

The history these workers have inherited may not simply be a blend of traditional, cultural or modern influence, but the history of class struggle and the onerous task of shattering old, accepted ideas about societal categories and the disadvantages that have historically plagued those who occupy lower ranks. Perhaps Debashish’s brand of dissatisfaction, shared by many others like him, is a prelude to the formation of a new class-based community, which will fight for their own version of equality, justice and collectivism.

--------------------------------------------
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Das Keshab and Hastimal Sagara. “State and the IT Industry in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* LII, no. 41, (2017): 56-64


Dijk Van Jan AGM. “The one dimensional network society of Maniel Castells.” *new media & society* 1, no. 1(1999), 127


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Appendix A: Questionnaire for Support Service Workers

City:__________________ Date:______________ Code #:________________

Demographic Information

Name: ____________________________ Date of Birth:_________

Gender: M  F  Other:__________  Religion: ____________________________

Current Marital Status: ________________  Caste:________________________

Age when Married (if applicable):________  Mother tongue: _________________

Literacy / Illiterate (circle one)  Languages spoken: ________________

Migrant / Non-Migrant (circle one)  Current Job Title: __________________

Home Town (if applicable):_______________  Job Income: ________________

Present Address:__________________________  Family Income: ________________
Family History

How would you describe your family background in terms of occupational category?

- Landless peasant: □
- Peasant: □
- Rich farmer: □
- Working class: □
- White collar: □
- Business (Large or small): □
- Other (describe): ____________________________

What is your family background in terms of annual income?
Rs 10,000 or less: ☐

Rs 10,001-15,000: ☐

Rs 15,001-20,000: ☐

Rs 20,001-58,320: ☐

Above Rs 58,320: ☐

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

None: ☐

1-2: ☐

3-5: ☐

More than 5: ☐
What is the highest level of education attained by your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary:</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary:</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-secondary:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Diploma:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List the cities, towns, and villages in which you have lived and/or worked

____________________________________  ______________________________________
____________________________________  ______________________________________
____________________________________  ______________________________________
____________________________________  ______________________________________
____________________________________  ______________________________________
____________________________________  ______________________________________
How long have you lived in your current location? ___________________________
Current Household

If you have a spouse, what are her/his profession, income, and highest level of education?
___________________________________________________________________

If you have children, what is their current educational level?
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

How many family members currently live in your household? _________

List their relation to you (mother, uncle, sister, etc.), employment status, and occupation, if applicable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Employed?</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y / N</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Y / N</td>
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<td>Y / N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y / N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y / N</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y / N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you provide financial support for family members who do not live in your household? Y / N
**Education**

What is the highest level of education you have attained?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>In progress</th>
<th>Unfinished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-secondary:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate/Diploma:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who paid for your education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Other (describe)</th>
<th>All of them</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What is the greatest challenge you faced in pursuing your education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Money</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Other (describe)</th>
<th>None</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training

Have you obtained any specialized job training to get your current job?  Y / N

If you answered ‘Yes’, please complete the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>In progress</th>
<th>Unfinished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical / Trade-Related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who paid for your extra course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Other (describe)</th>
<th>All of them</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the most significant barrier you faced in pursuing job training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Money</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Other (describe)</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Everyday Living

Housing:

Type of residence (shack, concrete, semi-concrete, etc.):__________________________

Number of rooms: __________

Rent or Own? (select one)

If rented, what is your monthly rent? __________

Electricity? Y / N

Indoor plumbing? Y / N

Clean drinking water? Y / N

Sewers: Open □  Concealed □

What type of health care services do you have access to?

Public:        □

Private:       □

Both:          □
Other (describe): ____________________________

Do you and/or your family have health insurance? Y / N

If yes, how much is paid monthly? ________________

Transportation:

Distance from workplace: _____________

Mode of transportation to work: ________________

Average monthly transportation cost: ________________

Media:

Describe your major sources of news and entertainment media (newspaper, TV, etc.):

______________________________________________________________

Do you have a mobile phone? Y / N

If yes, do you have data service? Y / N

Do you have a personal computer (PC, laptop, tablet)? Y / N
If yes, do you have internet access?  Y / N

Entertainment: Describe the types of entertainment activities you engage in most often (movie theatre, restaurants, sporting events, etc.):

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Organizations: Are you a member of any of the following types of group?

Trade union:  Y / N

Political party:  Y / N

Religious group:  Y / N

Caste group:  Y / N

Sports team:  Y / N

Other (describe): ______________________________________________________
### Personal Finance

What kinds of assets do you and your family own?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(TV, refrigerator, washing machine, etc.):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land (area in acres):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle (Bicycle, motorbike, car, etc.):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares, mutual funds, etc.:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (describe):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who owns the assets listed above?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Joint</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Other (describe)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Other financial support:

Do you receive any form of government financial assistance? Y / N

If yes, what type (BPL, APL, income supplement, etc.)? ____________________________

If not, why? ____________________________

Do you receive assistance from any non-governmental groups? Y / N

If yes, please describe: ____________________________

**Employment**

When did you begin working to earn your living?

Before the age of 18:  □
18 years of age or later: □

List your previous occupations:

________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________

Current Job:

Company Name: ____________________________

Nature of Job: ____________________________

Date job began: ____________________________

Wages and Benefits: ____________________________

Average weekly hours: ____________________________

Working conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Worst</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hours of work:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job security:</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer treatment:</td>
<td>□</td>
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</table>

Overall, on a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your current job?

(1= best, 5=worst job ever):_____

Are you currently looking for new job opportunities?  Y / N

If yes, what type of job are you looking for? ____________________________

Besides your regular job, do you have any part-time work?  Y / N

If yes, please describe the work: ____________________________________

**Previous Jobs:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Company or self-employed</th>
<th>Nature of Job</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Wages and Benefits</th>
<th>Average hours worked per day</th>
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<tbody>
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Appendix B: Ethics Approval

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Full Board Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nicholas Dyer-Witheford

Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies/Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University

NMREB File Number: 105209

Study Title: Digital Capitalism and the Informal Economy – The Case of Support Service Workers in the Indian IT sector

Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: June 04, 2014

NMREB Expiry Date: September 30, 2015

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<td>2014/05/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Quantitative Questionnaire Revised</td>
<td>2014/05/110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of Information &amp; Consent</td>
<td>Information and Consent Letter</td>
<td>2014/05/26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.
Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRS registration number IRS 0000941.

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your file.
Appendix C: Ethics

General Info

FileNo: 105209

Title: Digital Capitalism and the Informal Economy – The Case of Support Service Workers in the Indian IT sector

Start Date: 31/03/2014

End Date: 30/09/2015

Keywords: digital labor, globalisation, subjectivity, precarious labor, neoliberalism, capital, caste, ethnicity, religion, virtual technology

Project Members

Principal Investigator

Prefix: Dr.

Last Name: Dyer-Witfeld

First Name: Nicholas

Affiliation: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies

Rank: Professor

Gender: Unspecified

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone1: 88486

Phone2:

Fax:

Mailing Address: NCB240
Common Questions

1. Registration Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Do you confirm that you have read the above information and that based on that information you are completing the correct form?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Are you requesting delegated review? (Please see the blue &quot;i&quot; for a definition of minimal risk. Please note requesting delegated review is not a guarantee as it is determined on a case by case basis)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>If you answered yes to question 1.2 please justify why you believe your study qualifies for delegated review.</td>
<td>The quantitative and qualitative study involves people who are above 18 years of age working as support service workers in and around software technology parks in Bangalore, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Kolkata. The sample does not include any vulnerable section of the population - children or mentally challenged people,</td>
</tr>
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</table>
nor am I asking any question that would create the possibility of any kind of psychological issues. My questions are related to their daily life experiences and practices.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Please indicate the faculty you are affiliated with.</td>
<td>Information and Media Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Has this study been submitted to any other research ethics board (REB)? If yes, please include the approval letter (or relevant correspondence) as an attachment in the attachments tab.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 If YES is selected in question 1.5 above, please indicate where this project has been submitted and when.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Is this a sequel to previously approved research?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 If YES is selected in question 1.7 above, what is the REB number and what are the differences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Indicate the funding source for this study or if there is no funding simply indicate &quot;NONE&quot;.</td>
<td>Indo-Shastri Canadian Institute, and Hari Sharma Foundation at Simon Fraser University are providing $10,000 and $4000 respectively for the research. This money will be used for the field work in carrying out qualitative and quantitative interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Is this a student project?</td>
<td>Yes - PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11 If YES Other was selected in 1.10, please indicate what you mean by this.</td>
<td>This is part of my doctoral research in Western University, supervised by Dr. Nick Dyer Witheford. The project title is: Digital Capitalism and the Informal Economy – The Case of Support Service Workers in the Indian and Canadian IT sector. This research ethics</td>
</tr>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>Please list the names of ALL Local (Western affiliated) team members who are working on this project and their roles and responsibilities. Please see the “i” for this question for instructions on how to link their Romeo accounts to this form so they have access to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Nick Dyer Witheford - Acting Dean, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Supervisor Mr. Indranil Chakraborty, Doctoral Student. Media Studies, FIMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Lay summary of the study (approximately five lines).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The research will examine the work and culture of support service workers, who are euphemistically called facility management people, in software technology parks in India. They provide basic services, from transporting professionals, providing food, polishing glazed tiles, cleaning washrooms, and keeping campuses safe. Though there has been no dearth of study on the Indian IT industry in academic journals, monographs and industry analyses, there is a conspicuous absence of any empirical study or theoretical analysis about support service workers. The research will first address this gap in knowledge by creating an information base on the employment and life of support service workers, working in four urban areas - Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata and the National Capital Region around Delhi. Next, the project will address the theoretical issue of association between the digital world and the informal economy, a world comprised of both high skilled, well paid workers, and low-skilled impoverished workers. The research will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Submission | The submission is for the first part of the project- fieldwork in India. The second part will be the field work in three Canadian cities - Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge. For the second part I will submit a separate research ethics proposal. |

173
examine the debate as to whether segmentation of skilled and unskilled labor force is just a passing phase of digital capitalism in the age of globalization, or whether this feature of work and inequality are part and parcel of the structure of digital capitalism?

After the field work is completed, I will write a dissertation research paper based on the findings. I will return to India and speak with a representative sample of my interviewees to inform them of my findings. This will help me to revise my understanding based on their feedback about the results.

If this form was started by a team member, has the role of Principal Investigator been changed to the Faculty member who will hold this role for the study? This is required for review of your submission, and any forms submitted without this change being made will be returned without being reviewed. (The blue information “i” has the instructions on how to change the role of PI.)

Yes

2. Methodology

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<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Outline the study rationale, including relevant background information and justification. Cite references where appropriate.</td>
<td>The research is about the life and working conditions of janitors, security guards, fast food workers and car pool drivers -the support service, or ‘facility management’ people- who maintain the Indian software technology parks. The Flat world of Thomas Friedman (Friedman, 2005) has brought these workers from different parts of India – rural and semi-urban centers – in search of semi- and unskilled jobs. This will be part of a larger research project I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Please provide a clear statement of the purpose and objectives of this project.</td>
<td></td>
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| | doing at Western University, on the making of the support service workers in digital capitalism in four Indian urban spaces – Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad and Kolkata, and in a Canadian Information Technology (IT) zone – Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge. The doctoral research will examine the meaning of a globalized world mediated by high technology capitalism, comparing the labor experiences of support service workers across the two spatial zones of the global digital hub. |

| | Earlier, while doing the research on “Digital Capitalism and the Making of a Two Tier Labor System: The Case of Bangalore,” (submitted as a case study to Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. I found that there is a lack of basic information about support service workers. There is a paucity of data dealing with the working conditions and social life of these workers. Their numbers could be as big as one million, compared with the number of Indian software professionals pegged at 2.80 million according to official sources in The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), the Indian IT industry body. Objectives: 1) To create a database about the social and economic characteristics of support service workers who maintain the facilities of companies located in software technology parks; 2) To gather information about the outsourced companies/agencies that employ support service workers. 3) To analyze the demographics and employment data of support service workers with regards to age, gender, caste, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic factors, in order to understand the nature of their precariousness in digital workplaces in relation to the professional and highly skilled work force in the IT |

175
4) To understand the workings of high technology capitalism in relation to the creation of an informal economy that has helped the Indian software industry become globally competitive.

According to the NASSCOMM officials I met in my previous visit to India, there is no credible data about the population size of the support service workers. In this situation my method will be to select the number of interviewees in each of the cities based on 1) the number of software technology parks operating in each cities; and 2) a representative sample based on gender and age. The gender proportion of my sample will follow the World Bank report (http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FM.ZS) on male-female proportion in the Indian work force. The age stratification is based on the Indian census. According to 2011 Indian census, 65% of the Indian population is aged 35 years or less. The two Indian areas with the largest concentration of software technology parks are Bangalore and Delhi. Besides these two cities I will choose two other cities - Hyderabad and Kolkata. In terms of number of software technology parks, Hyderabad is considered as a mid-ranked city, and Kolkata has a small base of IT parks. From each of the two big cities I will choose 25 support service workers; 20 from Hyderabad and 10 from Kolkata. The proportions are based on the number of software parks located in these cities. To survey I will visit places where the support service workers assemble like in union meetings, tea stalls, pubs and community hangout zones. These are the places where the male workers congregate after their work day. However, these are not places where women workers normally go for entertainment and 2.3 Describe the study design/methodology and attach all supporting documents in the attachment tab.
relaxation. To obtain the sample of female workers, I will go to their residences accompanied by a female research assistant. Data collection will be conducted through a short-form quantitative questionnaire and a subsequent in-depth open ended interview. The quantitative questionnaire will obtain information about demographics, family, living conditions, and employment. In the second stage, the questions in the interview will vary according to the social and economic characteristics of the interviewee as revealed in the quantitative questionnaire. This interview will shed insight on quality of life, based on social categories (gender and age) in relation to living conditions and cultural practices.

<p>| 2.4 | If your submission deals with groups such as aboriginal peoples, or isolated communities, or work in other countries or cultures please indicate &quot;YES&quot; here and complete the Cultural Research tab of form. | No |
| 2.5 | Indicate the inclusion criteria for participant recruitment. | Any person above 18 years of age working as support service workers, including janitors, security guards, car pool drivers and fast food employees, in and around software technology parks, in Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata - will be eligible to participate. |
| 2.6 | Considering your inclusion criteria listed above, what is the basis to exclude a potential participant? | 1) Support service workers who are not above the age of 18; 2) Support service workers who do not belong to the job categories - Janitor, security guard, car pool drivers and fast food employee; 3) Support service workers who belong to the above job categories but do not work in and around software technology parks. |</p>
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<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>How many participants over the age of 18 from London will be enrolled in your study? This includes hospital and university sites within London.</td>
<td>No one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>How many participants under the age of 18 from London will be enrolled in your study? This includes hospital and university sites within London.</td>
<td>No one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>How many participants over the age of 18 will be included at all study locations? (London + Other locations = Total)</td>
<td>0+80=80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>How many participants under the age of 18 will be included at all study locations? (London + Other locations = Total)</td>
<td>0+0=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Does this study include any use of deliberate deception or withholding of key information that may influence a participant's performance or response?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>If YES is selected in question 2.11 above, provide an explanation, including how participants will be debriefed and attach the debriefing script you will use in the attachments tab.</td>
<td></td>
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3. Risks and Benefits

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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>List any potential benefits to the participants.</td>
<td>There has been no study on my research participants, support service workers in the IT industry. My research will benefit the participants in terms of identifying their social and economic conditions with respect to other workers in India. This will further help them in their struggle to improve their living conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>List any potential benefits to society.</td>
<td>First, my research will benefit academics, policy analysts, government, and industry people who want to gain a better understanding of the employment practices of the Indian IT industry. One of the direct results of this research will be the creation of awareness about a sustainable public policy for the informal workers in one of the rising industries of India. The result of the field research will directly benefit trade unions, non-government organizations and social activists, helping them to come up with a reform agenda that will benefit support service workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>List any potential risks to study participants.</td>
<td>One of the important areas of my research is to inquire about the job conditions of support service workers working in the IT industry. Almost all the employees work as outsourced workers employed by small and medium companies. The employers who act as labor suppliers to the national and multinational IT companies would not see this research favorably. In different ways they might put pressure on the workers not to participate in the project. There is a risk that they can resort to various coercive methods, from verbal threats to suspension of study participants. In order to safeguard the participants, I will not involve the employers in the</td>
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</table>
3.4 List any potential inconveniences to daily activities.

1) I will interview the participants after their working hours. This might be an issue for female participants who would be busy with household chores after the end of the work day. I will take care of this problem by visiting the women workers during the weekend when they are free from their household duties. 2) The workers may not be willing to take part in the interview when they see the risk of providing information that might antagonize the employers.

4. Recruitment and Informed Consent

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>How will potential participants be contacted? Select all that apply. A copy of all recruitment tools that will be used must be included with this submission in the attachments tab.</td>
<td>In person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>If other is selected in 4.1, please explain here.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Please explain in detail how the above method(s) from 4.1 will be used to recruit participants.</td>
<td>I will contact and recruit potential participants at the public places where facilitity service workers assemble after and before work - tea and food stalls, pubs and eateries, community and public meeting places, hangout zones, transportation corridors and union meetings. My preliminary work in Bangalore demonstrated that it is easy to identify the appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
places to encounter facility service workers, and to meet and develop relationships with them in these contexts. To gain access to informants in gender-segregated sites, I will employ a female research assistant to conduct interviews. Interviews will be conducted either in a discrete section of a public area, or, if the informant prefers, at the workers residence.

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<tr>
<th>4.4</th>
<th>Which research team members will be recruiting the potential participants?</th>
<th>Indranil Chakraborty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Does the Principal Investigator have any relationship with the potential participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Does the person recruiting the participants have any relationship or hold any authority over the potential participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>If you have answered &quot;YES&quot; to either 4.4 or 4.5, please explain here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Indicate if you will be recruiting from any of the following groups specifically for this study (Select all that apply).</td>
<td>At the location research is being carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Indicate any anticipated communication difficulties (Select all that apply).</td>
<td>Individuals who may require translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>If Other was selected in 4.8, please indicate what you mean by this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>If you have selected one of the anticipated communication difficulties above in question 4.8, please describe what procedures will be used to</td>
<td>There are 22 scheduled languages listed in the Indian constitution. However, Hindi, as the official</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
address this issue (e.g., the use of translated forms, translator, impartial witness, etc.). Language, has become the 'lingua franca' for much of the population. I expect most of my research participants to be literate and able to communicate in Hindi. I know Hindi, Bengali and English. The questionnaire will be available in these three languages. Interviews will also be conducted in one of these languages. As a result, there should be no difficulty in communicating with interviewees who know any of these three languages. However, some research participants may not be familiar with any of these languages. In that case, I will ask the participant to have another person (friend, relative, etc.) whom she/he trusts and is familiar with one of these three languages. This person will act as a translator and also as an impartial witness on behalf of interviewees. If the participant can't find anybody trustworthy, I will go to the next available participant.

4.12 What method of obtaining consent will you use for participants? A copy of all forms being used for obtaining consent must be included with this submission please add to the attachments tab. Please note that templates for many of these documents can be found on our website at Assent form
| 4.13 | If you are unable to obtain consent or assent using one of the methods listed above, please explain here. (Note, this does not apply to cultural research, please see the Cultural Research tab). | When I will meet with interviewees, I will provide them with a consent form. After answering any questions they might have, and after they have signed the form, I will begin the interview. If they decline I will leave and go to the next available participant. If the interviewee is illiterate, I will ask her/him to bring anyone (friend, relative, etc.) whom she/he trusts. The trustworthy person will read the consent form and then if she/he agrees to be interviewed can put a thumb impression indicating consent. |
| 4.14 | Indicate whether participants will be compensated for their participation. For example, reimbursement for expenses incurred as a result of research, description of gifts for participation, draws and/or compensation for time. Include a justification for this compensation. | Research participants belong to an under-privileged category of people. Their life is everyday struggle for daily living based on long hours of work. Even when they are willing to share their life experience, they must be compensated for the time they are spending for this research. Each interview - the questionnaire and the unstructured interview will take 1.5 hours to complete: 30 minutes for the questionnaire, and one hour for the interview session. I will compensate each interviewee |
5. Confidentiality and Data Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>How will data without personal information be stored and protected?</td>
<td>University local hard drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>If &quot;not stored electronically&quot; was selected in 5.1 please indicate where data will be stored.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>If OFF-SITE is selected above, please explain where and what security measures are being used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Western University policy requires that you keep data for a minimum of 5 years. Please indicate if you are keeping data in accordance to this policy, otherwise please comment on how your data retention will differ from University policy and why. If you will be archiving the data, please explain why and how here.</td>
<td>I will follow data conservation policy according to Western University requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>How will electronic and paper documents as well as study data be destroyed after this period? (if applicable)</td>
<td>The electronic data will be erased and paper documents will be shredded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Are you collecting any personal information from participants?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>If you checked any of the personal information in 5.6 above, please justify this collection.</td>
<td>My research is about the lived experience of support service workers. The research questions require personal information (age, caste, gender, residence address, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
185

| 5.8 | If you checked any of the personal information in 5.6, please indicate where these identifiers will be collected. Please note that no identifiers can be collected or stored with the data. Identifiers should be stored on a master list separate from the data and linked only with a unique ID |
| 5.9 | If YES is selected in question 5.6 above, which personal information is being collected? (select all that apply) |
| 5.10 | Please list any agencies/groups/persons outside of your local research team who may have access to any participant's personal information and indicate why such access is required. |
| 5.11 | Describe any coding system used to protect personal information or explain why the data must remain identifiable. |

of the participants as this information is closely connected to the way they live their life, which is one of the principal research questions.

Personal identifiers will be collected on the first page of the questionnaire and this page will be separated from the main questionnaire once the interview is complete. A code will be generated in the questionnaire, corresponding to the respondent's name and city of interview, which will only identify the person. The interviewer will also read out the code at the start of the audio recording of the unstructured qualitative interview.

Full name|Initials|Address|Full postal code|Telephone number|Email|Date of birth

No one will have access to the personal information except myself and the principal investigator.

The coding system of the questionnaire and interview will be comprise of a two-letter code - First letter of the name and first letter of the City and year of birth. For example if the interviewee's name is Gautam, city is Bangalore and date of birth is 1969. The code will be GB69. After each interview, the demographic information will be separated from the main questionnaire. A code will be generated in the main questionnaire which will correspond to the demographic part. In case of the interviews, the audio recording will
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>How will the master list, signed original consent forms or other data with personal information be stored and protected?</td>
<td>Paper file (Required protection: Locked cabinet in locked institutional office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>If OTHER is selected in question 5.12 above, please describe.</td>
<td>The master file of the questionnaire data will be stored in FIMS locked cabinet belonging to Prof. Nick Dyer Witheford. For digital recording, I will use the DS-7000 Professional Dictation System from Olympus which has device password protection and 256-bit file encryption. The recorder will also be kept in FIMS locked cabinet belonging to Prof. Witheford.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>Does this study require you to send any of the information listed in 5.7 outside of the institution where it is collected? This includes data taken off-site from the site it is initially collected for analysis. If yes, a data transfer agreement may be necessary.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>If you answered &quot;YES&quot; to 5.14, provide details as to where and how data will be transmitted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>How will study data be recorded?</td>
<td>Data collection form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>If you checked Audio Recording in question 5.16 can participants take part in the study if they do not wish to be audio recorded? This information must be included in your Letter of Information.</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>
If OTHER is selected in question 5.16 above, please describe.

6. Cultural Research

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Indicate which of the following special considerations should be acknowledged when reviewing the ethical standards of your research.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Address how the work will be dealt with and what approvals have been or will be sought from the community.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Address how you will obtain consent from the group you are working with, if written consent cannot be obtained.</td>
<td></td>
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7. Confirmation of Responsibility

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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>As the Principal Investigator I have read the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 and Western University's Guidelines on Non-Medical Research involving Human Subjects and agree to abide by the guidelines therein: <a href="http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/non-medical/guidelines.html">http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/non-medical/guidelines.html</a>;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>I attest that all Collaborators working on this Research Study (co-investigators, students, post-docs, etc.) have reviewed the protocol contents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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and are in agreement with the protocol as submitted;

| 7.3 | All Collaborators have read the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 and Western University's Guidelines on Non-Medical Research involving Human Subjects and agree to abide by the guidelines therein; | Yes |

| 7.4 | The Collaborators and I will adhere to the Protocol and Letter(s) of Information as approved by the REB; | Yes |

| 7.5 | Should I encounter any changes or adverse events/experiences, I will notify the REB of in a timely manner; and | Yes |

| 7.6 | If the Research Study is funded by an external sponsor, I will not begin the Research Study until the contract/agreement has been approved by the appropriate university, hospital, or research institute official; | Yes |

| 7.7 | Have you exported a copy of this submission to Word using the "Export to Word" button? Note that you will be unable to submit future revisions if this is not done. | Yes |

| 7.8 | Have you uploaded the following documents, if applicable, to the attachments tab? If you are unsure of what documents are needed with your submission please contact our office before submitting to clarify. Incomplete submissions will be returned without being reviewed. | Letter(s) of Information and Consent Documentation|Other |
8. Confirmation of Responsibility - Student

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<td>8.1</td>
<td>Is this a student project?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>As the Student I have read the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 and Western University's Guidelines on Non-Medical Research involving Human Subjects and agree to abide by the guidelines therein: <a href="http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/non-medical/guidelines.html">http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/non-medical/guidelines.html</a>;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>I will adhere to the Protocol and Letter(s) of Information as approved by the REB;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>I will notify the Principal Investigator as soon as possible if there are any changes or adverse events/experiences, violations/deviations in regards to the Research Study;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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**Attachments**

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<th>Description</th>
<th>File Name</th>
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<td>105209 Dyer-Witheford.pdf</td>
<td>02/05/2014</td>
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Curriculum Vitae

Indranil Chakraborty

Education

Doctoral Student (ABD), Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario (UWO)

Thesis – *Invisible Labour: Support-Service Workers in India’s Information Technology Industry.*

Ph.D. courses completed: 1) Interdisciplinary Foundations of Media Theory; 2) Advanced Statistics – Univariate Analysis (Ivey Business School); 3) Advanced Statistics - Multivariate analysis (Ivey Business School); 4) Genocide and Nation-States; 5) Advanced Research Methods- Qualitative; and 6) Information Society and its Promises of Development.

M.A., School of Communication, Simon Fraser University (SFU), 2011.


M.A. courses completed: 1) Political Economy of Communication; 2) Dialogue and Negotiations; 3) Contemporary Approaches to Communications Study; 4) Research Methods in Communication Research; and 5) Selected Topics in Communication Studies

M.A., Modern History, Jadavpur University, India, 1995

B.A. (Hon), History, University of Calcutta, India, 1991

Awards

1) Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, Shastri Research Grant 2014 for PhD Thesis, $10,000.
2) Hari Sharma Foundation (SFU), Research award 2014 for PhD. field work, $4000.

3) Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute -“Student Excellence Award” 2012.

4) Entrance Scholarship $2000, UWO, Fall 2011.


6) Travel Fellowship to Rwanda for the Genocide Course $2000, UWO, Winter 2012.

7) Graduate Fellowship $ 6250, SFU, Summer 2010.

8) Travel Fellowship $ 500, SFU, 2010.

Research Experience

1) Research Assistant to Johanna Weststar (Assistant Professor, Management and Organisational Studies):
Qualitative and Quantitative Analyses quality of life issues (working conditions, work-life balance, etc.) in the video game industry. Research funded by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), April 2014- present.
   a) Qualtrics Survey Program to develop and distribute the questionnaire;
   b) SPSS software program for coding and data analysis.

2) Research Assistant to Ravindran Vaitheespara, (Associate Professor, History, University of Manitoba):


Labour and Student Union Experience

A) President, PSAC Local 610 (Teaching Assistant and Post Doc Union), 2015-2016
   • Chief administrator and spokesperson for the Local;
   • Responsible for member grievances on labor relations issues;
   • Responsible for contacts with the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, University Senate, and Board of Governors;
   • Ensure the smooth operation of the Local;
   • Supervise all officers, including meeting with all elected officials twice every month;
   • Member of the bargaining and negotiation team;
   • Local’s chief delegate for the PSAC national convention.

Accomplishment:
1) Formed the main bargaining demands in consultation with the leading members of the union.
2) Created the bargaining and negotiation team in consultation with the past president.
3) Mobilization of the academic workers in favor of the bargaining demands
4) An effective communication strategy that include campaigning for TA rights on provincial and campus newspapers, engaging community members in support of the student demands and
5) Successfully concluded a collective agreement with sizeable increase in financial assistance program, child subsidy, extended health plan and food bank allocation
6) Helped PSAC to organise a voting campaign for the unionisation of the postdoc fellows

**B) Vice President, Finance, Society of Graduate Students (SOGS), 2013-2015**

- a) The Chief Financial Officer of the Society;
- b) Met regularly with the Account Manager and the Chartered Accountant;
- c) Administered the payment of all debts incurred by the Society during the course of the Society’s fiscal year;
- d) Assisted the Grad Club Manager in preparing annual budget for the Grad Club;
- e) Responsible for submitting changes to the Society’s fees to the University administration;
- f) To oversee the preparation of an annual review of engagement or audit of the Society’s finances, in accordance with the requirement set by the Campus and Community Affairs Committee of the Board of Governors

Accomplishment:

1) Balanced budget at the end of my 2 year term without cutting benefits and welfare of the students but through rationalisation of administrative expenses
2) Increase in budgetary allocation for attending conferences from $32,000 to $65,000
3) Increase in Child care subsidy
4) Made Grad Club sustainable through better management of resources

**Media and Journalism**

1) Twelve years’ experience in political and business journalism in India and Bangladesh; reported on information technology, communications and public policy beats:

   a) Assistant Editor for *The Indian Express* and *The Financial Express*, two of India’s leading national newspapers (2000 -2008)

   b) Senior Correspondent in the information and technology magazines, *Dataquest* and *PC Quest* (1996 -2000)

**Academic Work Experience**
a) Graduate Teaching Assistant, UWO - 2011-2015.
b) Marker, Brandon University -2011.
c) Graduate Teaching Assistant, SFU -2009-2010.

Publications


Conferences and Seminars

a) PSAC local 610 representative for Ontario Federation of Labor (OFL), Toronto convention – Oct 2015.

b) PSAC Ontario DCL Conference - Sault Ste Marie - Oct 2015

c) 33rd Annual General meeting, CFS - Ottawa, Oct 2014

d) 65th Semi Annual general meeting, CFS, Ontario – Ottawa Gatineau, June 2014

e) National Graduate Caucus - Annual General Meeting CFS, Ottawa, Feb 2013

f) ‘The Universe of Underclass in the Flat World of Information, Communication and Technology’ presented at the Simon Fraser University Graduate Student Conference, School of Communications, Feb, 2015

g) ‘The Universe of Underclass in the Flat World of Information, Communication and Technology’ presented at International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), July, 2015

h) ‘The Underbelly of the Indian IT Sector: An Ethnographic Analysis’ presented at the Inaugural Conference on Cultural Political Economy, Lancaster University, Cultural Political Economy Research Centre, September, 2015, Lancaster, UK