

# *Migrating Between Rural Raichur and Boomtown Bangalore: Class Relations and the Circulation of Labour in South India*

*Jonathan Pattenden, University of East Anglia*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is concerned with circular migration between the agriculture and construction sectors in Karnataka, South India. It analyses the class and household-based outcomes of migration during the 2000s between Karnataka's poorest district and the building sites of Bangalore – a city seen internationally as one of the epicentres of globalisation in South Asia. Its central argument is that migration's spatial extension of exploitation slightly shifts the balance of class forces in favour of the labouring class in source areas. 62 percent of households are found to gain from migration, but better design and implementation of welfare policies intended for migrant labourers (primarily those relating to health) would significantly increase migration's contribution to labouring class socio-economic and socio-political mobility. Positive outcomes are restrained, though, by the broader social relations of production and the ways in which capital shapes the outcomes of public policy. It is found that class-based impacts and household investments in productive assets are greater in villages with higher levels of migration and socio-economic and socio-political inequality, whilst household gains amongst unskilled labourers are more likely where socio-economic inequalities are lower.

## **KEY WORDS**

class relations, circular migration, labour, social protection, South India

## ***1. Introduction***

This paper is concerned with the economic and political implications of circular migration between the agriculture and construction sectors in Karnataka, South India. It analyses the class and household-based outcomes of migration during the 2000s between Karnataka's poorest district, Raichur (UNDP 2005) (see Table 1), and the building sites of Bangalore – a city seen internationally as one of the epicentres of globalisation in South Asia and a driving force behind Karnataka's high recent growth rates.<sup>1</sup>

The paper locates the circulation of labour from three villages in Raichur amongst broader processes of agrarian change before analysing the socio-economic and socio-political implications of migration for 129 labouring class migrant households.<sup>2</sup> Initial socio-economic and socio-political hierarchies at village-level are shown to mesh with hierarchies in the

construction sector before being reinserted (periodically, cyclically or permanently) into the class relations of the source villages.

The research was undertaken by the author and a research assistant in three fieldwork villages in Raichur: Jagalwara, Badarapur and Kumdini Cross.<sup>3</sup> The research assistant is from a neighbouring village – the same village where the author stayed during data collection. The author has conducted research in the same cluster of villages in 2007 and 2008, and in the region of North Karnataka more generally for eighteen months since 2002. Access to households and the building of trust was facilitated by both the author and research assistant knowing relatives and associates of some respondents in each of the villages. Research was conducted over six months – primarily during a four month period between early June and October 2010, but also in January 2010, and in June and November 2011.

Over three quarters of Madiga<sup>4</sup> households (129 out of 155 or 83 percent) in the three villages had migrated during the 2000s – in many cases repeatedly or for several years at a time. After group interviews in each of the villages, a survey of all 155 Madiga households (856 people) was conducted in order to determine household migration and employment patterns. The survey was followed by two rounds of primarily qualitative semi-structured interviews with thirty-four of the migrating households from which 156 individuals had migrated (each lasting between one and three hours – this will be referred to as the core sample). Additional qualitative material is drawn from the additional 121 surveyed households, around 30 percent of which were interviewed once by the research assistant, and through the author's discussions with key informants from nearby villages. The semi-structured interviews were mostly conducted in source villages, although a handful were held in migrants' tents in Bangalore.<sup>5</sup> The second round of interviews allowed for the development of qualitative material as well as for the triangulation of quantitative data. The author was present for the entire first round of interviews, for a minority of second interviews and the initial stages of the survey. The remaining data was collected by the research assistant (who was in frequent contact with the author during this time).

In addition, discussions were conducted with workers at nine different construction sites in Bangalore on between one and three occasions in January and October 2010 (of which three included members of the source villages), along with discussions with engineers, and employees in relevant NGOs and the Government of Karnataka's Department of Labour.<sup>6</sup> The article focuses on labour and its relations with capital and, as such, does not provide a full class analysis as capital remains relatively undifferentiated. In source and destination areas, the labourers that are the subject of this paper work primarily for larger farmers and construction companies, although most of them spend a minority of their time in the source areas working for smaller farmers. A minority also work on smaller construction projects.

The migrants from the fieldwork villages have worked predominantly in four areas of Bangalore during the 2000s – two in the east of the city, one in the north, and one in the south. Two of the construction clusters centre on residential and commercial developments built by Adarsh developers, who describe themselves as the 'foremost creator of premium lifestyle gated communities in Bangalore'.<sup>7</sup> Its recently completed Palm Retreat apartment blocks in Bangalore's Devarabeesanahalli have a clubhouse and lush green landscaped gardens, whilst its Palm Meadows development in nearby Ramagondanahalli comprises 590 luxury villas. Both largely accommodate those working in the neighbouring cluster of corporate offices, technology parks and Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Ten kilometres to the north-west Manyata Embassy Business Park is an SEZ developed by the Embassy Group – currently home to the largest cluster

of workers from the source villages and to prominent transnational corporations such as IBM, Philips and ANZ.<sup>8</sup> Electronic City, the fourth area, is home to another cluster of corporate offices and industries that includes the Biotech company Biocon, and the internationally recognised Narayana Hrudayalaya Health City.

These residential, commercial, industry and service-oriented developments provide employment for labourers from the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the north of India, and north-east Karnataka. Signs of upward mobility amongst these labouring class migrants – who exist at the interface of global capital and chronic poverty – could be seen as a barometer of the inclusivity of Karnataka’s current period of rapid economic growth. To what extent does the circulation of labour between the state’s poorest district and the epicentre of its growth facilitate upward economic and political mobility or the perpetuation of similar levels of exploitation of labour by capital? Are the trends contradictory and the mediations of class relations less obvious?

*Table 1. Unequal human development indicators in Karnataka*

Districts in Karnataka/States in India	HDI 1991	Rank out of all Karnataka Districts	HDI 2001	Rank out of all Karnataka Districts
Bangalore Urban	0.623	4 <sup>th</sup>	0.753	First
Raichur	0.443	Last	0.547	Last
Karnataka	0.541	-	0.650	-
Kerala	-	-	0.746	-
Uttar Pradesh	-	-	0.535	-

Source: UNDP 2005

Neoliberalism’s proponents subscribe to the contentious view that labour market regulation impedes economic growth and levels of employment (see Jha 2010 for an empirically based critique), and understand migration primarily in terms of individual choices aimed at income maximisation (Chandra 2004: 22, Iyer et al. 2004: 81). They have famously encouraged the rolling back of security and protection afforded to the small minority of formal sector workers (World Bank 1995, Breman 1996: 13).

Alternatively, migration can be located amongst production relations in the source and destination areas, and the broader social relations of production under uneven processes of capitalist development (Breman 1990, Chandra 2004). As a strategy for piecemeal processes of change in favour of labour, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and India’s National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS 2007: 173) advocate a ‘decent work agenda’ and argue for the extension of social security for the 90 percent of workers who operate in the informal sector. The NCEUS (2007: 9; see also Kannan 2009) calls for a ‘social floor’ composed of minimum working conditions and wages and a set of social security measures

to protect workers against such eventualities as health crises, loss of earnings due to accidents, and death. The channelling of widespread and sustained state welfare programmes to the labouring class can improve both their socio-economic and socio-political position (Herring and Edwards 1983), although their ability to access government programmes requires relative economic autonomy from the dominant class (Pattenden 2011b). The Government of India adopts an ambivalent position in relation to labour, and appears to want to leave working conditions in the informal sector as unregulated as they are now (Lerche, this volume), whilst some state governments have actively sought to undermine labour inspectors in order to promote flexible labour practices (Sharma 2006).

Migration has complex and contradictory implications for class relations. Out-migration tends to tighten labour markets in source areas with possible positive implications for employment levels and income (Patnaik and Chandrasekhar 2004: 11-12, Sidhu et al. 2004:153), whilst in-migration can push down local wages and reduce employment levels for local labourers who in turn may migrate themselves (Bremner 1990, 1996; Sidhu et al. 2004: 154). It is often hard to pin down the lines of causality – the relative influence, for example, of changes in agricultural productivity and the tightness of labour markets on wage levels (Jha 2007).

Outcomes are also mediated by the extent of inter-capitalist collusion (Rogaly et al. 2001, Bremner 1990), the broader class equations that underpin access to and retention of formal political power in particular regions (Rogaly et al. 2001), and state interventions to increase demand for labour (Rogaly et al. 2001, Selwyn 2007: 528). At a micro level socio-political shifts can be significant. It has been argued that exposure to higher wages and less pronounced social hierarchies during migration expands levels of awareness that may have progressive implications not only for the migrants but also for those left behind in the source area (Lenin 1977: 585, referred to in Chandra 2004: 27). In sum, this paper assumes that the causes and consequences of migration are to be found amongst the totality of migrants' social relations, and begins by contextualising itself in studies that have, like this one endeavours to do, attempted to analyse parts of that totality.

The paper proceeds in four parts before concluding. The first contextualises the outcomes of circular migration amongst the broader social relations of production. The second introduces the fieldwork villages in Raichur and shows how processes of agrarian change and the hitherto weak implementation of social protection programmes have contributed to migration flows. The following section analyses the class-based outcomes of migration, outlining minor labouring class gains in source villages and indicating how they are restrained by poor implementation of social protection programmes in Bangalore. The final section explores the uneven outcomes of circular migration across labouring class households.

## *2. Differentiation, Fragmentation and Marginalisation in Processes of Circular Migration*

Employment in the construction sector grew by 248 percent between 1983 and 2004/5, meaning that its relative importance in labour markets has grown faster than any other major sector (Srivastava, this volume), with 26 million informal workers in the mid-2000s (GoI 2009:89). Although broad-based accurate data on their socio-economic and sociological characteristics are lacking, a number of studies indicate that as well as being drawn from the

poorest in socio-economic terms, those who move between agriculture and construction labour are drawn disproportionately from the scheduled castes and tribes (Mobile Crèches 2008, Shivakumar et al. 1991, Sidhu et al. 2004: 142, Van der Loop 1996).

In 2004/5 agriculture and construction respectively provided 56.5 percent and 5.7 percent of jobs in India, making them the first and fifth largest providers of employment in the national economy (Srivastava, this volume), and underlining the significance of circular migration between them. This, in turn, is part of broader processes of urbanisation, economic development and growing levels of non-agricultural employment in India and across the developing world (Lerche 1999, Rigg 2006). Whilst this diversification of employment has generally increased the bargaining power of the rural labouring classes and reduced their levels of dependence upon the local dominant class, the extent to which this has occurred varies significantly (Breman 1996; Carswell and De Neve, forthcoming; Heyer, this volume). The widespread upward mobility amongst workers who enjoy elements of formal labour arrangements and relatively good working conditions and higher wages is contrasted to the casual informal workers for whom upward mobility is much less likely (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004). Others underline the importance of access to state social welfare programmes in determining the outcomes of heightened access to non-agricultural employment (Heyer, this volume), whilst others still underline the persistence of exploitation and even the reconstitution of labour bondage (Breman 1996; Carswell and De Neve, forthcoming; Guerin et al. 2009).

## DIFFERENTIATION

The extent to which circular migration contributes to social mobility is highly contested. Whilst some have described it as ‘the dominant form of economic mobility for the poor; especially the lower castes and tribes’ (Deshingkar and Akter 2009: 1), elsewhere it is seen as a survival strategy and a means of managing debt (Breman 1990, 1996; Mobiles Creches 2008; Mosse et al. 2002, 2005; Prospero 2009; Shivakumar et al. 1991; Van der Loop 1996). Mosse et al. (2002: 60-71; 2005: 3026-8) suggest that migration tends to perpetuate ‘below-subsistence livelihoods’ and amplify inequalities between better-off households migrating to facilitate agricultural investments or life events, and poorer families who migrate for longer in greater numbers, tend to earn less due to their lower levels of bargaining power, and use earnings primarily to repay debts. In other words, the initial socio-economic position, status and power of a household influences migration outcomes. Whilst this paper bears this out, it also seeks to analyse the broader implications for class relations.

There are indications that only a minority cross the divide from unskilled to semi-skilled labour, and that the transition is age-specific and highly gendered – most are men who enter the sector in their teens or early twenties (Van der Loop 1996: 282, Mobile Creches 2008:5). This paper also bears this out, and will show that skill levels are central to migration outcomes. Semi-skilled masons, who in some cases perform a supervisory role, receive around 50 percent higher wages than labourers, whilst regular workers are more consistently employed but tend to receive lower daily wages than more casual workers.

It should be noted that the amplification of inequalities, and distress and survival-oriented migration are not necessarily at odds with the view that circular migration, at least in parts of India, is the dominant form of economic mobility for the poor. These possible contradictions will be revisited below. Regardless, poor living conditions, increased health

problems, heightened risks of violence against women, and additional burdens of household labour and childcare on women and girl children appear to be the norm (Bremar 1990, 1996; Iyer et al. 2004: 85; Mobiles Crèches 2008; Mosse et al. 2005: 3025-7). Evidence also indicates that costs rise along with incomes during migration, that surplus earnings are largely directed to the partial repayment of debts, and that asset creation is rare (Mobiles Crèches 2008:1).

## FRAGMENTATION

Collective action amongst informal workers is relatively unusual (Ahn 2008a). Recruitment procedures are themselves central to the fragmentation and control of construction labour, and are part of broader subcontracting chains that offload risks (such as quality control or labour reliability) and minimise costs through a flexible labour force.<sup>9</sup> On most projects a core of indirectly recruited and managed regular unskilled and semi-skilled labour will be supplemented by subcontracting gangs that complete specific tasks (such as barbending) on a piece-rate basis.<sup>10</sup>

Construction capital, then, reduces costs and increases flexibility by hiring labour via intermediaries (maistries). As well as recruiting labour, maistries, who are usually drawn from its ranks, also tend to manage labour on a day-to-day basis on behalf of capital. They act as a safety-valve for grievances, thereby providing 'a buffer against the entry of trade unionism' (Shivakumar et al. 1991: M35; see also Van der Loop 1996: 79). The maistry largely recruits amongst those known to him and will often call workers from his own or nearby villages. If the maistry is a relative or neighbour, labourers are unlikely to let maistries or their on-site lieutenants down by leaving for other building sites, or by footdragging in the completion of tasks (Shivakumar et al. 1991: M34).

The maistry system, then, provides capital with substantial political control over labour, which is reinforced by the widespread reticence of people to assert themselves in unfamiliar urban locations.<sup>11</sup> The fragmented organisational structure is further compounded by social divisions based on language, locality, gang, caste, age, skill level and gender. Women (and girls) do similarly arduous work but earn around 50 percent less than men, and are far less likely to become skilled workers. Alongside construction capital's growing scale in Karnataka over the past twenty years in particular, and its partial but increased insertion into major forms of informal accumulation that incorporate leading politicians,<sup>12</sup> there appear to be continuities in terms of the capital-labour relation: poor working conditions, the absence of enforcement of rights and entitlements, low levels of unionisation and similar levels of exploitation (Shivakumar et al. 1991, Van der Loop 1996, Mobiles Crèches 2008).

## MARGINALISATION

The construction sector's fragmented and flexible organisational structure has two clear consequences besides the reduction of labour's bargaining power (Van der Loop 1996: 272-331). Firstly it allows employers to avoid responsibility for living and working conditions, and to sidestep labour laws (Bremar 1996: 157, Deshingkar 2009, Mobile Crèches 2008: 3, Mosse et al. 2005: 3026, Van der Loop 1996: 183) – for example piece rate work masks the routine abuse of minimum wage law by divorcing payments from time and the number of labourers (Bremar 1990).<sup>13</sup> Secondly it lessens labourers' capacity to access social protection. Workers generally know little of their rights or anti-poverty resources intended for them (see Kabeer and Mahmud

2004: 102), or lack the necessary bargaining power to demand them. Consequently as well as a lack of implementation of labour laws, a number of studies point to a widespread failure to provide workers with various forms of social security such as maternity benefits and access to state-backed crèches, primary health centres and adequate housing (Iyer et al. 2004: 86, 90; Mobile Crèches 2008: 3-4; Prospero 2009: 5; Shivakumar et al. 1991: M31; Van der Loop 1996: 79, 183; Virk 2004: 162). In sum, then, the differentiation, fragmentation and marginalisation of construction labour, both amongst production relations and their mediation by the state, collectively provide substantial obstacles to pro-labour outcomes. The migration stream that is the subject of this paper needs to be understood within these broader contexts.

### *3. The Source Villages: Emergence of a Migration Stream*

The three fieldwork villages, located on the borders of Sindhanur and Manvi sub-districts in Raichur district, were selected because i) they lie within the Hyderabad Karnataka region, which accounts for the greatest share of in-state migrants working in Bangalore's construction sector; ii) they have, unlike parts of neighbouring Gulbarga district for example, only been substantially integrated into circular migration during the last decade; and iii) they are relatively representative of variations in levels of irrigation, connectivity and landlessness in that part of Raichur.

129 of the 155 Madiga households surveyed in the three villages had migrated during the 2000s. All or part of 49 were in Bangalore in the 2010 wet season and a further 43 intended to migrate during the coming dry season. This represented a majority of all Madiga households, but was still almost 50 percent less than the migration peak in the latter stages of the 2002-2004 drought period (when distress migration was widespread), and the years immediately after it when knowledge about how to access employment in Bangalore had grown. The research focused on Madigas (former 'untouchables' and the largest caste amongst Karnataka's scheduled castes) because they had the highest proportion of landless households and had migrated in the greatest numbers. Only five of the 155 Madiga households owned more than three acres, and most Madiga land was unirrigated.

In Badarapur, which is located on major bus routes to Bangalore and is the most irrigated of the villages, 58 percent of Madiga households were landless and average landholdings were 0.65 acres.<sup>14</sup> In Kumdini cross, the least irrigated of the three villages, average landholdings were 1.63 acres and 40 percent of households were landless.<sup>15</sup> In Jagalwara the figures were 1.03 acres and 48 percent (see Table 2). Badarapur's more advanced levels of socio-economic differentiation in terms of assets reflect greater agricultural productivity, which has concentrated landholdings. Madiga labourers there worked for larger farmers (on average) across both piece-rate (*gutige*) and casual daily labour more than those in the other two villages.

56 percent of Badarapur's Madiga households, 73 percent of Jagalwara's and 35 percent of Kumdini's had either migrated or planned to migrate in 2010-11. Whilst the village with the lowest levels of landlessness (Kumdini) had seen the most marked decline in migration levels, Jagalwara had the greatest number of Madiga households still involved in migration, of which 68 percent migrated seasonally in 2010. By contrast, households from the village with the highest levels of landlessness (Badarapur) tended to migrate for significantly longer periods and with a higher proportion of household members (two-thirds of household members as opposed to around half in the other two villages, and a higher level of migration by entire households). In

other words, levels of migration were greater where landlessness was more pronounced. Although rooted in different intensities of production and levels of bonded labour, the more obvious connection is that landless wage labourers have fewer ties to their home village.

*Table 2. Characteristics of the three villages*

	<b>Badarapur</b>	<b>Jagalwara</b>	<b>Kumdini cross</b>
Levels of Irrigation	Mostly irrigated	Semi-irrigated	Semi-Irrigated
Total Individuals (Households) in the sample	430 (85)	165 (30)	261 (40)
Levels of Madiga Landlessness (%)	58	48	40
Average size of Madiga landholding (acres)	0.65	1.03	1.63
Percentage of households that have migrated during the 2000s (in whole or in part)	85	90	75
% of individuals that have migrated during the 2000s (seasonally <i>or</i> for sustained periods)	75	62	48
% of households migrating in late 2010 <sup>16</sup>	40	27	18
% of individuals migrating in late 2010	30	19	11
Highest overall level of migration <sup>17</sup>	1	2	3

Source: fieldwork data

It was also found that overall levels of migration were highest in the most irrigated village and lowest in the least irrigated village (Kumdini). This correlation is unlikely to be independent of levels of landlessness as landholdings are more concentrated in more irrigated villages. The countervailing tendency is that the demand for labour tends to rise along with irrigation levels and that consequently the ties between capital and labour may be stronger in more irrigated villages as, in the absence of in-migration, capital has greater incentives to hold labour in place. Hence, although the mostly irrigated village of Badarapur had higher levels of migration, another more highly irrigated village that is further from the main road (and long-distance bus routes) and has higher levels of land leasing, had lower levels of migration.<sup>18</sup> In other words the correlation between migration and irrigation is more problematic than that between migration and landlessness.

Badarapur had the highest overall number of maistries (which reflected its greater numbers of migrants and their longer average period of migration), although Jagalwara had the highest proportion of maistries (three from thirty households). Kumdini had the fewest (one), largely because on average its migrants spent shorter periods in Bangalore. Semi-skilled labourers were relatively evenly spread across the villages, implying no strong correlation with village characteristics. In addition, and of some significance with regard to levels of HIV transmission, around one third of adult males migrated without their wives.

Why did the trickle of migration from these villages become a stream in the early 2000s? Besides drought, the reasons are to be found in two marked changes in the forces and relations of production – the casualisation of labour and the partial mechanisation of production.<sup>19</sup> Bonded labour was still widespread as recently as the early 2000s, but in 2008 the number of the 155 households with bonded labourers moved into single figures. The casualisation of labour has taken two predominant forms: growing levels of individualised daily casual employment and group-based piece-rate work during times of peak labour demand. These changes in the relations of production have been accelerated by the partial mechanisation of agricultural production, and mass migration was finally triggered when three consecutive years of poor rainfall coincided with the adoption of labour-saving rice harvesting machinery between 2002 and 2004.

Two of the households began migrating in the mid-1990s and a mere handful had begun to migrate by the end of that decade.<sup>20</sup> As farmers increasingly opted for casual over attached labour, a growing number of labourers were able to exercise their preference for migration over attachment (interviews with former bonded now migrant labourers, Bangalore, October 2010). Initially a significant number migrated to Goa, Mangalore and Pune, as well as Bangalore. Bangalore became the dominant destination in the early 2000s – a trend that was reinforced over time as connections to its construction sites multiplied faster.

Underemployment, delayed wage payments and debt were the most cited reasons for migration. Employment levels, little more than 50 percent across the year, drifted under 33 percent in the pre-monsoon months when demand for consumption credit peaked (group and individual interviews 2010, Pattenden 2011b). In contrast to delays of up to three months in agriculture in the early 2000s, wages in Bangalore were usually paid on a weekly basis – although most had either one day's wages per week withheld until final settlement, and/or their wages were cut to repay advances. Out of 45 households for whom an initial level of indebtedness was established, 73 percent were indebted – mostly due to marriage, health and housing costs, and agricultural losses.<sup>21</sup>

As well as underemployment and debt (indicative of the fact that the labouring class was receiving an insufficient share of the agricultural surplus to meet its reproduction requirements), poor implementation of public social protection measures contributed to ongoing migration levels. Initiated in Raichur in April 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was intended to provide each household with 100 days of employment on public and private works, thereby reducing levels of migration, increasing income, reducing indebtedness and improving labour's bargaining power. Eleven group interviews and surveys of 81 households in six local villages in 2008 and 2010 revealed that each household had received on average slightly less than four days work per annum. Payments were routinely delayed for up to three months (surpassing delays in the payment of agricultural wages), and were often below the stipulated rate. In addition, NREGS work was routinely more intensive and for longer hours than was the norm for casual agricultural labour.

Kumdini had more equitable socio-political dynamics than most villages in the area due to relatively high numbers of scheduled castes, stronger links to Dalit organisations such as (different factions of) the Karnataka Dalit Sangharsh Samiti and the Madiga Horata Samiti, relatively few members of the region's dominant caste and a more even distribution of land (see Pattenden 2011b). Kumdini Madigas were found to be more likely to make claims of their Gram Panchayat than Madigas from Badarapur, whilst Jagalwara Madigas were least likely to make

claims of their Gram Panchayat.<sup>22</sup> This, though, had not yet translated into a significant increase in access to NREGS work in Kumdini.

#### 4. *Class-based Migration Outcomes*

##### EVIDENCE OF CHANGING CLASS EQUATIONS IN MIGRANTS' HOME VILLAGES

In the next section, the household-level outcomes of migration will be analysed. In this section the broader outcomes of migration for class relations in the source villages will be primarily assessed in terms of patterns of employment, patterns of credit provision and socio-political relations (labouring class bargaining power with regard to the dominant class), and also in relation to the delivery of social protection programmes.

As indicated above, data from the sample households showed that in 2010 around 29 percent of employment days were derived from the construction sector in Bangalore,<sup>23</sup> leading to increased incomes and representing a substantial decline in levels of underemployment and dependence on the local dominant class for employment. Group and individual interviews indicated that levels of employment were 50 percent higher in the cities than in the countryside – 5.25 days as opposed to 3.5 days per week. In June 2010, female and male construction wages were 40 and 55 percent higher than average agricultural wages respectively<sup>24</sup> – an average 48 percent increase (given that 55 percent of the migrants were male) covering 29 percent of annual wages. With an average of 1.45 adult construction workers per household this represented an overall 64 percent increase in household income assuming four months of migration during the agricultural slack season. Even if the increase is partially offset to allow for greater food costs (around double in the absence of access to fair price shops in the city (although a minority offset these costs by transporting grains to the city), there is still an overall marked rise in income (slightly over 50 percent) in the absence of severe or chronic health problems arising from migration (on-site injuries, or sickness caused by poor quality living conditions or water supply). For those migrating for longer periods the income gains were greater still. Such increased incomes heightened levels of consumption, but, as the next section shows, scarcely lead to any investment in productive assets – something which is only facilitated by the significantly larger incomes secured by maistries.

As well as decreased levels of dependence on the local dominant class for employment, there were signs of declining dependence on the dominant class for credit. In part this was due to the dominant class's reduced willingness to lend to migrants, and in part to Madigas' rising incomes. At the start of the 2000s, a majority of debts were owed to dominant class men in the same village. In 2010, there had been an increase in the *number* of loans and the proportion of those loans that were borrowed from *fellow Madigas*.

Detailed data from over a third of the Jagalwara core sample are indicative of such a trend. One Jagalwara household had three able-bodied adults and two acres of land (household 10, Table 3). Its indebtedness had recently risen from 60,000 to 120,000 rupees due to a health crisis. There had also been a significant shift in the composition of the debt. Whereas the initial 60,000 rupees were owed to two different dominant class men in Jagalwara, the additional 60,000 rupees were owed to eight different Madiga relatives and neighbours. Another respondent had until recently owed 25,000 rupees to two members of his village's dominant class (household 7, Table 3). Recent debts of 15,000, accrued in the previous few months after a work-related

injury, were owed to three Madiga relatives. Similarly another respondent owed 48,000 rupees – 25,000 to seven different Madigas and the remaining amount to four members of the dominant class (household 4, Table 4). However a fourth household (household 4, Table 3) – the poorest in the sample – had no loans from fellow Madigas and had recently increased its debts to their village’s dominant class from 26,000 to 36,000 rupees.

The tendency for loans to be increasingly taken from caste-fellows cannot be generalised across all households. Significantly respondents indicated that it was more likely in Jagalwara, which had the highest proportion of migrating households and maistries in 2010,<sup>25</sup> and Badarapur, and less likely in Kumdini cross, which had the lowest migration levels, the lowest levels of landlessness and the least antagonistic caste relations.<sup>26</sup> This change in class/caste relations appeared, then, to reflect the higher levels of migration and the consequent greater growth of wages and employment diversification (as well as greater numbers of maistries and semi-skilled workers across all surveyed households) within the two more irrigated villages, as well as their greater initial socio-economic/socio-political disparities. Along with a diversification of credit sources, there had been a widespread improvement in debtors’ confidence to repay as a result of migration. One respondent had just borrowed 90,000 rupees from two dominant class men in his village for a double marriage. With the daughters-in-law they would have six adult workers and no dependents and expected to repay the loan in 12 months in Bangalore.

This partial diversification of sources of employment and credit had contributed to a slight pro-labour shift in the political dynamics of labour relations in some villages – manifested in changes such as the prompter payment of wages and a shortening of working hours in daily wage work (for a more detailed analysis, see forthcoming work by the author<sup>27</sup>). Farmers, though, were deploying various techniques to defend their position such as underestimating the acreage to be worked by labour gangs on a piece-rate basis, or exerting influence over piece-rate labour gang leaders (ibid.).

Most respondents reported minor improvements in their socio-political position relative to other social classes – understood as the strengthening of labouring class bargaining power in source villages due to higher levels of awareness, and increased economic independence. Those who had migrated were more likely to claim greater assertiveness in relation to farmers. Most respondents (particularly those who had gained more from migration) stated that they were treated with more respect in their home villages, and were better able to defend their interests. The relief at no longer having to suffer the indignity of extreme socio-political inequality within labour relations was most evident amongst former bonded labourers. Dominant caste landowners no longer ask Madigas to do unpaid labour tasks in order to access credit – in part because they have less incentive to lend to more mobile Madigas in a context of far less personalised labour relations, in part because the Madigas ask them less frequently, and in part because they know that the Madigas *are likely to refuse*. Although their scale is limited, these are not insignificant victories – especially when added to the more generalised shortening of working hours and prompter payment of wages.

## RESTRAINTS ON MOBILITY: THE NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN BANGALORE

In contrast to minor changes in class relations in source villages, there has been little evidence of changes in labour’s position in the construction sector – despite a raft of measures

intended to improve their position. Leaving aside the issue of wages, which are held down by capital's use of a flexible and fragmented labour force that is directly managed by intermediaries, two (interrelated) issues were identified as impeding economic gains from labour circulation, and therefore as limiting the extent of modifications of class relations in source villages: poor working and living conditions that contributed to health problems which can negate economic gains (see below), and the hitherto poor implementation of social protection programmes.

Failings in the delivery of anti-poverty schemes were found to be widespread in Bangalore. The key social security schemes of the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act were only being rolled out in Karnataka in late 2010 and 2011, but the Buildings and Other Construction Workers Act's (BOCWA) provisions were already in place and relate directly to the findings of this study. The BOCWA legislates for the dispersal through state welfare boards of assistance for medical costs (up to 50,000 rupees per annum per household), funerals, permanent injury sustained at work, a small disability pension, and contributions towards child delivery, higher education and marriage (GoK 2010). The legislation applies to all sites with ten or more workers of a value of one million rupees (thereby covering any single storey middle-class dwelling and upwards of that) (GoI 2009:92), and all construction labourers in our sample. However a major design fault impedes seasonal migrants' registration: a letter is required from employers specifying which building sites the migrants have worked on during 90 days of the previous twelve months (GoK n.d.(a): 92, 94).

Between 2007 and June 2010, 4840 million rupees had been collected from the construction sector as a cess of 1 percent of the total value of works in order to finance the provision of benefits to workers (official records of the Karnataka Buildings and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board; accessed on 14 June 2010). Most of this amount had been collected from the public sector, as private sector evasion of the cess was reportedly widespread and a situation that the Labour Department lacked the resources to challenge (interview with senior Labour Department Official, 14 June 2010). The Labour Department had neither the means nor the intention to press charges against construction companies that contravened legislation, seeking instead to persuade them that compliance was in their best interests (interview with senior Labour Department Official, 5 October 2010). As well as showing a lack of state capacity, this may be indicative of the permeation of the Labour Department by construction interests (interview with NGO worker, 16 January 2010). Capital is of course not passive in the face of state regulatory initiatives (Breman 1990, 1996: 182-5,198), and the position of construction capital is advanced by organisations such as the Builders Association of India (BAI). The BAI represents 30,000 Indian construction companies by lobbying government for increased returns to capital, and by negotiating government legislation in a manner fitting of members' interests.<sup>28</sup>

The Karnataka BOCW Welfare Board's severe lack of manpower was underlined by its failure to spend more than 0.12 percent of the 4840 million rupees (\$120 million) that had been collected – a situation exacerbated by the obstacles to seasonal migrants' registration. Around one quarter of the money that had been spent had been dispersed in Davangere district where there is a small group of committed unionists who have supported beneficiaries (GoK, n.d. [b]). As Srivastava puts it (this volume), flexibilisation and the 'extraction of surplus value through lengthening of working hours, poor working conditions, denial of social security, even where it is due under legislation, is part of capital's growing strategy and portrays its increased assertiveness'.

Health costs will be shown in the next section to be the single largest obstacle to household-level socio-economic gains through migration. Effective implementation of the BOCWA would have covered migration-related health costs, and thereby significantly increased the proportion of households seeing socio-economic gains as a result of migration. There was no evidence of any respondent accessing BOCWA entitlements during migration. Similarly no respondents had accessed the Adarsha Vivaha marriage scheme, which has been providing 10,000 rupees to brides in mass marriages of 25 couples or more since 2007 (Deccan Herald, 28 May 2007).

Workers either did not have access to social services such as crèches, schools, protective equipment and first aid, did not know about them or did not feel that they were for them anyway. Some companies, such as KNK, appeared to adhere to basic safety standards such as the use of helmets. Educational impacts, meanwhile, were contradictory. Where schoolchildren could be left in their home villages (usually with grandparents), a number of households stated that schooling had been facilitated by migration. Others, who had migrated with children of school going age, reported that it had been obstructed, sometimes irreversibly. The overall pattern of partial provision of facilities allowed capital to make claims about complying with legislation whilst using fragmented and flexible forms of labour management to mask the extent of their failure to provide 'decent' working and living conditions, and thereby augment levels of surplus extraction from labour.

There were significant variations in living conditions. In general those working on larger projects had better living conditions with slightly larger tents, more reliable sources of water and better security, and were less likely to be cheated by maistries. Workers on smaller projects tended to sleep on the roadside or their open work sites. Wages, though, were around 30 percent higher (in October 2010 340 rupees daily per couple [220 for men] as opposed to 260 [160 for men] on larger projects [fieldwork data]). The wage differential relates to the greater levels of employment flexibility on smaller sites, and the lower costs due to the provision of fewer facilities. Wages are generally even higher for Bangalore-based casual construction workers – again this relates to levels of flexibility with local casual labourers tending to be employed for fewer days via established labour market nodes.

Fragmented and flexible labour practices mitigated against bargaining for wages. Those working on smaller sites changed location more frequently, and it was not uncommon for maistries on smaller sites to pass labourers amongst each other, which made it more difficult in many cases to establish relations even with the primary intermediary between them and their employers. On one larger site, respondents reported that security guards had prevented workers from seeking employment on another site on days when there was no work. Where the maistry lacked direct knowledge of labourers' home villages, some companies took the additional precaution of recording labourers' home details to obstruct sudden departures.

Workers only exercised a degree of bargaining power when moving between worksites in a context of high demand for labour. During slack periods on larger projects (more commonplace during the rainy season), and with the security of regular employment strengthening their position, labourers did sometimes bargain for wages, although they only expected to be successful when the casual employer 'needed labour fast' – in other words, at those times when their structural power was at optimum levels.<sup>29</sup> Changes in the capital-labour relation, then, were much more marked in migration source areas than in destination areas.

## *5. Household-level Migration Outcomes*

Evidence on the household level socio-economic and socio-political impacts of labour circulation will now be presented.<sup>30</sup> 62 percent of households were found to have experienced some form of (mostly limited) upward mobility due to migration. Households are divided between i) those whose socio-economic situation deteriorates as a direct result of migration, ii) those whose socio-economic situation deteriorates as a result of factors external to migration and whose situation would be worse without migration, iii) those for whom there are clear signs of sustained upward mobility due to investment in productive assets; and iv) those for whom there is evidence of incipient and limited forms of upward mobility. The latter include a) income diversification, b) minor investments, c) investment in PUC (A-level equivalent) or tertiary education, d) marked reductions in levels of indebtedness<sup>31</sup> and e) investments in resolving chronic health problems that had hitherto gone untreated. The latter two categories (iii and iv: amounting to 62 percent of the sample households) are those who have gained in socio-economic terms through migration, whilst the former two categories (32 percent of the sample households as 6 percent saw no significant impacts through migration) have not seen any gains in their socio-economic position – as often as not due to factors external to labour circulation.

Significantly it will be shown that unskilled construction workers from Kumdini, the village with the lowest levels of irrigation but where most Madigas owned some land and were slightly better-off in socio-economic and socio-political terms, were, once maistries are excluded, more likely to make minor socio-economic gains from migration. If maistries are included the picture becomes more complex as larger economic gains leading to investments in productive assets were more likely in the other two villages, which were more unequal in socio-economic terms but had higher levels of migration and a higher proportion of maistries. As indicated above, the greater class-based gains in the latter two villages stem both from the lower socio-economic/socio-political starting point of the villages' migrants, and from the greater diversification of employment and larger income increases.

### **UNSKILLED LABOURERS**

All households whose socio-economic situation had deteriorated since the start of migration had only succeeded in accessing unskilled work in Bangalore. Only two households in this category were from Kumdini (which had the lowest levels of landlessness). Amongst the 18 percent of households that saw their socio-economic position decline as a result of migration, health problems were the common cause. Two of the five households had suffered a death during migration, whilst the third cut short its migration after their son was injured. The fourth had seen an overall loss from migration due to a digestive tract operation for which the family house had been mortgaged. A single male had migrated from the fifth household. Alone in Bangalore his health had deteriorated and no money had been saved for a village house until he had recently been joined by his partner and teenage children.

The situation of the sixth household requires elaboration as it underlines how initial conditions of severe poverty such as bonded labour and adverse (female) dependency ratios can restrain migration. The parents of the seven member family were only able to do light work – the mother had long been incapacitated, whilst the father had recently injured his hand. The latter had been a bonded labourer for 35 years, which had earlier prevented him from migrating. The

couple had lost four sons and two daughters in infancy. One son died shortly after his first birthday when he was decapitated in a storm by a piece of cheap tin roofing. Four daughters had survived – three of whom had not attended school at all, and none of whom had migrated (due in part to safety concerns) until the eldest married. She and the second sister had migrated twice with the son-in-law, returning prematurely from the last trip due to health problems and claims that their maistry cousin was only paying them half the promised wages (in part because of cuts taken for a 5000 rupee advance). Due to the low wages (around half of the average construction wage) and 10,000 rupees spent on medical costs, the household’s overall indebtedness had grown by about 30 percent as a result of migration. *BOCWA entitlements (none of which had been accessed) would have covered all of their health costs, and those of 80 percent of the other households in this category.*

The last example indicates how advances can erode wage levels. Over time the proportion of migrants from the source villages receiving advances had grown, thereby increasing levels of control over labour (Breman 1990, 1996; Guerin et al. 2009; Shivakumar et al. 1991). This stands to reason as employers channel advances to labour via trusted maistries who in turn lend to workers that they trust – usually those from their or nearby villages. Two Jagalwara maistries stated that they lent 5000 rupees per couple, whilst a third from Badarapur stated that he lent 4000 rupees per couple. Whilst the exact terms of these advances were not specified, one of the maistries indicated that around 50 percent of a particular advance was given to the advancee’s creditor, 25 percent was spent on travel expenses and 25 percent was kept by the maistry from the wage deductions made over a six month period. All of which indicated the equivalent of an interest rate of 5 percent per month.

*Table 3. Households whose socio-economic position has not improved since the start of migration*

	Village	Type of Work	Econ. Decline due to Migration.	Primary reason for deterioration	Additional Factors	Debt* *
1	B	U*	Yes	Severe health problems	Single male migrants; previously bonded labourers	>100
2	B	U	Yes	Health problems	Single male migrant	>100
3	B	U	Yes	On-site death	Loss of primary earner	>100
4	J	U	Yes	Health problems	Wage deductions for loan to maistry. Bonded labour restricted earlier migration.	>100
5	K <sup>32</sup>	U	Yes	Health costs leading to death	Short-term migration	n/a
6	K	U	Yes	Road accident adjacent to site	Short-term migration	n/a
7	J	U	Partial	Building site injury	5 young daughters - necessitates solo migration	60

8	B	U	Partial	Building site injury	Overall increase in informal debt due to election costs and agricultural losses	>100
9	B	U	No	Marriage costs	Initial restraints on migration due to bonded labour	70
10	J	U	No	Health costs and death	Previously debt-free and migrating for agricultural investment	>100
11	J	U	No	Chronic health issue	Alcoholism	>100
12	J	U	No	Marriage costs		>100
13	J	U	No	Cost of second marriage due to lack of son		>100

\*U = Unskilled; B=Badarapur, J=Jagalwara and K=Kumdini; \*\*Debt refers to level of household indebtedness as a percentage of indebtedness at the outset of migration.

Source: fieldwork data

Others who had lost out during the process of migration included those affected by a mix of factors relating to migration and external to it. One such household had suffered an on-site injury and incurred substantial debts from standing for election to the gram panchayat (village council), whilst another, which had also suffered an on-site injury, saw migration restricted to two to three months per annum by having five young daughters – two of whom were infants with health problems. Significantly, despite having strong connections to three maistries with long-term relationships with large developers, the latter preferred to work for other maistries on small building sites where living conditions were harsher but wages were higher – a relatively common strategy amongst shorter-term seasonal migrants.

Finally, a number had seen a deterioration in socio-economic conditions for reasons independent of the circulation of labour: health and wedding costs. Of these one man had remarried due to his first marriage not producing a son, whilst a second was a relatively well-off household that had until recently only migrated to increase levels of agricultural investment. This changed when the mother became sick and died, generating debts of more than 100,000 rupees. BOCWA funds would have covered around half of the deceased's medical costs, and would have more than covered the others' treatment costs.

#### UNSKILLED AND SEMI-SKILLED WORKERS

Attention is now turned to those unskilled and semi-skilled labourers whose socio-economic position had improved as a result of migration due to such factors as higher levels of employment, substantial reductions in levels of indebtedness, minor investments, treatment of chronic health problems and the accessing of higher education (see Table 4). Significantly all

semi-skilled labourers had gained from migration as opposed to half of the unskilled labourers. Of the ten unskilled labourers that had gained, half were from Kumdini, which has the lowest level of landlessness. The only unskilled migrant labourers who had invested in agriculture were from Kumdini.

Besides becoming maistries, unskilled male labourers had two clear routes to higher incomes - by becoming masons or by accessing non-construction work. Overall around twenty per cent of households had accessed semi-skilled wages – mostly as masons. Eighteen men from the 129 migrating households had become masons – mostly somewhere between their late teens and late twenties. In the core sample five households had accessed non-construction jobs with similar wage levels. The latter included a garage attendant, a teacher, a security guard, a fruit vendor and a call centre worker (whose wages were twice those of unskilled male labourers). In addition two had become construction machine operators and five had become masons, of which four had begun to work as masons in their home area. Besides the garage attendant *all* of the women in the sample had remained as unskilled labourers, although the wives of maistries did in certain cases take on a supervisory role (as ‘maistrammas’).

*Table 4. Households whose socio-economic position had improved since the start of migration*

	Village	Type of work	Primary reason for socio-economic improvement	Additional information	Debt*
1	J	SS	MI: invested in land.		50
2	J	SS	ID; one mason, one part-time call centre worker	Brother-in-law is maistry	25
3	J	SS	ID, SRD: mason	Brother-in-law is maistry	33
4	J	U	MED I		>100
5	B	U	EI	Directly from bonded labour to Bangalore. Later migrated for agricultural labour with former landlord	Debt-free
6	B	U	EI		No Debt
7	B	U	LI, SRD: marriage; substantial debt reduction	Restrained from early migration by bonded labour; marked increase in consumption.	40
8	B	U	EI; SRD	All debts paid off.	0
9	K	U	HI; LI	Gynaecological Operation	>100
10	K	U/SS	ID; LI	One son starting masonry work.	>100
11	K	SS/M	HI; SRD	Eldest two sons (maistry and mason) have moved permanently to Bangalore. Middle two sons released from bonded labour in 2001 and 2008	33
12	K	SS	ID; MI (agriculture)		>100

13	K	U	MI	Periodic short-term migration for agricultural investment; eldest son teaches in Bangalore	n/a
14	K	SS	ID; MI: bought housing plot and Rs. 8000 of gold		Debt-free
15	K	U	MI; MED I: leasing more land, gynaecological operation	Father-in-law is maistry (no.18)	80
16	K	SS	Machine operator; garage attendant	Husband went directly from bonded labour to Bangalore	Debt-free
17	K	U	ID, MI	Moneylender in home village and in Bangalore	Debt-free
18	B	M	SI	Purchased tractor and auto-rickshaw for transport business	n/a
19	B	M	SI	Purchased land	n/a
20	B	M	SI; HI	Leasing in four times as much irrigated paddy land	n/a
21	J	M	SI	Purchased land	n/a

[Key: J= Jagalwara; B=Badarapur; K=Kumdini; U = Unskilled; SS=Semi-Skilled; M=Maistry; MI: Minor Investment; SI:Substantial investment in productive assets; ID: Income Diversification in home area as a result of skills learned in Bangalore (primarily masonry); MED I: Investment into improved levels of health usually with regard to chronic ailments not previously treated due to lack of funds; EI: Educational Investment at the level of PUC (A-Level) or above; HI=House Investment; LI = Lifecycle Investment (primarily marriage); SRD=Substantial Reduction of Debt (50% or more).]

\*Debt refers to level of household indebtedness as a percentage of indebtedness at the outset of migration.

Source: fieldwork data

Of the seventeen households with unskilled and semi-skilled labourers that had seen socio-economic gains, four had invested savings from construction work in high school and college education; one had invested savings in a housing plot and \$200 of gold; one had become moneylenders both of longer-term loans in their home village (typically 10,000 rupees and 36% interest per annum) and shorter-term loans in the temporary slum in Bangalore (where interest rates reached 120%), and had then invested in GP elections, securing a seat in May 2010; one had invested in a new larger family home; two had invested savings into leasing larger amounts of land; one used short-term migration to manage agriculture-related debts; and one had invested in levelling the family's poor-yielding acre of dryland.

Of the remaining six households who had experienced minor gains, three faced initial restraints to migration due to bonded labour, two had invested in gynaecological operations hitherto seen as unaffordable, and two had spent money on marriages that had, in the short-term, brought two new wage-earners into their households. None of the unskilled male labourers who had gained through migration had migrated unaccompanied – indicative of a greater incidence of gains amongst households from which both women and men had migrated.

Despite the widespread indications of some improvements in the socio-economic conditions of these migrant households, none reported any investment in productive assets as a result of migration. These households, then, had seen greater socio-economic and socio-political gains than those in the previous category, but their upward mobility was limited and insecure.

Significant upward mobility was confined to those who had become maistries (see Table 4). Although only five of the households in the core sample included maistries, the following analysis will also refer to the remaining three maistries in the three Madiga hamlets.

## MAISTRIES

The remaining 12 percent of the core sample have experienced significant upward socio-economic mobility as a result of migration – all were maistries, whose numbers had risen along with the growing density of connections to urban worksites. The eight maistries from the 131 households surveyed in the fieldwork villages shared a number of characteristics (see also Mosse et al. 2005: 3032-7, Van der Loop 1996). Firstly most have some land (which provides security for the loans and wages channelled through them by employers). Secondly most are literate – for the purposes of calculating wages and noting attendance. Thirdly, they tend not to be regular drinkers for reasons of reliability. Fourthly, they have usually been migrating for over five years as they need time to strengthen contacts and gain experience of the various jobs performed by subordinates. Three quarters had become maistries in their late twenties and early thirties after working as masons. One, who had become a maistry at a slightly later age, was now well into his forties and regretted that he now commanded less respect. Fifthly, half of the maistries had had close connections to existing maistries from their source villages. More than one had previously worked as an agricultural maistry in his home village. Sixthly, most maistries migrate in large family groups or in families with disproportionate numbers of adult males, which helps with the projection of power and leadership characteristics. One had migrated with thirteen mostly adult male family members. When asked to become a maistry, he was easily able to form a group of twenty and soon managed sixty workers – mostly neighbours from his and his relatives' villages. They rented a house with electricity and readily available water supply whilst in Bangalore, and on return built a large 500,000 rupee house. Following migration, he had leased in an additional six acres of good quality paddy land.

Meanwhile, two landless men – both the only adult male in their nuclear family with relatively few brothers – stated that they had turned down the chance to become a maistry because i) they could not mobilise enough workers and ii) lacked the necessary money. The latter is of course a further significant obstacle to the poorest accessing maistry positions and becoming upwardly mobile through migration. If a maistry has forty workers working under him and the company is late in dispersing wage money to him, then he will have to pay 40,000 rupees of wages himself in order to keep the workforce loyal. An added disincentive is that maistries may be held to account for poor quality work – too great a risk particularly for those from poorer households, and further evidence of the tendency for migration to heighten levels of socio-economic differentiation.

Despite the similarities there were marked differences between the eight maistries in terms of their investments, the share of wages/piece rates that they kept, and the type of work that they did. Some have groups of twenty handpicked labourers and worked alongside them in a supervisory role, whilst others organised a larger number of workers and operated on several sites simultaneously; others still operated from their home villages, marshalling even larger numbers of workers and extracting significant incomes whilst not often venturing to the building sites.

One maistry from the core sample was able to save 20,000 rupees per month for two years by adding 10 rupees commission from sixty workers to his and his wife's wages. He had

then bought two acres of dryland, invested 50,000 rupees in levelling his land, and had increased the area of land he leased (compared to 2006) from four to five acres. Others worked on a piece-rate basis pouring concrete and making concrete bricks. One of these kept around half the piece-rate paid, which provided an income of up to 400,000 per annum — sufficient for considerable savings. His close friend and neighbour, who himself now worked as a maistry on two large construction sites, was the brother-in-law of their village's first maistry. The latter had bought 1.25 acres of irrigated land in his home village, whilst the former had bought two acres after three years as a maistry.

Another maistry from the core sample had recently invested in a tractor and an auto-rickshaw and had leased in two acres of irrigated land. Unlike the workers he organised, he continued to be paid whether he was in Bangalore or not. He and the other two maistries in the core sample had all invested in productive assets as a result of migration, and were all upwardly mobile.

## **6. Conclusion**

Findings have shown that processes of differentiation, exploitation and marginalisation co-exist with elements of economic mobility and socio-political change. Minor socio-economic gains have been identified amongst a majority of migrant households. These changes and the concomitant growth and diversification of employment have also fed into minor socio-political gains for the labouring class in source villages.

Nevertheless almost 90 percent of migrant households in the core sample were unable to invest in their own productive assets, and initial socio-economic inequalities tended to be amplified. The vast majority of migrants circulate between different sites of exploitation by two branches of the capitalist class (small to medium size agrarian capital and mostly large-scale construction capital), and remain in the same broad socio-economic and socio-political categories after migration – testimony to the general continuity of the class relations involved and the wider unity of seemingly distinct hierarchies in source villages and urban destinations. Whilst maistries generally return to their villages to invest and possibly continue as large-scale maistries managing labour gangs through deputies, most unskilled labourers continue to circulate. Semi-skilled labourers, on the other hand, usually make minor economic gains – a key part of the overall majority who gain from migration.

There are some correlations between the characteristics of the three source villages and outcomes from migration. Migrants from the least irrigated village were more likely to gain economically through unskilled labour at a household level, but significantly it is the villages with higher levels of migration and greater socio-economic and socio-political inequalities that experienced the greatest gains by the labouring class as a whole.

Labour migration is a political as well as an economic process. It reflects, refines and reproduces the capital-labour relation, but does not appear to transform it – at least not in the case of labour circulation between the agriculture and construction sectors in Karnataka in the 2000s. The balance of power between capital and labour in direct relations of production in source villages are modified by migration, but the broader social relations of production remain unchanged.

I have argued elsewhere that reduced levels of economic dependence are central to greater labouring class assertiveness (Pattenden 2011b). Whilst increasing the demand for labour in rural

areas either through agriculture, rural industry or the MGNREGS is one way to scale up the modifications of class relations, an equally significant approach – more firmly grounded in the contemporary reality of labouring class employment strategies and potentially contributing to the first approach by increasing labouring class capacity to press for better provision of social protection in source areas – is to improve the provision of social protection *during* migration, and of providing access to health care in particular. This would require, amongst other things, challenges to the strong links between construction capital and Karnataka's politicians.

Improved access to social protection in the destination areas would increase the margins of socio-economic gains and through that further loosen levels of dependence on the dominant class in source villages – a trend that would be bolstered by improved delivery of MGNREGS (although such a combination might prompt agrarian capitalists to source labour from other areas). In Bangalore's construction sector, though, the possibility of socio-political gains seem far-fetched given the numerous mechanisms deployed by construction capital to marginalise its workforce. Most migrant construction workers are currently in no position to act politically with regard to the terms and extent of their exploitation, which raises the question of what processes might, in time, facilitate their ability to do so.

Progressive pressure groups have a role to play in shifting the socio-political dynamics and lessening levels of exploitation on Bangalore's building sites, but as the NCEUS indicates (2007: 166), it is likely that there will be little change without concerted intervention by progressive portions of the state and international moves to drive forward the decent work agenda. The latter may include pressuring high-profile transnational capital to take some responsibility for the working conditions of the labourers that construct and maintain their new office blocks. Any attempt to implement stronger regulation of the construction sector would, though, be resisted by the Indian construction industry and its associated politicians.

Despite the adverse political equations facing migrant labour on the building sites of Bangalore, the political position of most of those same labourers with regard to smaller-scale agrarian capital in their home villages has improved as a result of their circulation between the agriculture and construction sectors. The circulation of labour does, then, appear to be the primary basis of upward socio-economic mobility amongst labouring class Madigas from rural Raichur despite the fact that for 90 percent of them the plastic tents of Bangalore represent a perpetuation of poverty and exploitation.

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## NOTES

1. Bangalore was reported in March 2008 as being India's second fastest growing city with a growth rate of 10.3 percent (<http://www.indianembassy.ru/indiachronicle/mar08/infotech.html>).
2. Labouring class households are understood as those that are net sellers of labour power. If they own small amounts of land, these are insufficient to provide a surplus or meet basic household reproduction requirements. See Pattenden 2011a for a more detailed explanation of the labouring class.
3. These are pseudonyms (in order to protect respondents).
4. Madigas are the most numerous of Karnataka's scheduled castes.
5. Two households could not be located in Bangalore during the second round of interviews and that of a third, a maistry, declined to be interviewed a second time.
6. Households are understood as tending to be physically and economically integrated units.
7. <http://www.adarshdevelopers.com> (accessed 8 December 2010).
8. [www.embassyindia.com/projects/sez/embassy\\_manyata/page.htm](http://www.embassyindia.com/projects/sez/embassy_manyata/page.htm) (accessed 21 October 2010). For details of the tax breaks afforded SEZ residents see Karnataka's 'State Policy for Special Economic Zones' (Government of Karnataka 2009).
9. It appears that levels of subcontracting in Bangalore's construction sector increased when the arrival of north Indian capitalists put downward pressure on labour costs (Shivakumar et al. 1991: M37).
10. Unfortunately there is no space here to go into details about the construction sector's organisational structure (see Van der Loop 1996), or about the regional dimensions of its division of labour (Shivakumar et al. 1991: M39).
11. The maistry system is widespread across India (although the terms change – mukkadam is one of several terms used in the northern half of the country whereas maistry tends to be used in the south – see for example, Breman 1990, Guerin et al. 2009, Picherit 2009), although of course it cannot be seen as being uniformly applicable across the entire country.
12. This assertion is largely based on the widespread media coverage of alleged high level political involvement in irregular land deals in and around Bangalore, and coverage of related legal cases.
13. The extent of evasion of measures to improve working conditions is indicated by the ILO claim that India has the world's highest accident rate in the construction sector (Sarde 2008 cited in Deshingkar 2009:18).

14. Calculated as the total land owned by Madigas divided by the number of Madiga households.

15. Landlessness is understood here as total landlessness. The labouring class comprises landless households and households with small amounts of land (see footnote 3 above).

16. This is not the peak migration period. The latter falls between a festival in February (after transplantation of the second paddy crop has been completed and the remaining monsoon crops have been harvested, and July – when canal water arrives in the area). Questions about intended migration in the coming months revealed that the percentage of households migrating in late 2010 might rise to 55 to 60 percent in the spring of 2011. A greater percentage of the additional migrants would be seasonal migrants. In years when canal water is only delivered once (rather than twice), the total number of households involved in migration exceeds this level.

17. The ordering is based on numbers of households and individuals still involved in migration, and on the duration of migration (see text above).

18. This statement is based on data collected by the author as part of ongoing research in the fieldwork area into the changing dynamics of exploitation within agriculture. This will be published in due course as a paper on 'Changing Dynamics of Exploitation: The Labour Capital-Relation in Hyderabad Karnataka's Ricefields'.

19. For reasons of space, the impacts of the introduction of canal water over half a century ago is not discussed due to the complex and contradictory nature of its impacts upon labour relations.

20. All interviewed households were asked which family members had migrated, for how long and when, and when the first family members began to migrate.

21. This figure is based on responses from slightly over one third of all Madiga households in the three villages – the core households and a random sample of 12 percent of all remaining Madiga households.

22. The Badarapur Gram Panchayat was closer to the Madiga hamlet than the Jagalwara Madigas were to their Gram Panchayat. Badarapur Madigas, in part due to their location next to the area's main road, also had higher levels of education than the Madigas in the other two villages.

23. Calculated on the basis that seasonal migrants derive around one third of their annual employment from migration to Bangalore. Village-based employment for schoolgoers, women engaged in childcare, sick, incapacitated and elderly left behind has not been factored in as levels of work were generally very low.

24. These figures vary from month to month and from village to village. For example, in November 2011 the difference between male wages in Badarapur and those in Bangalore had

shrunk to barely 20 percent, whilst in more interior villages it exceeded 50 percent. In late 2011 the difference between female agricultural and construction wages was greater than male wage differences in late 2011.

25. Heyer (2000: 23) shows that labourers with stronger links to urban labour markets were significantly more likely to borrow from friends and relatives than usurious moneylenders.

26. For a discussion of the relationship between class and caste in the area, see Pattenden 2011b.

27. The data referred to forms part of the author's ongoing research in the fieldwork area into the changing dynamics of exploitation within agriculture. This will be published in due course as a paper on 'Changing Dynamics of Exploitation: The Labour Capital-Relation in Hyderabad Karnataka's Ricefields'.

28. <http://baionline.in/About-BAI.html>

29. See Silver 2003: 13.

30. Inevitably, given space constraints, there are significant gaps – particularly with regard to working conditions.

31. Informal debt is a highly problematic indicator due to the high degree of variability in debt levels according to a household's position with regard to lifecycle events (marriages etc.). In addition improvements in a household's socio-economic position may increase levels of informal debt if a chronic ailment is finally operated upon, or when postponed weddings are held, or if money is borrowed to invest in land. The political implications of informal debt also vary depending on who it is taken from: does it limit movement in the workplace or weaken socio-political positions in source villages? Moreover, Guerin et al. (2011) indicate that it is not so much total levels of indebtedness as the ability to access credit that is the key indicator of socio-economic differentiation.

32. Nos. 5 and 6 both lost out due to migration but both only migrated for short periods and both had seen socio-economic improvements since the start of migration.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

JONATHAN PATTENDEN is Lecturer in Politics and International Development at the School of International Development, University of East Anglia. His research focuses on how class relations in India are modified by state and civil society interventions, and broader processes of agrarian change and social and economic development