

**EXPERIENCE, ASPIRATIONS AND ORGANISATION:
POLITICS OF INFORMAL WORKERS IN POST-1990s INDIA**

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**BY
KOYEL LAHIRI**

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA
R-1 BAISHNABGHATA-PATULI TOWNSHIP
KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL – 700094**

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SYNOPSIS

Introduction

This dissertation looks at informal workers in India and their politics at two sites of work: the hawker in the city and industrial workers at factories, using an ethnographic fieldwork methodology supported by secondary literature. The two sites and workers are connected by contemporary processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and global processes of informalisation of work. Despite growing evidence to the contrary, there continue to be assumptions that informal workers do not organise/cannot organise. I trace this assumption through these contrasting studies of two kinds of informal workers-one in the informal sector, the other in the formal sector- and address gaps in the existing literature on the contemporary politics of hawkers and factory workers. Hawkers are studied via the National Hawker Federation (NHF) and its membership in Kolkata and Delhi. The NHF, formed in 2000-01, with 1188 member unions,¹ claims to be the largest federation of hawkers in India, with a presence in 28 states. Factory workers are studied in Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) in the industrial areas of Okhla, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Industrial Model Town Manesar (IMT Manesar).

Locating the two cases within relevant literature specific to their domains, this dissertation addresses questions of how hawkers and informal factory workers organise and why, addressing issues of representation, inclusions, exclusions and relevance of form vis a vis the principal features of precarity associated with the occupation in question.

This dissertation goes on to argue that it is impossible to arrive at a nuanced understanding of informal workers' politics without first recognising that a worker's relationship with work is infinitely more complex than is frequently acknowledged. It argues that workers' politics stem from a three-fold relationship with and experience of work. That is, firstly, a workers' experiences at the site of work, and the dynamics therein, such as everyday experiences at work, interactions with the state, employers, other workers, the political economy their work is embedded in, etc. Secondly, a worker's relationship with work and its social aspect. For example, beyond just

¹ See the website of the National Hawker Federation located at <http://www.nationalhawkerfederation.com/> (accessed August 18, 2021)

financial sustenance, the work one does helps secure for a person social position and respect, affecting the livelihood choices workers make, which in turn affects their political demands and articulations. Thirdly, the relationship of work and selfhood, marked by experiences of leisure, free time, drudgery, repetition and pain, and desires, hopes and ambitions cherished. The line dividing the social from selfhood, as used in this dissertation, is a soft one, for though both weave into each other, the dissertation still wishes to mark the distinction between them such that selfhood refers to inner worlds, i.e., inwardly focussed, where the principal actant is the worker, with their external social context reasonably muted. The social, on the other hand, refers to a more ‘outward’ focus where the principal actant is still the worker, but the worker embedded in their social context.

It argues that which of these three aspects one stresses is important, and that progressive movements sometimes focus on the material and worksite related issues, over the other two, thereby limiting political imaginations, asks, and struggles. Additionally, this can impact the degree to which progressive movements resonate with their intended membership, with implications for workers’ struggles and the political heft of labour on shaping the world of work. Equally, the question of how progressive movements respond to this threefold relationship and factor it into their politics also matters because as scholars like Bhowmik (2012) have noted, when political space is ceded by progressive workers’ movements, the vacuum left can be occupied by right wing ideological and reactionary forces and movements.

Research Questions

There are two key questions within this research, which in turn have certain sub-questions. These are:

1. How do informal workers experience work and how does one understand their relationship with work? How does this influence their politics?
 - a. What are the characteristics of work for informal workers in factories and hawkers on the street? What are the dynamics of work in post-Fordist factory spaces and what form do workforce profiles and concerns of workers take in this scenario? How do new forms of governance in neoliberal urban spaces affect the concerns of hawkers?
 - b. What are the social aspects of work and how is the selfhood of workers affected by the work they do?

- c. How do the three aspects of a worker's relationship with work-i.e., the relationship with work at the site of work, and the social and selfhood aspects of work -influence their politics?
2. How does one understand the politics of informal workers today?
 - a. How do informal workers organise and protest today? In the specific case of hawkers-what are the internal dynamics and organisational processes of long-term organised collective movements? What do we know of how they function, and the factors contributing to and detracting from their stability of form and continuing connection with their membership?
 - b. What is the relationship between traditional modes of labour organising and current forms of worker organising?
 - c. How does this differ across sectors (factory workers and hawkers) and spaces (Kolkata and Delhi NCR)?
 - d. With the passage of The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, how is the terrain of hawker politics changing? How is it impacting the organised hawkers' movement in India?
 - e. How does the labour law regime interact with factory spaces and workforce?
 - f. How does one read the political articulations of workers in terms of motivations, triggers and end goals? In what ways do informal workers exercise agency?

Chapter Two and Chapter Three introduce the case studies, the spaces they are located in, and set the context for the discussion of fieldwork data in Chapters Four, Five and Six. The first question is primarily addressed in Chapter Six, barring 1(a) which is address across Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five. The second question cuts across Chapters Four, Five and Six, barring 2 (a) and 2(b) which are also addressed across Chapters One and Three.

Methodology

This research is undertaken through ethnographic fieldwork supported by secondary literature. Data was collected through observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with individuals and groups, and free flowing conversations. The latter was prioritised as far as possible.

For the first case of hawkers' politics, fieldwork was primarily conducted with the NHF's membership in Kolkata and Delhi, with a smaller focus exclusively on its federation form (represented by leaders and organisers from the different states it draws its members from). The fieldwork with the Kolkata membership, i.e., the HSC, began in March 2012 as part of an earlier research, and continuous ethnographic contact was maintained during this project, ending with follow-up interviews of member sites between January-March 2017. Fieldwork with the Delhi membership of the NHF was carried out in May 2014, and then between August-October 2014. In both cities my primary sources were local member site organisers/leaders and those organisers/leaders who were a part of the central leadership in charge of the city in question. This choice was made in order to map the NHF's city-wide presence of more than 50 member unions in Kolkata and 51 member unions in Delhi. Given the then unstable nature of the structure of Delhi NHF (including fluctuating membership), and the shorter period of ethnographic contact (in comparison with Kolkata) I was unable to verify the presence of all fifty-one member unions, which I flag as a caveat in my dissertation.

Ethnographic fieldwork with factory workers in Delhi NCR was carried out from November 2015-August 2016, with some follow up interviews in March-April 2017. The chosen locations were the Okhla industrial area, Udyog Vihar Phase 1 (Kapashera border between Delhi and Gurgaon), IMT Manesar (two locations- Sector-3 JNS Cut and Naharpur Village), Dharuhera (two interviews only), Faridabad (two locations- Sector-24 industrial area and Majdoor Library at Autopin Jhuggi where the FMS collective meets). There hasn't been a particular trade-union that has gained the confidence of workers and/or dominated in any one of the four primary fieldwork locations in this period, nor across NCR as a whole. Thus, unlike with hawkers, I was unable to study a particular union and its membership. Instead, my entry into the field ended up being through the FMS. The FMS is a loose, non-organising, collective that publishes a monthly workers' newspaper from Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, Faridabad, which also doubles as the residence of its cofounder and editor. The four-page newspaper had been in publication for more than 30 years. My respondents were permanent and temporary workers, members and leaders of factory unions, leaders of central trade unions, members of the FMS collective, a few management personnel and owners of factories and a Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) industry association. I also draw from a 2009 (qualitative) fieldwork-based research on women garment workers in factories in Chennai (through interviews and group discussions translated to English in real time

by a translator) and from a 2013 General Assembly and International Conference of the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI)

I would like to flag at the outset the issue of asymmetry that emerges in this research with respect to the two cases. This was an exploratory study, so going in, I did not know what I would find, and how the findings would speak to each other. How I would frame the research would depend on what emerged on the field.

While both studies sought to understand the politics of organising, its method of doing so had to be different. The nature of the worksites for the two cases were different, and that, coupled with the fact that both the case studies, especially the NHF one, was constantly evolving even as I studied it, meant that there were various asymmetries in the studies. There was firstly, the asymmetry of the worksites, which was anticipated. Secondly, there ended up being an asymmetry of the methodological approach to the hawker study (following a union) versus the approach to the factory workers study (non-union, dispersed study). Thirdly, an asymmetry ended up existing between the NHF study in Kolkata (begun before the 2014 Act was passed, thus being able to map the HSC movement before and after it) versus Delhi (fieldwork entirely conducted in the aftermath of the passage of the 2014 Act, therefore not having a sense of the field and Delhi movement prior to that). Fourthly, a natural asymmetry also exists in the factors that emerged as being key shapers of the NHF movements in Delhi and Kolkata. The thematic areas of discussions are not equally balanced for both cities, because of uneven information that emerged from field interactions. On some themes I have information from Delhi that I do not have from Kolkata (for example, the frequency of raids and the manner of retrieving goods after such raids in Delhi). This is because it seemed to be a more common and recurring feature for the hawkers I spoke to in Delhi, compared to Kolkata. While these absences are a limitation to the research, one can also, perhaps, read them as existing because hawkers tended to highlight the issues specific to their context, therefore highlighting the different experiences of hawking in these two cities.

With regard to my positionality as a researcher, my engagement with the HSC began as an ally in 2012, and then continued as a researcher and I undertook ethnographic fieldwork with them. I recognize there are methodological implications for such involvement in long projects such as this- I was present in my interactions with them sometimes as an ally and sometimes as a researcher though the lines between the two naturally began to blur once I officially decided to study the

HSC's movement for my MPhil and PhD research. One complexity of such involvement is the obvious danger of compromised responses from member hawkers, once I came to be recognised as being close to the HSC/NHF, and as someone who was endorsed by their leader Saktiman Ghosh. This is something I explicitly addressed in an earlier research, noting that there was no outright attempt to control or police responses by the central leadership, and that despite this risk, the responses and opinions articulated were adequately diverse to justify the approach. On the other hand, an advantage of this kind of involvement was that it ended up facilitating greater access to its membership, and created a situation where the HSC/NHF invited me to internal meetings, national level consultations etc.

My contact with the FMS was less involved. There I was present exclusively and explicitly as a researcher (and was accepted as such), although I did eventually request to help distribute copies of their monthly newspaper at industrial areas which ultimately became my fieldwork sites. Thus, by default I ended up spending a lot of time there, with them, and by myself. I came into contact with several factory workers who were either a part of the collective or existed in its orbit (as occasional distributors, or regular readers etc.), who generously granted interviews outside of the regular group conversations taking place. Through the collective I was able to make contact with some other factory workers who granted me interviews (including the two Dharuhera conversations).

While this kind of proximity was not sought or cultivated as a cold-blooded strategy, my simultaneous straddling of the field as a researcher and ally posed a problem in that it made detached observation quite challenging at times. This was mitigated to an extent by time, conscious effort and by relying on supplementing field responses and observations with secondary sources like newspaper reports, blogs and other literature as much as possible.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One (Introduction) introduces the research, factors that motivated it, discusses relevant literature and gaps therein, sets out the research questions and chapter outlines.

Chapter Two: Methodology

This chapter sets out the period of data collection and introduces the two cases and the two spaces in which they are located. That is, the politics of hawkers' movements and the National

Hawker Federation and its membership in Delhi and Kolkata, and factory workers in the Delhi NCR locations of Okhla, Gurgaon, Manesar and Faridabad. It also introduces and briefly discusses the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, which in many ways anchored my fieldwork with factory workers. It also flags the asymmetry that exists between the worksites of hawkers and factory workers and the consequent asymmetry in how the fieldwork chapters discussing the two cases are organised.

Chapter Three: Setting the Context

This chapter sets the context for this research, with discussions situating the informal worker within the changing nature of the urban and post-Fordist changes in the world of work which are braided together. This feeds into some discussions on informal workers and the informal sector, where I firstly lay out how this dissertation defines the hawker and the ‘workman’ for the factory workers’ case, specify what kinds of hawkers and factory workers are a part of formal organising that I came across (in the form of unions and organisations) and briefly engage with definitional and classificational issues around who a ‘worker’ is and what comprises a workers’ movement. I contend that in today’s world of work, such definitions are being stretched and modified (as they have been in the past as well) allowing me to include both hawkers and factory workers within the concept of the informal worker today, and to read their politics as examples of politics of informal workers. The chapter also discusses how the post-independent Indian state created the formal/informal divide in the first place, choosing to extend legal protections to a small minority of workers in the formal sector which had a strong influence on the nature of the Indian labour movement. The latter came to be comprised predominantly of permanent workers within the formal sector, a majority being government employees (since the government was the largest formal sector employer for many years). This came to shape the fault line between securely employed permanent workers and precariously employed informal workers which strongly impacted the Indian labour movement represented by the trade union form of organising. I note that today’s labour movement continues to be informed and shaped by this lingering legacy. The dissertation briefly traces the changing place of labour in the state narrative and shows how post-2000, responding to various global policy currents and transformations in the world of work, it has increasingly been turning its attention on the informal sector from the former focus on the formal sector. We see thus the institution of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised

Sector (NCEUS), and the various discussions that arose from the reports they released about informal workers and the informal sector. The discussion briefly traces how the above (i.e., of the changing nature of the urban, transformation in the world of work and growing numbers of informal workers across the world) has impacted workers' movements and their politics. Questions emerge on how to read struggles in the present context (since earlier narrativizations of workers' movements do not necessarily apply), on how one needs to revisit the question of representation within workers movements, the history behind the pro-union framing of workers politics that is still popular in the mainstream, and a critique of the same. This then feeds into a discussion on the relationship with work itself, which this dissertation draws heavily from in order to understand informal workers' politics. It argues that the way we think about our politics is greatly influenced by how we relate to and think about our work. Setting up the threefold relationship with work (at the worksite, with the social and selfhood), I note that workers experiences of work are not homogenous and uniformly negative, even in the post-Fordist regime. Thus, what a worker wants and is seeking need not necessarily be found within labour movements, or even progressive politics focussing on issues stemming from the worksite. I argue that we need to keep this in mind when reading acts of resistance and thinking about workers politics in general.

Chapter Four: The Politics of Organising at the Site of Work- The National Hawker Federation

This chapter dives into a reading of the fieldwork with the National Hawker Federation, after first locating it within the literature that exists on hawkers' politics. It is helpful to keep in mind here that there is still a predominant notion that within the informal sector, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, workers do not/cannot organise. The significance of instances of formal organising by hawkers must be read against this. I argue that comparatively little research exists on hawker politics, since hawkers, like other kinds of urban informal sector workers, are often subsumed within the catch-all category of the 'urban poor'. It is important to disaggregate the various segments of the urban poor and study their politics separately for greater clarity and accuracy. I argue, for instance, that hawkers' movements are not adequately captured by many of the influential arguments that exist regarding the politics of the urban poor. Given that theorisations rely on good empirical data, I argue that we need to plug this gap. Further, I argue that, as mentioned, of what research exists on hawkers' politics, very little focusses on instances of formal organising, as is represented by the NHF. This gap means we know very little about

the operational dynamics, trajectories and logic of organising of hawker unions. We know very little of the factors that contribute to the building of durable organisations or their limitations, including issues of representation and exclusions. I address this through my study of the NHF movement in Kolkata and Delhi, and by looking at its federation structure and scale of operation at the national level. While the NHF's movement is very strong and influential in Kolkata, in Delhi, at the time of fieldwork, it was considerably weaker. I analyse factors that contribute to their relative strength in both cities, highlighting what has worked well where and why. The discussion on the NHF's functioning at the federation level is attempted at the level of understanding internal dynamics and structures, what it takes to keep such a structure together, issues considered important by its membership and seeks to give a glimpse of its overall approaches to politics, struggle and strategy. The chapter also discusses some limitations of the movement.

Chapter Five: The Politics of Organising at the Site of Work- Factory Workers in Delhi National Capital Region

This chapter discusses the second case study of factory workers in Delhi NCR, following a brief literature discussion that highlights the manner in which evolving trends in academic scholarship on labour and labour movements have influenced what is focussed on and 'knowable' with respect to industrial workers, their politics and agency. Unlike in the case with hawkers, the predominant framing with respect to factory workers tends to be that their politics takes/should take the form of union organising. Within industrial zones in Delhi NCR, one came across multiple ongoing agitations by workers. Some of the most militant agitations since 2005 had seemingly been triggered by managements preventing workers from unionising. This indeed is the framing that one repeatedly encountered in scholarship and amongst activists. However, during fieldwork I faced the puzzling reality that factory workers, most of who are temporary workers these days, were also quite averse to unions and union politics. How was one to make sense of this apparent contradiction? How was one to read the political articulations of factory workers? I approach this by highlighting a gap in literature and in popular activist narratives which don't seem to have a desire or inclination to discuss forms of workers struggles that fall outside of union organising, those that resemble the riotous and turn violent, those that don't necessarily have a long-term vision. By choosing to foreground wildcat strikes and riotous

political articulations that characterise this industrial belt, I seek to make visible and understand individual and collective acts of resistance and mobilisations, both as events and in the everyday, uncoupled from a pro-union framing. I argue that making the right to unionise the central focus of understanding strikes, conflicts and unrest amongst factory workers is very limiting. This is because trade unions have very little to offer to temporary workers in India today and also because it does not account for the social and selfhood aspects of their relationship with work. I undertake to examine the conditions which produced these conflicts. Just like in the case of hawkers I identify eviction as the defining characteristic of their precarity, with factory workers I argue that it is temporary work and its resulting consequences that becomes the defining characteristic of precarity. Drawing from literature I contrast how the lifeworld of factory workers in some of today's model industrial zones differs from the lifeworld of an earlier generation of workers who had permanent jobs within elite Nehruvian industrial enclaves. I discuss from my fieldwork the changing dynamics and experiences of factory work in the context of workforces becoming predominantly comprised of temporary workers. I also discuss how violations of statutory laws are the norm today (i.e., on pay, benefits, hours of work etc.), which adds to the precarity of temporary workers and frequently triggers a range of struggles, resistance and politics. Drawing from fieldwork, the discussion looks at the complex relationship that exists between factory workers and trade unions. I argue that while the changing landscape of industrial work is somewhat mitigating the historical faultlines that have existed between permanent and temporary workers, leading to common collective mobilisations, the process of unionisation almost inevitably reintroduced those faultlines and adversely impacted collective mobilisations and the pressure such mobilisations were able to create on employers. On the other hand, there were many examples where workers were able to have their demands met when they prioritised non-union forms of resistance and mobilisation.

Chapter Six: The Social and Selfhood Aspects of an Informal Worker's Relationship with Work

This chapter returns to the threefold relationship with work and the aspects of a worker's motivations and desires that exceed worksite related issues and contributes to shaping their politics. Drawing from fieldwork, it discusses the social aspect through a) discussions on the push and pull factors that bring workers from villages to cities, and how this was not necessarily

seen as a negative or painful move, b) how desires for greater social respect, reputation and prestige motivated work, life and political choices, even if it contradicted economic rationality and logic at times, and c) the various experiences of work that were communicated including experiences of enjoying apparently ‘bad’ work. The discussion on work and selfhood is arranged around experiences of a) leisure and free time, b) drudgery repetition and pain and c) ambition, hope and desire.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion- Reflections on the Politics of Informal Workers

This chapter sums up and presents a reading of informal workers politics, reading discontent and the pacification of discontent in view of the discussions and critiques presented in the dissertation. It speculates on the political possibilities that could exist if workers’ discontent cannot be pacified, if workers’ movements and/or progressive movements are able to work with a political imagination that accounts for the complex experience of work that workers have (beyond just workplace issues). It also sets out the limitations and shortcomings of this research and mentions future research that can follow from this.

Postscript

The final chapter, by way of a postscript, was not originally planned. Towards the end of the dissertation, however, its inclusion began to feel very urgent, even though I did not fully know how to write something of this nature within a formal piece of research. Feminist praxis trains one to navigate the ‘I’ in research, and the role the self plays in the process of gathering, processing and producing research. However, ways of knowing is seldom addressed in mainstream labour studies literature, and the complexities of navigating a PhD journey seem to almost never be addressed within the formal piece of research and writing itself. One’s own process of labour is generally effaced in academic productions, and I offer a rationale here as to why I don’t think it should be. This chapter is an attempt to address these concerns, however imperfectly.

Major Findings and Contributions of the Dissertation

This research adds to literature on hawkers’ politics through an empirical study of the politics of the NHF, studied through its memberships in Delhi, Kolkata and by reading the functioning of its national federation. The study presents, across both cities, details such as who the members and leaders are, what their politics look like, and what the internal organisational structures and

dynamics are. Such details remain ignored or understudied in literature on hawkers, as noted. It reveals that the NHF's movement in Kolkata (constituted of the HSC) is much stronger than its Delhi movement and it is instructive to read them both together to understand what contributes to their respective strengths and weaknesses. I argue that the HSC's ability to implement its politics and successfully organise rests heavily on its dual strategy of organising (simultaneously building the struggle at the macro and micro level), that widened from space-bound little struggles to larger collective action (while still holding on to the former).² The NHF's Delhi movement, on the contrary, at the time of fieldwork, had been unable to develop resistance and struggle at the micro level across its various membership sites. Unlike the HSC in Kolkata, it was unable to protect its membership from eviction and/or to advocate for them in the aftermath of one. It was also unable to protect its membership from exploitation by various power brokers in the street economy such as the Police and *dalals* (agents). I attribute this to the specific way factors from above (such as the complicated governance structure of Delhi) interacted with factors from below (leadership struggles, a '*sewa*'-i.e., 'service'- mentality to political struggle as opposed to a rights-based one, amongst others) in Delhi. The study notes that at the national level, in its federation level of functioning, the NHF stresses a simultaneous focus on the implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 and the need to continue nurturing the capacity for street level resistance and struggle. During the fieldwork period, most of the organisational attention appeared to be on the former aspect, which involved the following. They were conducting internal discussions and external consultations with experts and allies and drawing from those in order to understand how best to advocate for and train their membership in the post-Act world. They were constantly applying this understanding in the proactive role they were playing in setting the agenda for state governments as the latter began formulating the rules for the 2014 Act. They were also in the process of consolidating and formalising their organisational structure and they elected a national general council, working committees, central secretariat, state leadership and adopted a constitution at their first national conference at Delhi, in February 2016.

I argue that the forms of precarity that mark hawking, especially evictions, *produced* this form of struggle, i.e., hawkers' unions and associations. These forms allowed hawkers' movements to

² The study of the HSC was published as an article in the *Global Labour Journal* (Lahiri 2022) and I thank Reviewer 1 for suggesting this formulation.

advocate for long-term, stable gains. They were seen as providing (much greater) security against evictions, and going forward, they are expected to proactively increase gains to be made under the 2014 Act.

There are, however, limitations to this form of politics, including the fact that in the post-2014 Act regime, it will be harder for non-unionised hawkers to be protected. But overall, I argue that, at this point, this form of struggle is meeting a political need and resonating with hawker memberships under certain conditions (i.e., where the unions retain their willingness to continue militant place-based struggles even after the passing of the law, and not see the law and legal regime as the final answer and solution). What will happen going forward as the law ages is an open question and not yet a decided outcome, since within hawking, this form of organising is relatively new, especially in India. The history of struggling under this form is thus in the process of being made.

This research also adds to the literature on factory workers in India by presenting across the four fieldwork locations in Delhi NCR, the changing dynamics of work at the post-Fordist worksite of the factory, the experiences and issues that arise out of that, focussing on temporary work and temporary workers, and the manner in which the labour law regime interacts with this to produce a diversity of political articulations and struggles.

The picture that emerges from fieldwork is more complicated than what narratives of helplessness and victimhood of informal factory workers would have us believe. One sees the emergence of a new generation of young, temporary workers who often have the experience of ten to fifteen jobs under their belt before they turn twenty-five years old. They move from company to company with a growing bank of experiences, having no loyalty to any, building relations with the many workers they come in contact with. They work in terrible conditions, with terrible pay, no job security and this sometimes translates into them having very little agency. Frequently, however, this also translates into them becoming a militant force that neither managements nor the state can control.

Unlike in the case of hawkers, where the form of struggle adopted served their political interests and demands better than the alternative, in the case of informal factory workers, one does not see this. Since the 1990s, a majority of the industrial workforce has become informal, and therefore out of the purview of many labour laws extended to the formal sector. Those laws that do apply

exist in violation, often even for formal workers in the sector. The collective response of workers has thus increasingly tended towards activity without the involvement of trade unions, bypassing the legal framework for industrial disputes (which has been loaded against workers from inception) and the state. Wildcat strikes and occupations and lockouts have steadily grown in number, as have apparently leaderless and organisation-less acts of resistance. The trade union format of demand lists and wage agreements etc. seem to exist alongside more and more appearances of demand-less struggles (such as workers' riots). This is challenging managements and the state because how do you address a demand-less struggle? What is equally interesting is that if you cannot resolve or address a struggle that has no formal charter of demands, nor a representative/leader who can be bargained or negotiated with -how do you return quickly to status quo? If the return to status quo is deeply threatened, or delayed-time is money, after all, in the 'Just-in-Time' production regime of post-Fordism- who do we think stands to gain politically? I found evidence in my fieldwork that managements capitulated to workers in those situations where they saw very clearly that they had no option, when neither the carrot nor the stick worked. Factory workers' struggles in India therefore prods us to rethink the form they embedded in, or atleast the form that much of the left seeks to embed it in, i.e., the union. My fieldwork reveals that in the case of informal factory workers in the formal sector in India, trade unions do not appear to advance the political interests of informal workers nor strengthen solidarity and collective struggles of permanent and temporary workers. In fact, my evidence suggests that it is the collective actions of and solidarity amongst workforces-permanent and temporary workers together-that begin to threaten managements. In the post-Fordist world congenial relations appear to be growing amongst permanent and temporary workers because they are no longer separated by significant gaps of pay, privilege and security. In such a scenario, unions, which managements resist so long as they feel in control of workforces, tend to become a way for them to contain militancy and break struggles. Going forward, especially in the face of the new labour law changes that were made in 2019 and 2020,³ one expects that the role of union politics in its present form will shrink further and one will need to emphasise these other forms of struggle even more.

³ The Narendra Modi-led NDA government undertook labour reforms that amended and condensed 29 existing labour laws under four labour codes. These were pushed through in 2019 and 2020, and likely to be implemented soon. They are the Code on Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, Social Security Code and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. Discussions on these reforms, unfortunately, lie outside the scope of this dissertation.

Further, drawing from the two case studies, this research contends that while over-arching self-contained narratives of informal workers' politics might be challenging or impossible to arrive at (given the huge diversity that exists in work structures and conditions) what is nonetheless indicated is a need to understand anew what we recognise as politics and/or legitimate forms of struggle, and the goals and motivations of resistance. The latter, I argue, draws from a worker's three-fold relationship with work. The dissertation highlights the diverse ways in which agency is exercised by workers within this threefold relationship and the manner in which desire and discontent can be located across all three registers. It illustrates how this complicates unidimensional narratives and understandings of how workers perceive the work they do and how even bad work offers something 'positive' to workers. Findings also indicate that cultural transformations of desires must be recognized as complicating and undermining blanket narratives of deprivation, depression, scarcity, economic and social pressure frequently associated with the transforming urban and the disappearance of the public city. The future that today's generation of workers imagine need not even be similar to an imagination of the future that was considered acceptable to an earlier generation of workers.

Aligning with a critique of the default pro-union framing of labour studies, this dissertation thus argues that the final form a collectivization process takes is, arguably, not important in itself and needs to be evaluated on the basis of whether its membership believes its needs are being adequately addressed in the short as well as the long term, and the impact it is creating on state and capital. It highlights some variations that exist in informal workers' movements-within trade unions and outside of it, within a diversity of forms of collectivisations, organised or seemingly unorganised. There is frequently a tension between trade unions and non-trade union articulations of workers' politics, as shown. It is argued this is because of the transformations in the world of work and the almost universal informalisation of labour that has taken place across classes that frequently makes traditional ways of resistance meaningless. Empirical studies like Buckley's (2021) demonstrate that alternatives, such as wildcat strikes in the industrial sector in Vietnam, provide successful models of an alternative-provided we are able to take cognisance of it. Existing traditions of pro-union framing creates situations where alternative forms of struggle are disowned by trade unions and the mainstream left, especially violent ones. In this context, I submit that it is obvious that there isn't any clear path to follow. Prioritising agility over dogma, studies of informal

workers' politics must thus remain deeply attentive to what is happening on the ground, and draw from that rather than forming models based on 'shoulds'.