

Super-exploitation of Adivasi Migrant Workers: The Political Economy of Migration from Southern Rajasthan to Gujarat

Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics

31(1) 63–99, 2019

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DOI: 10.1177/0260107918776569

<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jie>

Priyanka Jain¹
Amrita Sharma²

Abstract

This article offers a political economy account of labour migration of Adivasi workers from southern Rajasthan to growth centres in Gujarat. It unpacks the structural forces that shape this labour mobility, which erupted only as recently as 30 years back. The article focuses on three industries that are key employers of migrant workers—construction, textile as well as small hotels and restaurants in the Gujarati cities of Ahmedabad and Surat. It presents evidence on labour market segmentation and resulting unequal wage distribution between migrants in this corridor by their social group. This is complemented by an extensive mapping of the informal practices that violate applicable legal provisions found in these industry segments. Through these, the article teases out the mechanisms by which the community undergoes what in Marxian terms are referred to as *surplus extraction* and *super-exploitation*. The article finds that Gujarat's economy utilizes the historically low socio-economic position of Adivasis for capitalist accumulation, such that the community's poverty and disadvantaged position is reproduced inter-generationally, instead of being interrupted by their employment in the growth centres of the state.

JEL: O15, J61, N35

Keywords

Migration, Adivasi, political economy, capitalist accumulation, super-exploitation, labour market segmentation

¹ Programme Manager, Research and Knowledge, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions (CMLS), Aajeevika Bureau, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.

² Director, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions (CMLS), Aajeevika Bureau, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.

Corresponding author:

Priyanka Jain, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions (CMLS), Aajeevika Bureau, 39 Krishna Colony, Bedla Road, Udaipur 313004, Rajasthan, India.

E-mail: priyanka.jain@ajeevika.org

Introduction

As internal migration gains policy attention in India and becomes increasingly connected to development concerns, greater emphasis is being placed on its economic potential. The magnitude and impact of remittances received by a community has been a popular entry point into the issue of migration, connected to an imagination of households migrating out of poverty. One of the aching gaps in such a remittance discourse is that its analyses of migration as a form of livelihood are narrowly focused on cash gained. Inadequate attention is paid to labour processes or to the historical trajectory or socio-economic relations of the particular migrant community under discussion. These factors are key because they play a significant role in determining the implications of migration for the community that undertakes it, especially on the poverty experienced by it (Mosse, 2007; National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector [NCEUS], 2007). The imperative for disaggregate analyses, embedded in socio-historical terms, emerges from the very nature of India's labour market, which the International Labour Organization (2013, p. 1) describes as 'one of the most variegated', functioning through separate submarkets or segments, each with its distinct norms and characteristics. One of the key axes of this labour market segmentation is social identity (caste, tribe and religion). A great deal of agreement exists between a group of prominent economists and anthropologists, such as Rodgers and Soundararajan (2016), Papola (2012), authors of the NCEUS report (2007), Breman (2013) as well as Shah and Lerche (2018), that such segmentation is a reflection of labour market inequality. This inequality manifests in a way that social groups with historically low positions find themselves in the most disadvantageous locations in the labour market, which is structured to pose high barriers to their access to better segments of work, which in turn are dominated by groups higher in the social order. They argue that for historically disadvantaged communities in the country, this inequality functions more in terms of unequal access to work than wage differentials for similar work (as is common in the case of male and female workers).

Among all social groups in India, Adivasis¹ or Scheduled Tribes (STs) fall in the bottom most rung within the diverse world of labour, along with Dalits² or Scheduled Caste (SCs) migrant workers and child and bonded labourers. They also form a disproportionately large percentage of migrant workers in the country, much above their overall share of population (NCEUS, 2007). Using the Marxian analytical category, Shah and Lerche (2018, p. 19) have called Adivasi migrant workers the super-exploited within India's capitalist economy, their vulnerability compounded by their low social position. Our article focuses on workers from southern Rajasthan that occupy this intersection of being Adivasi and migrant. Over 400,000 ST workers seasonally migrate from this region to the labour markets in Gujarat for casual, manual work every year (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014). The article investigates the experiences of this community in light of the national trend of Adivasis falling at the 'bottom of the heap' and attempts to demystify the processes that arguably make them super-exploitable (Breman, 2013, p. 95; Shah & Lerche, 2018, p. 19). Through this, the article seeks to contribute to the

aforementioned body of work centred on the relationships among social identity, labour markets, inequality and poverty, an area that Thorat (2008) argues has been understudied in mainstream discourse on migration.

The evidence used in the article draws from the following data sources: (a) secondary literature, including (i) studies conducted by Aajeevika Bureau³ over the period of 2007–2017, on various aspects of labour migration from the region, in particular their state migration profile (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014) that studied over 38,800 households from Rajasthan,⁴ of which over 5,500 were from southern Rajasthan (including 3,600 Adivasi households from the region), and (ii) other past studies conducted in the region and (b) primary data, including (i) narrative accounts of Adivasi migrant experiences captured in the period from August 2017 to January 2018, (ii) primary analysis of data collected for Aajeevika Bureau's (2014) state migration profile, as well as (ii) estimates developed using the organization's programmatic database, drawing insights from its presence in Western India for the last decade. This evidence has been interpreted to demystify the processes that create, sustain and transform the distribution of power and resources between Adivasi labour migrants and other social groups that are key actors in this migration corridor.

The second chapter presents a conceptual frame of three inter-related processes that lead to the super-exploitation of Adivasi migrant labour (as highlighted in literature): (a) the emergence of a pool of impoverished Adivasi labour force, made super-exploitable through a history of dispossession and subjugation, (b) its continuity in contemporary economy where their vulnerability is actively used by the industry for extreme surplus extraction and (c) the abdication of the Adivasi migrant household's sustenance by the employer, cumulatively culminating in an inter-generational transfer of poverty and ill-being. The third chapter empirically demonstrates the functioning of these processes in the southern Rajasthan to Gujarat migration corridor. The article shows that these exploitative processes lead to a concentration of wealth among capital-owning classes, with a failure to share the gains of growth with labour. The fourth chapter concludes that striking a judicious balance between the interests of capital and labour is a pre-requisite for Adivasi communities to migrate out of poverty.

The Political Economy of Adivasi Labour Migration: An Analytical Frame

Shrestha (1988), based on his fivefold typology of theoretical lenses used in migration studies, finds that dominant discourses (especially those based on rational choice theory) tend to obscure the overarching features of capitalist development that shapes labour migration. He finds that Marx's⁵ conceptualization is highly useful in overcoming such an analytical gap, especially if extended to deal with the specificities of contemporary labour processes found in India, as Mitra, Samaddar and Sen (2017) have also argued.⁶ Drawing from this Marxian theoretical tradition and based on their ethnographic study of the changing contexts of oppression of Adivasis and Dalits in five states of peninsular India,⁷

Shah and Lerche (2018) have posited a frame to understand the contemporary dynamics of exploitation of Adivasis. Developing their idea further, our article uses the following triangular notion of *super-exploitation*:

The historical, inherited powerlessness of Adivasi communities: Capitalist development in India, Mitra et al. (2017) argue, has neatly followed what in Marxian terms is called *primitive accumulation*—a systematic hollowing out of the countryside, a form of rural immiseration that has given rise to vast impoverished populations who are forced out to look for wage work. In the case of Adivasis, Shah and Lerche (2018) argue that this immiseration process has converted them from land- and forest-based direct producers into wage-dependent labouring masses. Marxian scholar Cockcroft (1983) argues that such alienation of the rural masses from their means of production is a pre-condition for capitalist development, as it helps in creating the necessary *reserve army of labour* that is impoverished enough to move around and work in highly exploitative work arrangements. In the case of Adivasis, Shah and Lerche (2018) argue that such a process of primitive accumulation is typically facilitated by the state in collusion with dominant social groups (locals or outsiders), who come to exert vast amounts of control over local productive resources and amass socio-political influence, enabling them to reappear in contemporary economy as usurious brokers and mediaters of Adivasi labour mobility.

Surplus extraction of Adivasi, migrant labour in flexible, segmented labour markets: Munro (2008) explains that it is labour power that creates surplus value (i.e., the surplus from the difference of the total value of the product over the sum value of its constituent factors). This expansion of value over constituents is made possible by the physical and mental exertion of the worker. In a capitalist production process, an unregulated employer not just appropriates this surplus value, but also extracts maximum levels of it, to the detriment of labour. Frank (1978) argues that employers extract an even higher surplus value from migrant workers through: (a) the migrant's greater *intensity of work*: intensity relates to the degree of mental and physical exertion that the labourer must expend for his tasks, with hazardous and strenuous work and living conditions contributing to it, (b) *extension of the work day*: extension can be caused through many overt and covert ways such as unpaid or underpaid overtime, on-site living, the system of piece rate work or the inclusion of other economic activities that a migrant household needs to perform after work hours to make ends meet and (c) the *payment of labour below its value*: meagre wages inadequate for subsistence, well below the value generated by the worker and less than the rate paid to local labourers for the same work. Cockcroft (1983) argues that this makes migrant labourers the *sub-proletariat* or the poorest of the poor within the labouring classes.

Sen and Dasgupta (2009) argue that these mechanisms of surplus extraction have become normalized and legitimized in India through a deepening of informality (especially since the mid-1980s) translating into three types of labour market flexibilities: (a) *numerical flexibility* that signifies a legal sanction or impunity enjoyed by firms to adjust hiring levels according to the vagaries of demand and technological changes, by employing in temporary and non-standard

manners through sub-contracting and casual work arrangements, (b) *wage flexibility*, which refers to a firm's capacity to adjust wage levels freely dictated by competition and cost-reduction motives, in the absence of minimum wage laws or through informal means despite regulations and (c) *temporal flexibility*, through which the industry sheds labourers during low seasons and extends work hours (through unpaid or underpaid over time) during high seasons, that is, bearing no costs for seasonal variations in production. In India, Papola and Pais (2007) argue that such flexibilities are exercised through the weak implementation of labour laws, the wide-scale use of casual labour and through the weakening of workers' bargaining power.

Abandonment of the Adivasi migrant household by state and employer: What are the features of the *system* of migrant labour that enable high surplus extraction? Burawoy (1974) argues that central to the very design of this system is an institutional differentiation and physical separation between the day-to-day subsistence of the migrant at the work destination (*maintenance* function) and the renewal of the labouring class by the migrant household back in the immiserated, rural areas of their origin. This is particularly true in the case of single male migrants, who move around for work, while their families remain in the villages. Maintenance and renewal are usually constituted as one process within a household. However, capitalism conceals how it splits these through the system of migrant labour. Under such a system, the cost of functions typically performed by the state or the employer, such as welfare or social security or payment of a living wage, is easily externalized to the migrant's household and community. Shrestha (1988) argues that employers save on the standard costs of hiring labour through such mechanisms, paving the way for capitalist accumulation of the type where wealth becomes further concentrated where it already exists.

Super-exploitation of Adivasis for Capitalist Accumulation: Evidence from the Southern Rajasthan to Gujarat Migration Corridor

In 2002, the United Nations Development Programme commissioned a report on the changing livelihood patterns of the rural poor in Rajasthan. The report pronounced that from being a mere coping strategy during droughts, seasonal labour migration has evolved into a dominant livelihood strategy for the poor in the state. Of the various regions from where labour movement was witnessed, southern Rajasthan or the 'Tribal South' as the report calls it showed the most notable increase in casual labour migration post-1990s. At the turn of the millennium, 48 per cent of the male workforce reported migrating for work from this region (ARAVALI, 2002). More than a decade later, in their state-level analysis of migration magnitude and trends, Aajeevika Bureau (2014) found that the migration proportions from southern Rajasthan had increased to 56 per cent (see Table 1). These were rural households that reported that at least 1 member was spending 3 or more months away from his/her native rural block for casual work in informal

Table 1. Incidence of Migration Across Different NSS Regions

Rajasthan Regions	Migration Incidence	No. of Migrant Workers (in millions)
Northeastern Rajasthan	40	2.29
North	33	0.78
Southeastern	38	0.67
South	56	0.87
Western	65	1.18

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

Notes: $n = 38,828$ households (Standard notation for sample size used in descriptive statistics); Migration Incidence: Percentage of households reporting one migrant worker or more of Rajasthan.

labour markets. Adivasi households accounted for 48 per cent of this 56 per cent engaging in labour mobility from the region, which in turn constituted about 55 per cent of the total Adivasi population of the region (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014). As Table 1 highlights, the Western zone of Rajasthan (the Marwar, Jaisalmer and Gorwar regions) has the highest migration rates from the state. However, the movement from this region is a much older and well-known migration stream involving higher-caste communities. Movement from southern Rajasthan (comprising the Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara and Rajsamand districts), on the other hand, is noteworthy because the region is heavily populated by traditionally land- and forest-bound Adivasi communities (constituting about 60–80 per cent of the districts' population [Government of India (GoI), 2011]).

A total of 89 per cent of the households from the southern region report that migration is a relatively recent phenomenon for their family, dating back to around 30 years. They cited deepening economic distress and a decline in primary livelihoods as the key triggers for movement, especially for Adivasis who felt the impact even more deeply. Migrants from the region tend to be young men with 64 per cent in the age group of 18–30 years and over 95 per cent males, seasonally moving out for work while their families remained in the village (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014). While intra-state migration⁸ was observed too, over 79 per cent of the movement was inter-state, headed towards 16 states/union territories across the country. Among these, Gujarat emerged as the most dominant destination for these workers, commanding around 58 per cent share of the flow.⁹ While Gujarat receives migrant labour from all over the country, there is a distinct and overwhelming presence of Adivasi labour from neighbouring areas. In addition to southern Rajasthan, these include districts such as Jhabua from Madhya Pradesh as well as Dahod and Panchmahal from southeastern Gujarat. These areas form a contiguous Adivasi region, with a common history and culture, and now also share the trend of seasonal migration to growth centres in Gujarat for casual work (Mosse, 2007; Mosse, Gupta, & Shah, 2005). The most common work sectors and destinations for migrants from southern Rajasthan include building and construction, small hotels and restaurants (particularly in Ahmedabad) as well as Surat's textile industry (see Figure 1). These are popular with Adivasi labour in particular,

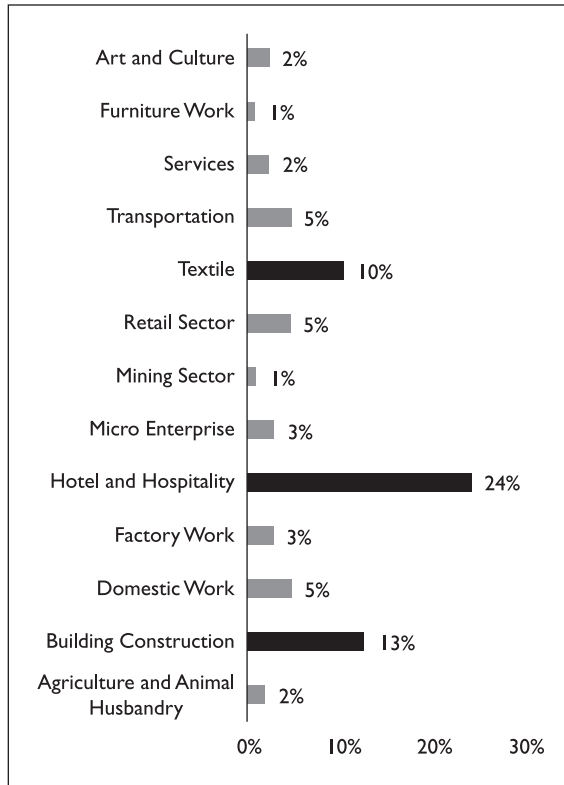


Figure 1. Occupational Profile of Migrant Workers from Southern Rajasthan ($n = 5567$)

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

who gain access to employment here through the neighbouring upper-caste communities back home that have a longer history of migration to these pockets (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014). These industries are crucial from Gujarat's point of view too, lying at the heart of the state's growth in employment (Ghosh, 2012; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MOSPI], 2017; Rani & Kalaiyarasan, 2012).

As is evident from the earlier fact, the path from southern Rajasthan to Gujarat has emerged as a corridor with hectic labour mobility. The economic trajectory of the two poles of this corridor, however, exhibits major contrasts. Gujarat has been growing at a staggering rate of 10–12 per cent a year, much above the Indian average. By the beginning of the millennium, the state became 'the second most industrialized, third most urbanized and fifth richest state', attracting the third highest share of domestic investments (Ghosh, 2012, p. 128). This economic upturn experienced by Gujarat is synchronic with the surge of Adivasi labour migration from southern Rajasthan post-1990s. Mosse et al. (2005) argue that the Adivasis have been major contributors to the boom experienced in Gujarat as they were employed in large numbers in some of its major growing sectors. However,

unlike the expanding prosperity of these growth centres in Gujarat, the Adivasi rural areas have remained hotbeds of chronic poverty. The World Bank (2016a) reports that the Adivasi-dominated southern Rajasthan has not benefitted from the growth in the state and region, with some parts experiencing poverty levels as high as 62 per cent. The economic chasm between the two ends of this migration corridor is striking, with the per capita income level in Gujarat being 176 per cent of the income levels of Rajasthan, arguably higher if compared specifically for Adivasis from southern Rajasthan (MOSPI, 2017).¹⁰ Though migration provides roughly 50 per cent of the total household income for migrant households in southern Rajasthan, for Adivasis, the remittances can barely support basic consumption. Unlike upper-caste groups who are able to invest their migration earnings in enterprises and other productive assets, ARAVALI (2002, p. 16) reports that migration income for Adivasis does not lead to any significant capital formation, and their economic journey remains on the 'brink of survival'. These divergent trajectories of the two poles of the same migration corridor beg the following questions: What produces the persisting deprivation of Adivasi migrant communities of southern Rajasthan? What is the role of Gujarat's labour markets in these processes? What is the economic potential and limitation of migration as a livelihood strategy for the community? The following sections provide evidence-based analyses on these questions.

The Historical Creation of a Super-exploitable Labour Force

The NCEUS (2007) report argues that individual and community-level endowments (such as natural resources, education and health) are critical to understanding the relative positions of various groups of workers in the country's segmented labour markets (NCEUS, 2007). In the case of southern Rajasthan, a poor natural resource base is the most common explanation provided for the disadvantageous incorporation of Adivasis in contemporary labour markets (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014; ARAVALI, 2002). Geographers Rathore and Verma (2013), however, contest this popular imagination of the region as a resource-starved, semi-arid zone. They argue that, until as recently as the 1970s, the Aravalli region was thickly forest clad, rich with abundant forest produce, well stocked with water sources, receiving over 100 days of timely and dependable rainfall. In the last six decades, however, the environment has undergone ruthless destruction through anthropogenic activities, losing about 45 per cent of its forest cover between 1972 and 1985. This has resulted in a dramatic lowering of the water table, unchecked soil erosion and rapid desertification of the area (Rathore & Verma, 2013). This drastic socio-ecological decline is often presented as a de-politicized, geographical destiny of the region. Mosse (2007) argues that on the contrary, these adverse changes are intimately related to the following socio-political processes of the distribution of power and resources in the region:

Alienation of Adivasis from their means of production: Through a detailed historical account of tribes in Western India, including southern Rajasthan, Skaria

(1999) argues that the genesis of the decline in the region can be attributed to a spurt of legislative measures brought in by the colonial indirect rule of the British,¹¹ further entrenched by the post-independence Indian state. Historically a self-sufficient community, Adivasis in the region lived symbiotically with the local ecology, using its rich produce for their sustenance and nourishment, in turn maintaining natural stock levels through sustainable use (Mosse, 2007; People's Union for Democratic Rights [PUDR], 1991). Moreover, the relationship between Bhil chieftains and the ruling Rajput princes was largely of inter-dependence and mutuality. As the British gained control over the region, Skaria (1999) argues that they demarcated the forests in Bhil areas as state property for commercial extraction. Revenue generation became the sole logic towards forest management, which was used to serve imperial interests. Such policies and practices towards forests started the long history of the dispossession of Adivasis as well as socio-ecological destabilization, leading to the eventual displacement of the community into seeking new forms of livelihoods (Tripathy, 2016). Ironically, these processes converted many Bhils into wage workers with profiteering logging companies and contractors, making them participants in the ruination of their own resources and livelihoods (Mosse, 2007). Post-independence, these destructive colonial processes were further entrenched, with the Indian state making forest administration more arbitrary and complex (Venkatraman, 2010). Unbridled extraction of forest resources continued, this time for supplying highly subsidized raw materials to industry and commercial agriculture (Mosse et al., 2005). The 1953 Rajasthan Forest Act brought large tracts of forest and common lands under state ownership, prohibiting Adivasi use of these for activities such as grazing, pasturing and collection of firewood (PUDR, 1991). Jones (1978) argues that with the value of resources extracted from their areas far outweighing the money put in for local development, the Indian state has actively engineered Adivasi underdevelopment. Moreover, unregulated mining deepened the adverse ecological transformations in the region—diverting large tracts of forest and common lands for illegal open-cast mining, further diminishing water tables, and contaminating ground water. This in turn reduced agricultural and livestock productivity, forcing poor rural communities to sell their land and robbing them off their limited means of production (Gopalakrishnan, 2012).

Concentration of wealth and control of Adivasi economy: The systematic destruction of the Adivasis' material basis of life gave way to relations of subjugation. The dependence of Adivasi communities on settled agriculture grew, bringing them under the domination of upper-caste communities. While the dominant groups seized greater control over the more fertile tracts of land with water access, Adivasis were pushed deeper into non-arable upland areas (Jones, 1978). With a flux in their livelihoods and the onset of an unfamiliar cash-based economy, Adivasi communities became increasingly dependent on usurious credit from moneylenders. Mortgaging of land became a common practice, leading to the further loss of land to local elites. The absence of clear land titles and lower literacy levels among the Adivasi population helped the rural oligarchy appropriate greater control over the economic life of Adivasis (Mann & Mann, 1989). Rajput families

came to employ Adivasi hands to work their farms (Seva Mandir, 2007). The feudal practice of *Ghar Bhil* flourished, where a Bhil family was attached to a Rajput household, to perform unpaid labour during marriages and other ceremonies in return for some food and patronage. In addition, in the 1970s and 1980s, a 'Gold Rush' of mining leases started, obtained by upper-caste businessmen who subverted legal provisions with state collusion, to tap the rich mineral deposits found in forest and common lands. In a short span, 'a thousand millionaires are said to have emerged in the city of Udaipur', while Adivasis had to resort to dangerous and poorly paid manual labour in these mines (Government of Rajasthan [GoR], 2002, p. 52).

The effect of these processes was a quick and dramatic concentration of wealth and control over productive resources among local dominant groups, entrenching the power of a rural oligarchy, who used it to exercise control over the economic and social lives of Adivasis (Mann & Mann, 1989; Mosse, 2007; Skaria, 1997). The trajectory of capitalist development in Western India is such that the aforementioned socio-economic relations of Adivasis with dominant groups have not been subverted but reproduced by the system of migrant labour (Mosse, 2007). These groups have come to exert various types of controls—credit, capital and recruitment as *sahukar*, *seth* and *thekedar* (moneylender, employer and contractor, respectively). Mosse (2007, p. 16) argues that upper-caste groups developed into 'a multi-tiered system of labour gang leaders, jobbing recruiter-supervisors and labour contractors' who trapped the Bhil migrants in insecure, irregular and low-skilled employment. Dependence on *sahukars* deepened with distressed migration. Kulkarni (2012) found that over 67 per cent of migrants from the region were indebted to exploitative moneylenders and contractors, with loans and advances acting as an instrument of coercion and making them vulnerable to bonded forms of labour.

Persistence of historic inequalities in contemporary economy: These historic patterns of resource and capital accumulation are faithfully reflected in the contemporary distribution of endowments among social groups in the region. Educational levels among STs in Rajasthan (over half of whom are from southern Rajasthan [Government of India (GoI), 2011]) is around three times lower than their General category counterparts. A total of 60 per cent of the Adivasis in the state are illiterate and only 13 per cent have secondary or higher education levels, with the community being particularly left out of the educational gains made in the state (The World Bank, 2016b). Similarly, in health and nutrition, Adivasi households in southern Rajasthan fare significantly worse than their upper-caste counterparts. Over half of the children and mothers in the region are malnourished (and about one-third of the children severely so), with non-ST children showing significantly higher nutrition levels (Mohan, Agarwal, & Jain, 2016). A total of 99 per cent of Adivasi women in the region suffer from anaemia, with 13.5 per cent exhibiting severe anaemia levels, according to Aajeevika Bureau's rural health clinics operating in the region.¹² Mohan et al. (2016) argue that such poor health and nutrition levels of the Adivasi are strong markers of the unequal resource distribution they face, experiencing acute shortage of basic means of sustenance,

including food and water.¹³ Such inter-group inequality in basic endowments is shaped by the region's history of Adivasi dispossession and upper-caste accumulation, and it has in turn affected the positions occupied by them in contemporary economy (Mosse, 2007). The ARAVALI (2002) report found that upper-caste groups not only strengthened their position as contractors and moneylenders but also used their accumulated capital, kinship networks and political connections to dominate government jobs in Rajasthan and to establish businesses (including in Gujarat). For Adivasis, however, these segments of work remained inaccessible, with only 4 per cent representation in salaried jobs in the state (The World Bank, 2016b). The bulk of them had to turn to hazardous casual work, in over 4.5 times the proportion found in upper-caste groups (The World Bank, 2016b).

Mechanisms of Surplus Extraction of Adivasi Migrant Labour in Gujarat

What transpires when these labouring masses from southern Rajasthan reach Gujarat? What spaces, position and opportunities do Adivasi migrant labourers occupy in the state's labour markets vis-à-vis other social groups? Does the national trend of Adivasi migrant labour being super-exploited get reproduced here? We explore these questions in this section, using evidence from Gujarat's construction, hotel and restaurants as well as textile industries. We examine if Adivasis undergo extreme surplus extraction in these sectors and the mechanisms thereof. We evaluate the distribution of costs and gains between the industry and labour, mapping out labour law violations to assess the quotient of exploitation found in these sectors.

Ahmedabad's Construction Sector

The city of Ahmedabad is among the largest construction hubs in the country, with ceaseless building of infrastructure such as bridges and roads, as well as commercial and residential complexes. As per a Right to Information (RTI) petition filed by Aajeevika Bureau in August 2013, a total of 2,595 construction sites were registered in Ahmedabad. About 68.7 per cent of the workers at such sites are typically migrant labourers, a majority from the adjoining Adivasi belt including male migrants as well family-based migration from southern Rajasthan (Prayas, 2009). A peek into the underbelly of this world of construction is offered by the story of Jeevan, a 22-year-old Adivasi migrant labourer from the Banswara district, juxtaposed against the perceptions of a labour contractor and engineer from a large construction site in the city.¹⁴

In 2009, Jeevan came to Ahmedabad at the age of 14 with a Rajput contractor from the neighbouring village and started work as a 'helper' laying China mosaic floors. He received ₹110 for a day that started at 7 AM and extended till 1–2 AM in the night. There was no overtime payment. Not able to sustain this workload, he returned home after 2 months. Low wages at home pushed him back to Ahmedabad

where he continued working as a daily wage labourer, finding work mostly through nakas.¹⁵ He does all kinds of work as a helper—pipe fitting, centring and plastering work—depending on what is available. More than 10 years hence, he remains what the industry and state categorizes as an unskilled worker, earning around the minimum wage, between ₹350 and ₹400. Jeevan is wary of contractors because they often do not pay fully and are difficult to trace afterwards. He had a tough time with a contractor who is still to pay ₹4,000 (around half a month's wages) after repeated follow-ups. After 10 years of hard manual work, Jeevan falls sick quite often. He says that every 6 months his body stops working when work is too intense—'haath pair kaam karna band kar deta hai'. He has to go home and rest for 4–5 days before he can resume work with great difficulty. He regrets that even after so many years of work he has not been able to build even a kaccha house of his own. 'Kya pata yeh kitne din chalega'—god only knows how long I will be able to sustain this.

Umed Singh, a contractor from the Rajput community, has brought around 100 labourers to work at a big construction site in Ahmedabad. With a total workforce of 300 on-site labourers, a luxury residential complex is under construction. Umed Singh explains that Adivasi migrant workers are the best employees—'they don't know anyone, they don't negotiate and they have nowhere to go'. 'Local workers or those hired at the naka have a home to go back to—when the day ends, they drop their tools and go home to their families, whereas migrants are easy to get to work longer hours', Umed Singh shares. Moreover, he prefers labourers that live on site because workers from nakas ask too many questions like 'what is the wage?' and 'what time work will finish?' Mahesh Patel, an engineer at the site, is a local from the city. His perceptions are similar to Umed Singh's—'these people (Adivasis) are second class labourers, just like when we go to other countries like America, we are second class labourers. This is how it is naturally'. Explaining the hiring system at the site, the engineer shares

[T]here are different community groups for different types of work across the various stages of construction. Tasks such as RCC work that require less skills, are performed mostly by Adivasi labour. For different kinds of skilled work there are men who come from UP and Bihar, and Adivasis are used as their helpers.

On the availability of a crèche facility at the site, Umed Singh opined, 'if Adivasis and their children gain education, who will perform the hard labour for cheap rates. Who else will come for this work? The understanding that we have as contractors is that when the supply of labour reduces, then labour costs will also increase'.

Location of Adivasi migrant workers in the industry value chain: Aajeevika Bureau has visited over 200 construction sites in Ahmedabad over the last decade. Across these sites, Adivasi migrants were found to perform the most repetitive and strenuous tasks, with lowest remuneration and limited opportunity for upward mobility. The data collected for the organization's state migration profile suggest similar trends—Adivasi workers account for 83 per cent of the migrant workforce from southern Rajasthan in the sector (see Figure 2). Over half of these occupy the category of helpers (viewed as the most unskilled role), and around 30 per cent are

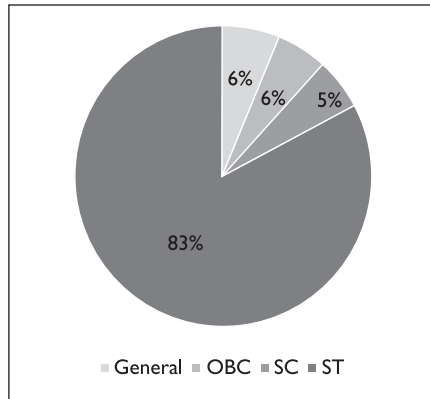


Figure 2. The Distribution of Workers from Southern Rajasthan in Ahmedabad's Construction Industry (by Social Group) (n = 697)

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

found in the next level of masons. Labourers from the region's Other Backward Class (OBC)¹⁶ and General categories are present in small numbers but typically perform more skilled roles, as is evidenced by the wage distribution given in Figure 3, with ST workers earning about 69 per cent and 81 per cent of the wages earned by OBCs and General category groups, respectively. The more profitable roles, such as supervisors, large-to-mid-sized labour contractors and professionals such as engineers, are dominated by upper-caste groups, from either local communities or permanent migrants to the city.

Mechanisms of surplus extraction: According to the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 (henceforth referred to as 'CLA'), labour contractors employing more than 20 persons need to obtain a licence and maintain

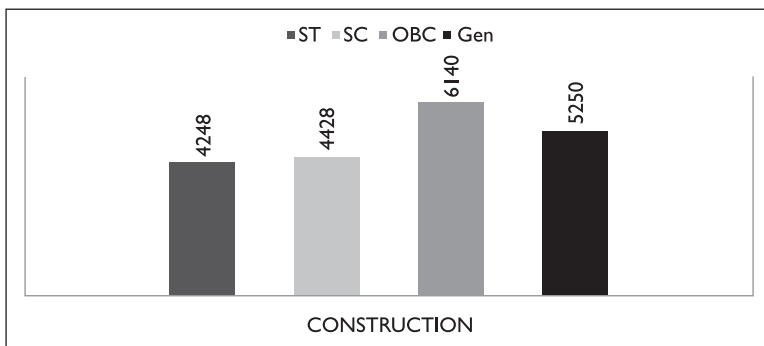


Figure 3. The Distribution of Average Wages (in ₹) among Workers from Southern Rajasthan (by Social Groups) in Ahmedabad's Construction Sector

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

1	Builder	Local	Owner and trader	@₹ per square feet. The exact amount is never disclosed.
2	Engineer	Local	Builder/Engineer/ Contractor	
3	Contractor	Local	Builder/Recruiter	
4	Sub-contractor 1	Local	Material and Labour Recruiter	
5	Sub-contractor 2	Local/Rajasthani	Recruiter of Labour	
6	Sub-contractor 3	Rajasthani	Recruiter of Labour/ worker	₹2–7 per square feet plus wages
7	Labour recruiter	Rajasthani	Recruiter/worker	Wages
8	Skilled labour	Rajasthani	Worker	Wages
9	Unskilled labour	Rajasthani	Worker	Wages

Figure 4. Levels in Contractual Chains in the Construction Sector in Ahmedabad

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2008a).

an attendance record of the labourers hired by them. In the 200 sites visited by Aajeevika Bureau, contractors were found to typically employ 15–60 workers, a bulk of them falling under the ambit of law. The sites themselves were large, employing between 100 and 500 workers. However, contractors were often found to be unlicensed. Even if a licence was obtained, contractors regularly manipulated their records to circumvent legal obligations. Labour contractors were found to be at least from four to five linkages away from the builders (see Figure 4). Sub-contracting in the industry's value chain was found to result in a heavy externalization of responsibilities to the contractors. Contractors, on the other hand, secure in their distance from the principal employer, were found to enjoy near-complete flexibility to ignore legal provisions given weak labour law enforcement (Aajeevika Bureau, 2008a).

Both CLA and Gujarat's Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act of 1996 require licensed contractors to provide a range of facilities for safeguarding basic human and workers' rights, including the provision of a canteen facility,¹⁷ crèche, clean and ventilated accommodation as well as safety tools and provisions. With the exception of 7 sites (where Aajeevika Bureau operates crèche facilities), none of the other 200 sites visited by the organization met these requirements. The refusal of the industry (meaning the builder and all of the contractors in the chain) to fulfil these responsibilities results in a direct transfer of the burden to the workers, who were found to cross-subsidize the industry's cost-reduction motives by bearing the burden themselves. For instance, carrying heavy building materials up and down makeshift stairs and platforms with no safety gear or measures was observed to increase the mental and physical exertion of Adivasi male and female workers. They had to combine heavy weightlifting with the need for constant vigilance to stay safe and alive in these environments.¹⁸ The intensity of their work is heightened by the constant exposure to dust through grinders and cutters (designed without any dust-control mechanisms), making

skin problems and tuberculosis common diseases, along with accidents, injuries and even cases of death (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014).

The intensity of the work day is even greater for women—they are observed to lift the heaviest weights on the site, continuously multi-tasking with the provision of care for small children, who have to often accompany them to work (since the employers fail to provide for the legally mandated child care facilities). The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 or MBA (which applies to every establishment and type of employer engaging more than 10 persons) prohibits employment of, or work by, women for 6 weeks after delivery. The employer is also required to provide medical facilities and support. However, it is common for women to give birth on the site itself without any assistance from the employer and return to work within 15 days, with the newborn by her side amidst the grind and dust. Families commonly live in the half-built structures on the site or in auto-constructed temporary shelters using scrap material.¹⁹ With poor sanitation and no cooking facilities, living in these conditions is not just inhumanly strenuous and unhealthy, it also extends the work day of women well beyond the hours spent labouring on the site. They have to work longer hours to meet the needs of the household, as cooking, cleaning, safe keeping, provision of care and all the other myriad activities required by a family take longer and become more laborious in the absence of basic facilities and provisions.

Are Adivasi construction workers paid below value for the work performed by them? Construction is one the few work sectors employing migrants from southern Rajasthan that is commonly found to pay at least the stipulated minimum wages, which was ₹305.06 for 2017–2018 in Gujarat (Wage Indicator, 2018). Payment for overtime work is also common now. However, contractors pay the regular hourly rate, instead of the double rates for overtime work required by the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 (or ‘MWA’). There remain a host of other issues with wage payments in the industry: (a) the construction sector is rampant with cases of delayed or no payments, with arbitrary wage deductions. According to Aajeevika Bureau’s (2008b) study, about two-thirds of migrant construction workers from south Rajasthan reported that they have experienced a major wage dispute just in the last 1 year from the date of survey. Lawyers supporting the organization’s legal team have mediated in over 6,500 such cases and repatriated over ₹100 million of rightful wages to construction workers. Based on this legal practice, Jayaram (2018) argues that such cases are just a small sliver of the total volume of wage thefts in the state and country’s construction sector, with the total quantum of rightful wages denied to the construction workers being potentially as high as ₹64 billion per annum; (b) the construction sector is a major employer of migrant women. Despite the requirement of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 (henceforth referred to as ‘ERA’) of equal wage for women as men for similar work, a consistent wage gap of around 20–25 per cent is found; and (c) moreover, *nakas* function as an extra-legal, labour market institution that displays the tendency for extreme wage flexibility—as the day starts, rates are negotiated at minimum wage levels, even ₹50–100 higher than the daily wage rate of an on-site worker. However, as the first hours of hiring pass, the desperation of unemployed workers grow, who are inevitably present in large numbers. Contractors utilize this

desperation to buy the labour power of workers at very cheap rates. If the labourer is particularly in need of an earning that day, rates can go as low as ₹100 (one-third of the minimum wage rate), which workers take given that their subsistence depends on daily wages. The extreme wage flexibility of the *nakas* in Ahmedabad affects the Adivasi community disproportionately, who depend on this institution much more than other social groups to access employment (Mosse et al., 2005).

It is interesting that in Aajeevika Bureau's (2008b) study on wage disputes, upper-caste workers reported a lower incidence of wage theft by employer, harassment and abuse, sharing that they are often able to negotiate and access support from their social networks when faced with such cases. Adivasi workers on the other hand experience high 'internal alien-ness', as Shah and Lerche (2018, p. 19) have called it. Coming from the most remote, hilly areas, the language, norms and institutions in urban areas tend to be more unfamiliar for Adivasis than other rural groups. They face not just individual but also a community-level disadvantage. Unlike upper-caste and some OBC groups, who have settled there for generations and can negotiate support, Adivasis do not enjoy extended kinship networks in the city to draw help from. The group also faces higher barriers and stigmatization when approaching formal systems such as the police. The relatively powerless position of Adivasis is well understood and actively used by some contractors to deny them their dues. Not just in payment of wages, but the overall relations of production are subsumed by the power dynamics of the historic social relations between these groups. Umed Singh and Mahesh Patel's perceptions of Adivasi workers are commonly displayed by others in the employer/supervisory categories—docility and submissiveness have not just come to be expected of Adivasi workers by their upper-caste employers but is actively preferred and utilized by the industry.

Ahmedabad's Hotel and Restaurant Sector

There are an uncounted number of hotels and restaurants in Ahmedabad, ranging from premium ones to roadside shacks. Over the course of its work, Aajeevika Bureau has worked with migrant labour in over 300 such enterprises spread across the city, employing anything between 10 and 50 workers. Prakash's story further reveals the labour processes prevalent in the sector.

Prakash came to Ahmedabad from the Sarada block of Udaipur district with his cousins, who were all first-generation migrants, to work at a hotel in the city. His normal work hours stretched from 10 AM to 3:30 AM and then again from 6:30 AM to 12 at midnight—around 11 hours a day. As demand peaks, Prakash's work hours extend. For instance, during birthday parties organized at the hotel, they have to work till 1 or 2 AM and on an average 1–2 such parties are organized every week. Prakash started work as a 'mori' or 'pocha waala', cleaning utensils and the kitchen, as almost all Adivasi workers joining the industry do. He works in confined, poorly ventilated rooms for hours at a stretch. He spent years in the city, without being able to go beyond the neighbourhood. 'I don't even see who comes to the hotel to eat', remarked Prakash. He shares that Adivasi workers are

considered uncouth and not presentable, so owners do not like to give them customer-facing roles such as waiters. However, after several years of this back-breaking work, he was lucky enough that a cook agreed to teach him to make Punjabi food. So now Prakash has the unusual position of preparing food in a hotel kitchen in the city—a rare feat among Adivasi workers.

Location of the Adivasi migrant worker in the industry value chain: In the roles of cooks, waiters, cleaners and helpers, Ahmedabad's (low and medium price range) hotels and restaurants almost exclusively hire migrant labourers. Similar to the construction industry, local workforce seems largely missing in the labour-intensive roles of the sector, occupying only the more supervisory positions such as hotel or restaurant managers. There is a predominance of workers from south Rajasthan in the sector in Ahmedabad. However, only 2 per cent of them are in supervisory roles, and over 90 per cent of this 2 per cent are from the General category. The rest of the upper-caste workers from south Rajasthan, in particular the Brahmin workers, dominated the role of cooks, followed by roles in house-keeping and waiters. As shown in Figure 5, Adivasi workers account for 47 per cent of the labour migration from the region into the sector. However, they are unable to access the relatively better work segments mentioned earlier and remain relegated to the least remunerative role of a *mori* or cleaner, earning 65–69 per cent of the wages of their regional counterparts (see Figure 6).

Mechanisms of surplus extraction: Establishments such as hotels and restaurants (hiring even one worker) fall under the purview of the Gujarat's Shops and Establishment Act 1948 (or 'SEA'), which requires them to obtain a licence and maintain certain labour standards. Aajeevika Bureau has worked with labourers

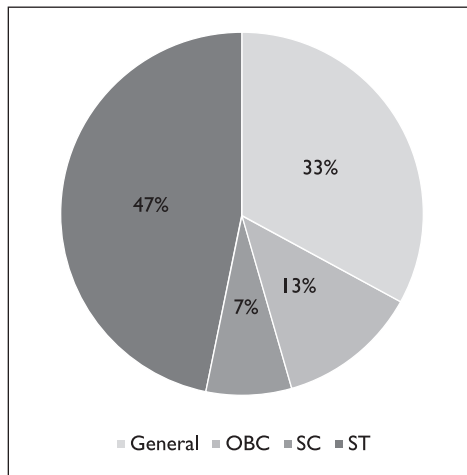


Figure 5. Distribution of Workers from Southern Rajasthan (by Social Groups) in Ahmedabad's Hotel and Restaurant Industry ($n = 1,340$)

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

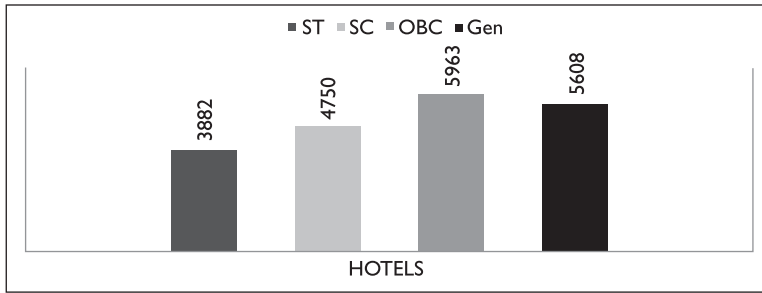


Figure 6. Distribution of Average Wages (in ₹) among Workers from Southern Rajasthan in Ahmedabad's Hotel and Restaurant Sector (by Social Groups)

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

from 300 such establishments in the city and found all of them to be in gross violations of the SEA. This is despite the Act's attempt to accommodate the nature of the industry—unlike other enterprises where a regular work day is of 8 hours, Gujarat's SEA extends it to 9 hours (until 11:30 PM), further allowing an extension by another 3 hours of overtime during festivals or similar occasions, but balances it by requiring that the number of such extensions be capped at 10 days in a year. Prakash's daily routine is a good representative of the daily grind of Adivasi workers in the sector and the extended length of their days. Labourers work overtime by at least 2 hours on a daily basis and by 3–4 hours once or twice a week. The sector employs children under 14 years of age, despite the prohibition on it by the Child Labour Amendment Act of 2016 (or 'CLAA'). It also employs adolescent workers (between 14 and 17 years) in large numbers, making them work the same hours as adults, violating CLAA provisions that cap their work hours to 6 and only between 8 AM and 7 PM.

The industry uses other ways for the extension of the work day of labourers well beyond the legal limit. Far from meeting the SEA's requirement of giving 21 days of paid leave in a year, workers in this segment do not even enjoy a weekly off, as is required by the Weekly Holidays Act (1942), for all workers (NCEUS, 2007). Adivasi workers live in effective confinement week after week, engaged in laborious activities of washing dishes and sweeping, concealed from the customers' view in the inner chambers of these establishments. Spending 24 hours every day in the hot, humid and airless environment of the kitchen and dorms, about 14 per cent of the workers from the sector report suffering from skin diseases, frequent burns and severe cuts (Aajeevika Bureau, 2008b). Where they don't live in crammed, unhygienic dorms, workers sleep inside the main facility, on desks and tables. In this type of arrangement, the social hierarchy reflects in the division of space as well, with Adivasi workers having to sleep on the worst spots such as dirty kitchen floors. For these workers, especially for children and adolescents, another common feature of working in the sector is dealing with frequent harassment, with 28 per cent of them experiencing recurrent verbal and physical abuse (Aajeevika Bureau, 2008b).

The work trajectory of Adivasis working as *pochawalas* is marked by the stagnation of wages and is limited to no upward mobility. They enter the sector typically between the ages of 12–15, starting off on monthly payments as low as ₹2,000–3,000. This is less than half the daily and monthly minimum wages applicable to the sector in Gujarat, that is, less than half of ₹305.60 per day or about ₹7,900 per month (Wage Indicator, 2018). These abysmally low rates continue until they ‘get set’, which the workers report is a euphemism for learning to perform laborious tasks at rapid speed without complaining and acclimatizing to abominable living conditions without falling sick. Then their wages usually increase to ₹3,500–₹4,000 but remain well below minimum wages. Very rarely do Adivasis have Prakash’s luck and get support for upward mobility. In most cases, Adivasi labourers can spend their whole working lives in an establishment but progress only as far as making rotis, with wages stagnating around ₹5,000–6,000 at best. In another gross violation of the MWA, there is no payment for overtime work in this sector, even though Adivasi workers perform at least 15 hours of overtime on a weekly basis. In addition, there is a peculiar payment-related norm in the sector that violates yet another legal provision, this one under the Payment of Wages Act of 1936 (or PWA). The PWA requires employers (engaging less than 1,000 workers and if a worker earns less than ₹6,500) to pay their employees within the first and seventh day of every month. Instead, the hotel sector follows a market norm of paying workers in 45-day cycles (i.e., on the 15th of every month), for 30 days of work performed in the previous month. This in effect means that the employer withholds payment for 15 days for future settlement at any given point of time! If the worker needs to go home for an emergency or holiday, employers do not settle the full payment, requiring the worker to necessarily return to work to claim the due wages of 15 days or to forfeit it if he does not want to return, constituting a form of bondage. Moreover, employers often deduct wages for the first 15 days of work performed by a new employee, as payment for food and accommodation, despite such deductions being unlawful under the PWA. In the rear-end life of hotels and restaurants, legality is largely suspended. Work is structured on the singular logic of the business’ cyclical nature, uncalibrated by the necessary checks and balances of labour standards. While the industry does not share the benefits of high demand with workers through payment of overtime, it passes on the costs from the variations in demand to them. Instead of keeping workers on shifts of 9 hours or hiring additional workers for parties or events, the industry freely extends the labourers’ work day and increases its intensity with impunity.

Surat’s Textile Industry

Textile production has been one of the fulcrums of Gujarat’s economy, with the sector growing at a staggering rate of 18 per cent per annum since 2004, at times defying the national trend (Raychaudhuri, 2017). Surat is Gujarat’s prime textile hub, with an annual turnover of ₹50 billion from its polyester industry. This sector produces what is popularly called ‘art silk’, accounting for around 40 per cent of

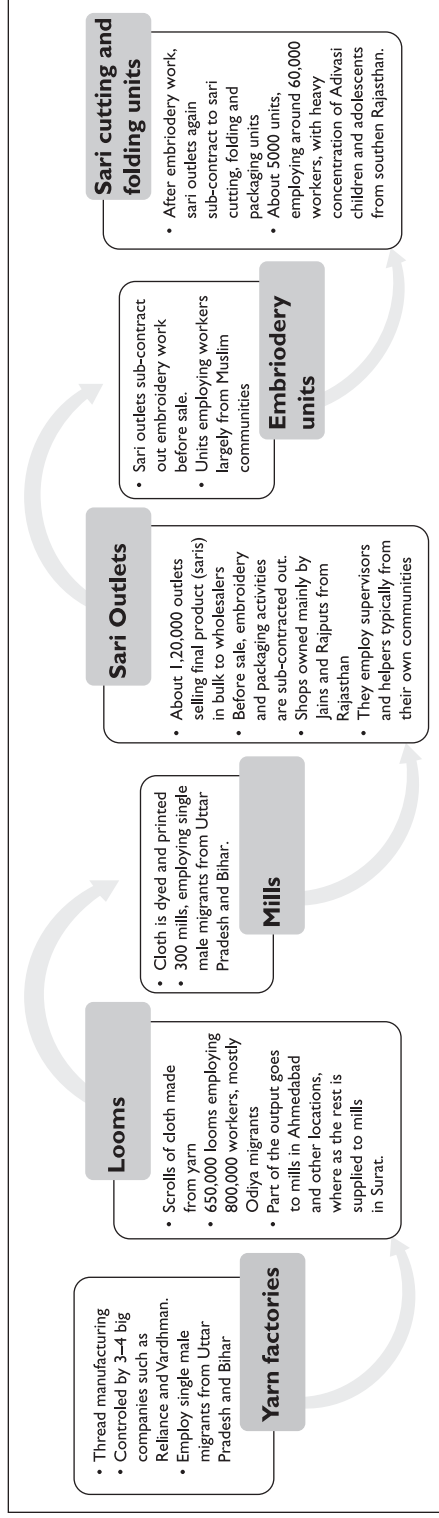


Figure 7. Value Chain of Surat's Textile Industry

Source: Compilation of facts and figures presented in the main text of the article on Surat's textile industry.

Note: Mapped through focus group discussions with sari outlet owners, who have been working in Surat's textile industry for over 20–30 years. The estimates provided by them were triangulated with secondary sources (Menning, 1997; Srivastava, 2017; Aajeevika Bureau & ODI, 2007).

the total synthetic fabric produced in the country. This art silk is used to make Indian garments, mainly *saris*, which are sold in bulk to wholesalers across the country (and overseas). The sale is made by through the 120,000 *sari* outlets, which dominate Surat's famous textile markets, spread over an area of 5 sq. km (Aajeevika Bureau & Overseas Development Institute [ODI], 2007). There is a long industry value chain that works up to this downstream segment of *sari* outlets, starting from yarn factories to power looms and dyeing and printing mills (see Figure 7).

Based on 14 months of ethnographic work, Menning (1997) found that the textile industry in Surat is dominated by what he termed 'ethnic enterprises', with the whole value chain displaying high levels of segmentation along the lines of caste-tribe and place of origin, both in ownership and in labour hiring. At the ownership level, the whole value chain (except for the yarn segment) is dominated by upper-caste communities such as Patels, Khatris, Ranas, Jains and Rajputs. The downstream segment of *sari* outlets is particularly dominated by Jains and Rajputs from Rajasthan, who tend to hire migrants from their own communities for supervisory and shop-helper roles. These communities also control the middleman-ship between the various industry segments, comprising a large body of brokers and merchants that connect supply and demand (Menning, 1997). Across the value chain of this industry, millions of migrant labourers from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan are employed, working and living in difficult conditions.²⁰ Adivasis from southern Rajasthan are found in the most vulnerable segment of the industry—in the sub-contracted, marginal work of *sari* cutting, folding and packing—that requires back-breaking work at wages which have been stagnant for decades. These units are owned by petty contractors employing anything between 5 and 20 workers, mainly from southern Rajasthan. These *sari* cutting units constitute the clandestine back-alley world of Surat's textile market, touted to be the biggest of its kind in Asia. The lives of the 60,000 workers from southern Rajasthan employed in these units are well captured in Mohan and Bhabru's father-son story.

Mohan Gameti, an Adivasi from Gogunda block in Udaipur district, went to work in one of Surat's *sari* cutting units in 1995, when he was 14 years old. He was offered wages worth ₹1,000 a month for rapidly folding saris for 12 hours a day and promised that if he did well, it would be increased to ₹1,200. A break was only allowed if there was no 'maal' (goods) left to process. For 4–5 days in a month, when work load was high, Mohan worked in both day and night shifts. In case he fell asleep, the contractor hurled abuses and sometimes kicked and slapped as well. On Sundays, which was meant to be a holiday, they often brought work to their room. A child, small and scared Mohan never dared to ask for overtime payment. He was recruited in a group of 15 boys, who lived in a crammed room and ate watery rice and dal every day. All expenses including clothes and medicines were paid by the contractor but later deducted from the wages. The contractor kept the accounts and Mohan had to accept whatever leftover sum was paid to him after deductions. He never got the raise that he was promised and after 3 years of such punishing work, he returned home and took up daily wage work in a nearby mine instead. In 2012, due to his family's abject poverty, Mohan was forced to send his 12-year-old son Bhabru to the same *sari* cutting industry in Surat, despite

his hatred for them. Unfortunately for Bhabru, much of the labour arrangements in the industry remained the same as his father’s time, except that the night shifts were uncommon. However, the day shifts continued for over 12 hours in the intense heat, putting a heavy strain on his back and the eye. Bhabru meekly says that he feels restless and sad all the time but shares that at least he earns ₹4,000 a month now, instead of the ₹2,000 he started with, since he is old enough to cut saris now, as opposed to earlier when he could only fold.

The location of Adivasi workers in the industry value chain: General category workers, Rajputs in particular, accounted for over 60 per cent of the migrants from southern Rajasthan in Surat’s textile industry (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014) (see Figure 8). Workers from this community mainly occupy the jobs of shop assistants, supervisors and helpers at the *sari* outlets. A total of 28 per cent of the southern Rajasthan workforce in the industry consists of Adivasis, but they almost exclusively work in the *sari* cutting units, with the lowest remuneration in the whole textile value chain (see Figure 9). Often, Rajput workers have to resort to working in these *sari* cutting units at the same level as Adivasi workers, with their families facing an economic downturn. However, it is common to find that they progress over the years to even own a *sari* outlet. For Adivasi labourers, on the other hand, the farthest progression noted so far is to become a petty contractor of a *sari* cutting unit, earning small margins. It is not surprising that upward mobility should be so heavily shaped along the lines of social segmentation. Menning (1997) argues that this is common in Surat’s textile industry, which follows strong norms of caste endogamy, providing material advantages (such as loans and contacts of suppliers/customers and dealers), as well as tacit support (such as

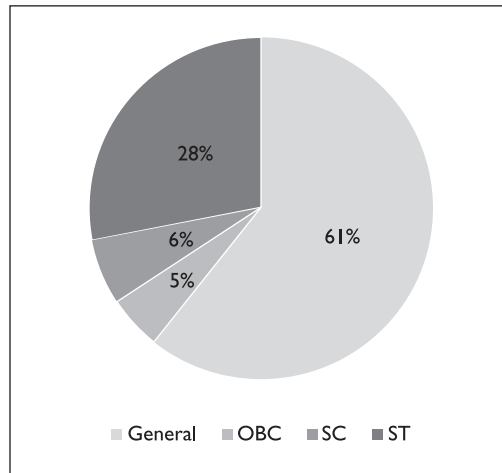


Figure 8. Distribution of Workers from Southern Rajasthan (by Social Groups) in Surat’s Textile Industry (n = 568)

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

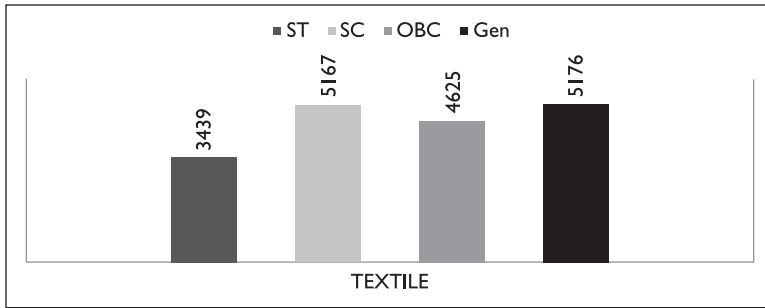


Figure 9. The Distribution of Average Wages (in ₹) among Workers from Southern Rajasthan (by Social Groups) in Surat's Textile Industry

Source: Aajeevika Bureau (2014).

training, knowledge and encouragement) to persons from their larger social group. For inter-group dealings as well, a poor Rajput trying to set up his own *sari* outlet would enjoy greater trust and credibility while developing business relationships with suppliers and customers. The lack of upward mobility of Adivasis is not just a factor of individual poverty but of community-level deprivation of resources needed for advancement, with relative advantages and disadvantages between groups compounding through generations.

Mechanisms of surplus extraction: Similar to hotels and restaurants, *sari* cutting units also fall under the purview of SEA. All the rules and provisions described previously on hours of work, rest and overtime payment apply to these units as well. However, this segment of the industry largely operates in the sphere of illegality. A total of 40 per cent of its labour force, when it joins work, is in the age group of 10–14 years (Aajeevika Bureau & ODI, 2007). Preferred for being 'energetic, hardworking and docile, requiring low maintenance', employers extract punishing intensity and the length of work day from this young workforce (Aajeevika Bureau & ODI, 2007, p. 6). In these establishments, children and adolescents spend on average 10–12 hours, often standing for the whole period, cutting, folding and packing over 2,000–2,500 *saris* a day. In case demand increases, the same workers are made to work in double shifts. When the day ends, they sleep, eat and live in the same dimly-lit, cramped and hot room, concealed from public eye and any possible legal action. Even though Adivasi labouring communities are deeply familiar with inhumane work and living conditions, the *sari* cutting units are so disconcertingly grim, that 66 per cent of the workers leave within the first year (Aajeevika Bureau & ODI, 2007). Of all the work sectors that receive labour migrants from southern Rajasthan, workers from *sari* cutting units report the highest rate of physical/verbal abuse as well as overtime work at 29 and 24 per cent, respectively (Aajeevika Bureau, 2008b). Interestingly, many of the contractors of these units today are Adivasi themselves. The likeliness of abuse and harassment is observed to be lesser in these cases. However, the work and living conditions do not display any alleviation, as they are found to be shaped heavily by the deeply entrenched market norms and industry practices.

As for payment below value, the wages in the industry start at ₹2,000 a month (for packaging or folding *saris*), and stagnate at ₹4,000 (for *sari* cutting), significantly lower than the minimum monthly wage of around ₹7,900. This is because the most skilled work possible in this segment is cutting *saris*, with no pathways for further progression, except for becoming a petty contractor. In other segments of the textile industry value chain, migrant workers earn twice or thrice the amount. For instance, the Odiya migrants, usually from OBC and SC backgrounds, working in Surat's power looms, earn about ₹12,000 a month on average. The low payment rate in *sari* cutting units is connected to the low margins of this segment within the highly fragmented industry value chain. In fact, it is arguable that this form of work is not economically feasible as an enterprise at all and is kept afloat and profitable only by the extreme extraction of a defenceless young workforce. In their absence, the segment would arguably have to be integrated with upstream activities and the industry would have to bear the cost of such production activities at higher labour standards. The parallels across the three work sectors highlight a critical feature about the very structure of labour markets—that it operates by creating isolated ghettos within it, where terms of work are so eroded with such low remuneration, that mainly groups suffering long-drawn impoverishment are found here. While the bulk of informal labour suffer from inadequate work conditions, Adivasis find themselves in an additionally paradoxical position—on the one hand, they are largely unwelcome in better segments of work but, on the other hand, they are actively sought and preferred by the industry in the least rewarding and most exacting forms of work.

Abandonment and Insecurity of Adivasi Migrant Households

To check the industry's tendency of shifting costs and burdens on to workers, labour legislation in India has enacted another set of laws that seek to provide security to labouring households. The Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948 and the Provident Fund Act of 1952, both applying to establishments employing 10 or more workers (including casual workers), provide social security against sickness, maternity, temporary or permanent disability and death at workplace as well as pension for old age (Papola & Pais, 2007; Press Trust of India, 2016; Rajagopal, 2016). The Workmen Compensation Act of 1923 (or WCA) mandates employers' liability and compensation to workers for any injury during the course of employment and provides a list of diseases, which if contracted by the employee will be deemed an occupational disease liable for compensation (NCEUS, 2007). Papola and Pais (2007) argue that these laws are based on the rationale that they are a minimum pre-requisite for a healthy and secure labour force, needed for sustainable industry growth, based on a balance of rights and responsibilities between the employer and the worker. However, in the hundreds of units that Aajeevika Bureau has visited across the three sectors, registering workers and extending applicable benefits under ESI, PF and WCA is witnessed only in rare cases of empathetic employers or contractors, who do exist but remain exceptions.

For most workers, accidents are made to look like it is their like fault. They do not receive any compensation but are immediately laid off. Costs for basic medical treatment for injuries and ill-health during the course might be paid by the employer, only to be deducted from the month's wages. Even in extreme cases of death on construction sites in Ahmedabad, typically no liability is assumed by contractors or principal employers, and the families receive no compensation at all (Prayas, 2009). The abdication of its basic responsibility towards the worker and its household's security is particularly damaging since workers (especially those like Adivasis working in the bottom-most echelons of the labour market) have to absorb the toxicity of their work environment directly into their bodies, with high prevalence of respiratory diseases, workplace accidents and injuries and musculo-skeletal disorders (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014).

What are the repercussions from such abdication by the industry of its basic and legally mandated responsibilities? To understand the implications from such extractive labour processes, the stage once again needs to move back to the rural, immiserated periphery from where this article's analyses began. The discernible impact of the employers' abdication of basic costs can be seen in the life cycle of a typical migrant from the region, which is marked by an early entry and premature exit from the labour market, both symptomatic of the communities' deep vulnerability (Aajeevika Bureau, 2014). Based on a survey of over 260 men in the age group of 17–35 years from southern Rajasthan's Rajsamand district, Jatan Sansthan (2008) found that about 56 per cent of the male persons in their study villages were migrants who had ended their migration cycles prematurely. In a similar study, Aajeevika Bureau (2010) found that over half of such 'returnees' came back involuntarily due to wage theft or poor health. It is indeed rare for an Adivasi migrant to be able to persevere longer than 35–40 years given the steady abrasion their bodies undergo in Gujarat. With their early exit, households require children and adolescent boys to start migrating. The labour market's extreme surplus extraction of their migrant fathers means that the children grow up in conditions of poverty and food insecurity, subverting the possibility of a healthy start for them. Thus, the new generation enters the labour market much in the same conditions as their fathers—*super-exploitable* with poor endowments and low position, restricted in the same segments of the economy.

Jain (2017) argues that another marked implication observed in the migrant household of southern Rajasthan is on women's unpaid labour—raising children single handedly, in the absence of their fathers; caring for their sick, returnee husbands who often end their migration cycle with debilitated bodies and minds, needing rehabilitation from the assault of extractive labour processes; and meeting the needs of the household in conditions of acute scarcity, by expending large amounts of labour and time to reproduce life in scarcity. Jain (2017) argues that though wives of single male migrants seem to live distant rural lives, away from Gujarat's labour markets, they nevertheless end up absorbing a large part of the insecurity and precarity pushed on to the household by the industry. Overall, the industry's engagement with Adivasi migrant households reveals a discernible trend—it employs them during their most productive years when the workers possess the greatest labour power, extracting maximum value from their brain,

nerves and muscles, while simultaneously distancing themselves from bearing the basic costs of the household (including the costs of raising children adequately) and finally dispensing off the worker as soon as their productivity starts waning or younger and cheaper workers become available for extraction, offering no support for the non-productive years that come early due to the toll absorbed during their productive phase. The physical separation and institutional differentiation between the migrant at the work destination and the household that is subsisting in the rural backdrop, as Burawoy (1974) calls it, obscure the far-reaching implications of this abandonment. Teasing out these inter-related processes, inter-generationally at the source and the destination, connecting the history of social groups to their contemporary dynamics, and investigating the inner workings of informal labour processes against legal provisions reveal the complex ways in which Adivasis are super-exploited in this migration corridor (summarized in Table 2).

Capitalist Accumulation at the Cost of Labour

The article shows that the three industries that are central to Gujarat's growth and economy make illicit profits through the payment of labour made below minimum wage levels, unfair or illegal deductions and delayed payments, the refusal to bear overtime costs of extended work days, the shifting of legally mandated industry responsibilities for creating safe work environments, the compensation for injuries and occupational diseases as well as basic forms of social security on to the worker and the migrant household. The magnitude of capitalist accumulation that takes place through such profiteering can be gauged from the following: if Adivasi workers, such as those working in hotels or *sari* cutting units, work for 26 days a month for 10–12 hours a day, the legally mandated wages (including overtime) would amount to around ₹10,400 a month, based on Gujarat's minimum daily wage of ₹305.06 and double payment for overtime by hour. As we saw earlier, workers in these sectors earn in the range from ₹2,000 to 6,000, with underpayment by the order of 40–80 per cent of the legally sanctioned wages. If other applicable laws regarding deductions, insurance, safety and compensation are invoked, the accumulation by the industry through such extraction would be many times higher, for every worker, every month! It is through the successful application of these legal tools that Aajeevika Bureau has been able to repatriate over ₹130 million of rightful dues to workers in around 8,500 cases across such sectors. These figures suggest that the quantum of total surplus value extracted for capitalist accumulation overtime from labourers, especially from an Adivasi migrant labour, should be a colossal amount.

With labour processes being geared towards such illicit capitalist accumulation, what are the larger distributional implications of Gujarat's growth? Based on his analyses of the state's economy, economist Sood (2012) argues that Gujarat's market-based development model is structured in a highly uneven way, such that gains from its rapid growth are designed to be concentrated within certain regions and among capital-owning social groups, the managerial class of professionals,

Table 2. Inter-related Processes of Super-exploitation of Adivasi Migrant Workers from Southern Rajasthan in Gujarat's Labour Markets

Work Sectors	Construction	Hotels and Restaurants	Textile
Labour market segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom-most segment of helpers populated by Adivasi migrant workers. • No significant presence in the better segments of skilled work, supervisory and professional roles, which are dominated by higher castes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely found in the role of cleaners with limited-to-no upward mobility; not 'polished' to be waiters • Relatively more remunerative roles of cooks dominated by Brahmins • Supervisory and managerial roles dominated by local workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General and OBC category migrant workers dominate industry segments with greater value add and higher pay • Adivasis are secluded to performing the most marginal tasks in sari cutting and folding units, with harshest work conditions and curtailed upward mobility
Violations of legal provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitary accommodation, canteen, cooking and crèche facilities not provided in violation of CLA • 20–25 per cent wage gap between men and women for similar work, in violation of ERA • Pregnant women receive no medical support and work within 15 days of delivery in violation of MBA • Overtime paid but at single rates in violation of MWA 	<p style="text-align: center;">MECHANISMS OF SURPLUS EXTRACTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violation of SEA's cap on work hours and overtime • Violation of prohibition on the employment of children below 14 years and on maximum hours of work by adolescent workers under CLAA • Violation of SEA's 21-day annual paid leave and WHA's weekly off • Violation of PWA provision of payment of wages from first to seventh of each month • Violation of MWA of ₹305 per day and ₹7,500 per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same regulations apply and similar violations observed as hotels and restaurants

(Table 2 continued)

(Table 2 continued)

Work Sectors	Construction	Hotels and Restaurants	Textile
The extension of work day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The absence of legally mandated facilities extend women's work day to meet needs of the household.• For workers living on site, underpaid overtime is common	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workers subsidize the cyclical nature of demand in the industry with illegally extended work days of at least 15 hours each week• Captive conditions of work: no weekly holiday and the threat of wage forfeiture if the worker wants to leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illegal constitution of workforce: 40 per cent of labour begins within 10–14 years, who work at least 10–12 hours in a day• Double shifts are common during the peak season of Diwali
The intensity of work day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hazardous environment with no safety mechanisms to prevent common accidents, injuries, deaths and occupational diseases• For women, continuous multi-tasking of providing care to children in the absence of a crèche• Physical and mental exertion from living in open, unsafe and unsanitary shelters made of scrap material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laborious activities conducted rapidly for long hours—cleaning dishes, mopping floor, chopping vegetables• Confined in intensely hot, humid and unhygienic kitchens• Sleep on dirty floor, tables and cramped rooms with unusable toilets• Physical abuse and verbal harassment are common, especially of children and adolescent workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children undertake <i>sari</i> folding, standing for hours while performing the task, for 2,000–25,000 <i>saris</i> a day, working rapidly without breaks• Physical and verbal abuse is common for children.• Workers work and live in the cramped, unventilated and hot rooms, completely concealed from the public eye
Payment below value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rampant wage theft—forfeiture, delayed payment and/or unfair deductions• 20–25 per cent wage gap for women• 'Race to the bottom' wages at <i>nakas</i> when workers are desperate for work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wage rates start around ₹2,000 for children, stagnate at around ₹6,000 at most for Adivasi workers even after 15–20 years in industry• Wages of first 15 days are deducted as compensation for living facilities (in the violation of PWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Payment starts at ₹2,000; highest around ₹4,000• Provision of medicines and clothes deducted from salary

ABANDONMENT OF MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD

Violations of legal provisions

- Industry reluctance to register workers under ESI and PF for the provision of social security (against sickness, maternity, disability, death, etc.) and pension
- Industry refusal to assume liability and provide compensation to workers for injury, death or occupational disease as required by WCA

Poverty and insecurity of households

- Results in early entry and early exit of workers from the labour market, with an inter-generational transfer of poor health, low skills and poverty
- The employer saves by not investing in safe and healthy work and living environments during productive years
- The employer passes on costs of non-productive years (including those emerging from work hazards) on to the household and community

CONTINUITY OF HISTORICAL DISADVANTAGE

The role of social relations and position

- Highly disadvantageous incorporation into contemporary labour markets with the lowest endowments among social groups, shaped by a history of dispossession and destruction of the material basis of life
- Low bargaining power as the casual worker is exacerbated by power inequality vis-à-vis upper-caste employers, supervisors and contractors
- Lack of community resources such as extended kinship networks with contacts and access to support mechanisms in the city
- Internal alienness in public spaces and institutions such as the police; prejudice and negative perceptions in the labour market

Source: Summary of the analyses presented in the main text of the article.

while penalizing labouring communities. He finds that the share of labour in gross value is dismally low, among the lowest in the country, and has been falling since the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, Hirway and Shah (2011) argue that the share of wages in the net value add has dropped in Gujarat at the rate of 3.25 per cent per year from 1999 to 2008. The real wage rate for casual work in Gujarat is among the lowest in the country. While the state enjoys a 20 per cent higher per capita income compared to the national average, the rural and urban wages lag behind by 20 and 15 per cent, respectively (Chandrashekhar & Ghosh, 2014).

Breman (2013) argues that the nature of Gujarat's growth is predatory, with the state facilitating and underwriting capitalist accumulation at the cost of labour. For instance, the government has given out sales tax subsidies worth ₹52.5 billion and capital subsidies worth ₹7.69 billion to the industry in under 15 years (from 1991 to 2005) (Hirway & Shah, 2011). However, its spending on basic services and public goods such as health, nutrition and safe water is below national average and there has been a conscious thrust by the state government to not monitor compliance with minimums wage laws to reassure the industry of an investor-friendly climate (Breman, 2013). Such features have made Gujarat's growth exclusionary, with the state's poverty and inequality reduction rates being even more sluggish than the national average (Sood, 2012). While there are no estimates that throw light on the distribution of gains with Adivasi migrants from southern Rajasthan, the poverty levels experienced by their Gujarati counterparts, the Bhil Adivasis from Dahod and Panchmahal districts, offer a close proxy. Mittal's (2012) analysis of Gujarat's NSSO regions highlights that these districts have one of the highest incidences of poverty rates in the state and one of the lowest rates of poverty reductions since 1993. Despite being connected to the booming markets of Ahmedabad and Surat (much in the same way as Adivasis from southern Rajasthan), these communities have experienced only a marginal increase or even significant periods of decrease in the growth rate of their average monthly per capita expenditure, such that Mittal (2012) finds that their condition is worsening in real terms. The geographical spread that has emerged is that of a core area of growth in Gujarat, including areas of agglomeration such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Valsad, Vadodara and Kheda, surrounded by a vast impoverished periphery, including a large Adivasi belt that fuels the growth of the core, with very low shares in gains (Rani & Kalaiyasan, 2012).

As for the distribution in southern Rajasthan, the system of labour migration from the region shows marked features of reproducing the historical inequalities between its social groups. The World Bank (2016b) reports that the poverty levels in the ST community of Rajasthan is nearly 10 times higher than their General category counterparts and nearly 4 times higher than the OBC communities. Moreover, the rate of poverty reduction among Adivasis is four times slower than General category communities and three times as slow as the OBC categories for the period from 2005 to 2012. It should be noted that southern Rajasthan contributes about two-thirds of the total ST population in Rajasthan and this disparity is likely to be heavily related to the inequality in gains from migration to Gujarat, which is a dominant livelihood strategy across social groups from the southern region. Breman (2013) argues that gains from Gujarat's growth are shared with

upper-caste middlemen, whose networks go up to the boundaries of the formal economy—the owners of small shops, a wide assortment of traders, shopkeepers, labour recruiters, contractors, moneylenders, pawnbrokers and commission agents—but not with the migrant labourers from the region.

Conclusion

Using the case of Adivasi labour migration from southern Rajasthan to Gujarat, the article examines the dynamics of the system of migration for the poorest labouring communities. The super-exploitation experienced by Adivasis could well be shared with other historically disadvantaged groups such as Dalits, with the intersections of women and children being doubly exploited within these communities. Focusing on systemic level factors does not imply a denial of the individual agency of migrants or their subjective experience. On the contrary, the article highlights the larger forces within which individual trajectories unfold and the barriers they might face, posed by history and its continuing legacies in contemporary labour markets. It is important to invest in such a political economy account of labour migration to help identify effective ways of making the livelihood less corrosive and to infuse it with some nourishing qualities for the poorest groups in the country. This is needed because inequalities, when structural, as the article shows in the case with Adivasis in Gujarat's labour markets, are unlikely to self-correct themselves (Thorat, 2008). The discussions in the article suggest that reducing the exploitative characteristics of capitalist production processes cannot occur in a piecemeal fashion. Instead, they require a larger reclaiming of the labour welfare agenda, with the earnest implementation of labour laws and investments in improving the starting positions of the poorest communities, through improved health, education and nutrition as well as by adding force to legislations such as the Forest Rights Act (2006) that seek to return Adivasi communities' rights over forests. Unfortunately, the sway of policy is in the very opposition direction today. Breman (2013) expresses dismay that a radical shift has occurred in the country, and in Gujarat in particular, such that the formalization of labour is no longer seen as the awaited outcome. Instead, deeper labour market flexibility is seen as the solution to the ills that plague the Indian economy. Similarly, Papola and Pais (2007) point that the industry's disposition is not towards an improvement of labour standards but argue that labour laws are too burdensome and limiting. Interestingly, the violations of labour legislation by the industry, as shown in this article, are not of one or two onerous laws but of the bulk of rules that seek to protect the basic rights of labour. The capitalist call for even greater flexibility and relaxation in labour laws is then a demand for exemption from any measures that might stem its full and unhindered accumulation process, allowing the industry to operate with near-complete impunity to utilize the desperation of the country's poor. This spells a crisis for the labouring communities of the country, including Adivasis, for it signals that they can continue to toil very hard, yet be kept poor, without their employers being implicated in the process.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Professor Ravi Srivastava, Nivedita Jayaram, Priya Raghavan, Rajendra Sharma, Santosh Poonia and Divya Varma for their valuable inputs to the article and to S. Sangeeth, Jagjit Singh, Mohan Lal Gameti and Gulab Parmar for their support with case documentation. The authors are responsible for any remaining errors.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Adivasi literally means ‘original inhabitants’ and refers to the indigenous groups in India that are/were largely forest dwellers. Adivasis are officially designated as STs, and the article uses these terms interchangeably.
2. Dalit is a popular term used for SC groups and is preferred since it arose from the activism of these communities themselves (Shah & Lerche, 2018).
3. The authors are affiliated to Aajeevika Bureau, a civil society organization that works with seasonal migrant communities in Rajasthan and Gujarat. It provides legal aid and education, primary health care and financial support (among other services and solutions) to address their needs.
4. These households were selected in the following manner: two districts were chosen from each of the five NSS regions of the state. The selection was made purposively to cover different types of migration contexts in Rajasthan and were chosen based on consultation with 10 civil society organizations working in these regions. From each of these 10 districts, 5 panchayats were randomly chosen and a survey on migration patterns was conducted covering all households in the selected 50 panchayats (data from 3 panchayats had to be discarded due to poor quality).
5. Though Marx did not formulate any specific theory of migration, his work included a well-developed understanding of the displacement of labour to cities (Shrestha, 1988). Marxian theories, which constitute a heterodox body of work, have drawn from this to focus on the distribution of value and the nature of labour processes in capitalist economic systems. This article benefits from these theories, without venturing into the Marxist extension, that is, the political ideology that the crisis in capitalism would lead to revolution (Munro, 2008). In this respect, the article uses the distinction (common in academia) of analytically benefiting from Marxian economics without venturing into Marxist revolutionary socialism.
6. Mitra et al. (2017) argue that while the specificities of capitalism in India might not neatly follow the ‘Marxisms’ conceptualized in the West, its analytical categories such as capital remain highly relevant in unpacking the country’s economic order and are useful if studied by keeping an eye on the peculiarities found in local contexts.
7. Including Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.
8. Towards urban centres in Pali, Udaipur and Rajsamand districts.
9. Followed by Maharashtra which accounted for 14 per cent of the traffic.

10. This data are based on per capita net state domestic product for the year 2014–2015 at constant prices, keeping 2011–2012 as the base year.
11. The districts in southern Rajasthan were part of the Mewar and Western Rajputana princely states (within the larger Rajputana agency) during the colonial era. Verghese (2015) argues that despite their direct absence in princely states, the British tended to control forest resources through their policy of indirect rule. Skaria (1997, 1999) reaffirms that Adivasi Western India (including southern Rajasthan), in many of its aspects was effectively managed by British officers (despite the rule of Rajput princes), and that colonial forest policies were responsible for a disruption in the historical rights of Bhils over forests.
12. Based on the data of 2,000 pregnant Adivasi women (in the age group of 18–45) that visited the clinics for prenatal care.
13. For instance, access to the basic facility of drinking water at home is over four times lower among STs than General category households in the state (The World Bank, 2016b).
14. The interviews presented in this section have been conducted by Aajeevika Bureau's research team. In the case of Ahmedabad's construction sector, for example, the organization operates on-site crèches, that enabled the researchers to frequently visit the sites, developing a rapport with workers and employers. This allowed for in-depth, candid interviews focused on their perceptions and experiences.
15. *Nakas* are the labour congregation points in the city where workers and contractors come together every day to negotiate work and wages.
16. OBCs in Rajasthan include groups such as Lohars, Gujjars and Patidars, who have not suffered the manner of social discrimination and disadvantage experienced by other communities that fall in this category in other parts of India. The economic position of these groups is relatively stronger in the state, often faring better than some of their upper-caste counterparts such as Rajputs and Brahmins from southern Rajasthan.
17. Canteen is a requirement for sites with 100 workers or above, working for 6 months or more.
18. India's construction sector reports the largest number of workplace accidents globally, employing 7.5 per cent of the world's workforce and accounting for 16 per cent of all workplace accidents in the world (Kulkarni, 2007).
19. Construction workers, who access work through *nakas*, typically live in the open (by the payments and under bridges) or in cramped, small rented rooms.
20. The case of power loom workers from Odisha's Ganjam district has been particularly highlighted by the media (Srivastava, 2017).

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