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# The Contradictions of Globalization

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## Dualism and Dialectics in the Historiography of Labor

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### Dualism Rampant

Aristotle, one of the two founding fathers of western European philosophy, in his *Politics*, classified human beings into natural lords and natural slaves: "...that which can foresee by exercise of mind is by nature lord and master, and that which can with its body give affect to such foresight is a subject and by nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same interest" (Aristotle, 1988:2). Thus, in one sentence, he gave an ideological justification for a society based on slavery and for ruling out master-slave conflicts. Even in his time, there was a contrary view, and Aristotle was aware of it. So he wrote a few paragraphs later; "Others affirm that the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by convention only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust" (Aristotle, 1988:5).

The Aristotelian distinction between natural masters and natural slaves, and the more general Greek distinction between barbarians who could not speak the logos and Greeks who could, percolated into Christian (especially Thomist) theology and provided the basis for 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish debates about the right of American Indians to be treated as free human beings rather than as creatures fit for enslavement (Pagden, 1986).

The Aristotelian (and Thomist) dualism was reinforced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by Rene Descartes, whom Bertrand Russell (1961:542) regarded as the founder of modern (presumably, western) philosophy. Descartes posited a rigid dualism between mind and body, and regarded the mind essentially as a ghost in the machine. Hence there was no human reason why the body of one man could not be directed by the superior ghost living in the body of another man.

The Aristotelian, Thomist and Cartesian distinctions were handy for the marauding European explorers, soldiers and sailors in the centuries since Henry the Navigator of

Portugal first went looking for gold and slaves down the coast of Africa. Even without any explicit formulation of the labor theory of value, they knew that wealth could be produced only by labor, that those who could effectively mobilize and put to use the largest numbers of workers would in the long run come out victorious. One of the simplest ways of converting thinking and feeling human beings into labor was to ethnicize and dehumanize whole peoples — all non-Christian Africans, for example, and in most cases, Christian Africans as well — into "barbarians" or "natural slaves."

The historiography of labor has not been able to escape the influence of this dualism which lies at the ideological and structural foundation of modern capitalism. Some historians (and economists) have regarded workers just as bodies who respond to changes in wages and behave like inanimate machines once they enter the workplace. Other social scientists regarded them as not fully deserving the name of "workers" because they failed to respond only as "economic" men/women to economic stimuli and seemed to have other preoccupations as well. A subgroup among this last class have treated workers as fancy-free beings whose behavior can be explained entirely by invoking their presumed states of mind, without reference to the way they live, work, socialize or die.

The historiography and the economics of labor is dotted with conceptual frameworks which posit any (or several) of the following kinds of dualism:

- a) Dualism of body and mind.
- b) Dualism of unfreedom and freedom under fully developed capitalism.
- c) Dualism of unfree (precapitalist, precolonial) and free (capitalist, colonial) markets.
- d) Dualism of industry and agriculture (as in Lewis-type models of dualistic growth and development).
- e) Dualism of formal and informal markets of labor.
- f) Dualism of primary and secondary markets in models of

segmented labor markets and segmented space.

The mind-body duality in the absolute sense will not stand up to serious philosophical or scientific scrutiny. But there is a core of truth in the dualism posited in the different (and sometimes, overlapping) frameworks. The spread of capitalist colonialism across the world, with its repeated drive to subordinate whole groups of people to the dictates of capital, and the creation and re-creation of new reserve armies of labor within a capitalist society lie at the heart of dualistic or more generally, segmented structures. No dualism is entirely static, however, nor is it the case (as is often assumed in Lewis-type models of dualistic growth) that dualism suddenly ceases some day because of the operation of the market, the graduation of a peripheral country to a semi-peripheral status, or because of the exhaustion of the secondary market for labor. Moreover, dualistic phenomena in labor markets are often subordinate to overarching structures of other kinds — such as imperialism, or the operation of a racially-governed system. Completely “denatured” capital and labor are rarely found and the operation of the capital-labor relationship is imbricated with discrimination or exclusion based on race, linguistic or regional affiliation and, last but not least, gender. The results of such discriminatory or exclusionary practices show up also as dualistic, or on closer examination, multiply segmented structures. Uneven processes of growth under capitalism inevitably reproduce and create patterns of dualism. But every kind of dualism produces its own contradictions, and in some cases the sustaining structures break down or are transformed through the working of a dialectical process. The propositions advanced above will be illustrated with examples from the historiography of Indian labor and also that of the historiography of labor in Africa and Latin America.

### Dualism of Mind and Body and Slave Workers

The postulated dualism between mind and body in the field of labor studies is connected with intimations of breaks between European Enlightenment and non-European (Oriental, or barbaric in an inclusive sense) superstition, between unfreedom and freedom, between supine acceptance of hegemonic constructions by workers and their resistance. As we have seen, the mind-body dualism for slaves was advanced by Aristotle in the first book of his *Politics*, and the Aristotelian tradition was followed in Europe for more than two millennia after its formulation. There were people who were “natural slaves,” slaves were a form of property. Even if slaves were “property with a soul,” that soul was only to be at the service of the master whose living tool the slave was. (Finley, 1980: chs. 1,3; Sabine and Thorson, 1973: chs. 6,9). Moreover, the people who were peculiarly suitable for being natural slaves were “barbarians.” By definition, the latter did not speak the Greek language. Since Greek was the sole instrument and medium of communication of reason, therefore, the barbarians were without reason, and fit for enslavement (Pagden, 1986: chs. 2,3). However, there were barbarians who might still not be suitable for enslavement. In the case of the American Indians after the Spanish conquest of America, it was argued by leading clerics and theologians such as Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolome de Las Casas that the

Spaniards had no right to enslave them. But they could be treated as “nature’s children” and subjected to the discipline of an authoritarian parent (Pagden, 1986: ch. 4).<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of natural slavery was used to justify the fresh enslavement of millions of people conquered by the Europeans and the Atlantic slave trade in which around 12 million Africans may have been transported to the Americas. In the Arab world and in Asia and Africa, slavery generally took a different form from the chattel slavery of the American plantations (Smith, 1954). Moreover, until the rise of plantations in Africa under the stimulus of expanding commerce, slaves in that continent were used for domestic service, and for military and administrative purposes rather than for producing surplus value.

The Africans transported across the Atlantic and employed in the plantations and mines of the Caribbean, North America, Brazil and Peru were probably the largest mass of black workers employed in capitalist enterprises before the rise of capitalist-style plantations, mines and factories in Asia and Latin America from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most planters tried to practice the theory of natural slavery or natural childhood on the lives of the slaves employed by them (Craton, 1978; Dunn, 1987). However, the slaves resisted, most often in the mode of daily and silent protest, by “idling,” shirking the more arduous kinds of labor, running away, refusing to produce children, and dying untimely, thus damaging the valuable property of the slave-owners (of course, slave prices would adjust to reflect this unruly behavior of the living tools). But slaves also revolted. The first act of abolition of large-scale, western-style plantation slavery was carried out not through white, anti-slavery propaganda or legislation, but through a revolt organized by the slaves themselves. In 1791, the slaves of the French colony of St. Domingue (today’s Haiti) rose in revolt; by 1803, they had established the first black republic in the western hemisphere, three years before the British had abolished trade in slaves in their dominions (James, 1989).

The revolution led by Toussaint L’Ouverture was the most famous of the slave revolts. But there were many others, big and small (Genovese, 1979; Craton, 1982, 1987). In most of these revolts, one of the rights the slaves demanded was the right to strike: they obviously saw themselves first and foremost as workers, exactly as in fact their owners did. Thus in British Guyana, on 16 August 1823, slaves of 60 estates, 30,000 in number rose in revolt, and when the British Governor of the colony met them, the rebels told him:

God has made them of the same flesh and blood as the whites, that they were tired of being slaves to them, that their good King had sent orders that they should be free and they would not work no more (Craton, 1982:283).

Again, in Jamaica, around Christmas, 1831, about 60,000 slaves from 200 estates rose up in what was essentially a strike action, and bound “themselves by oath not to work after Christmas as slaves, but to assert their claim to freedom, and to be faithful to each other” (Craton, 1987:273-274; Craton, 1982:291-321).

In all the three major slave revolts in the British Caribbean — Barbados in 1816, Guyana in 1823, and Jamaica in 1831 — the black workers on the plantations took care not

to damage property or the plantations, and only used the threat of force as a backing for strike action and for their bid for freedom (Craton, 1982, 1987). But all three were suppressed by the planters and the British colonial authorities with exemplary ferocity; in each case, they shot down, and executed several hundred revolting slaves, and sent countless others to jail. The ferocity was provoked by a challenge to white racism, a threat to their profits, and above all, the perceived danger to an order based on naked coercion rather than consent. However, the revolt of 1834 sealed the fate of slavery in the British Caribbean. It was seen that neither Christianizing the slaves nor ameliorating their condition would save the existing order, and the greed of the plantocracy might endanger British imperium in the region — the fate of the erstwhile French St. Domingue was fresh in everybody's memory. Thus the mind-body dualism in the case of the slaves in the British Caribbean ended in the termination of slavery and the gaining of legal freedom by the plantation workers.

### **The Dualism of Freedom and Unfreedom under Capitalism**

In Marx's definition, capitalism in a pure form is a system under which the whole society is polarized into two classes, namely, a class of capitalists who own and control the means of production and a class of workers who are free in a civil sense, namely, that in daily life they are not subject to the arbitrary power of any individuals or private organizations but who are dispossessed of all means of production and can survive only by selling their labor power. These workers are thus doubly free, in the sense that the only authority which can regulate their daily life is the state within a framework laid down by law, but they are also freed of all their means of production and hence survival other than their labor power.

What seems to have escaped the notice of many observers is that workers are also doubly unfree under the capitalist system. First, when the workers sell their labor power and enter into an employment relationship with a capitalist, the latter can exercise an arbitrary authority (within widely defined legal limits) over the worker (Marx, 1887/1960: chs. 13-15; Coase, 1937; Simon, 1951/1982; Bagchi, 1997). Essentially the worker is subjected to the political authority of the capitalist for the duration of the relationship. This authority can extend outside the workplace as in many company towns, or as in the relation prevailing between managers of large Japanese firms and their workers. But even without such an extension of the political relationship outside the labor process, the political nature of the worker's surrender of his freedom to the employer remains an irreducible core of the employment relation.

Secondly, workers are forced to sell their labor power in order to survive, and have very little control over the way they want to live. As Marx (1857-1858/1973:488) put it in the *Grundrisse*, workers are denied the possibility of realizing their full potential, viz., "the full development of human mastery over the forces of nature as well as of humanity's own nature and the absolute working out of his creative potentialities."<sup>2</sup>

As in the case of other dualisms, the contradiction be-

tween capitalist unfreedom and unfreedom in the market place, within the labor process and within the broader society lead to tensions and struggles. The history of the workers' struggle for more control over their lives in the workplace has been the subject of extensive research by Braverman (1974), Friedmann (1977), Burawoy (1983), Elbaum, Lazonick, Wilkinson and Zeitlin (1979), Elbaum and Wilkinson (1979), David Noble (1979), and others, and we will not try to summarize that literature here. Similarly, the struggle for trade union rights, social democracy and socialism in western European countries and other advanced capitalist countries can be regarded as struggles for workers to attain greater control over their lives outside the workplace (and inside as well) and to acquire a greater share of labor power. Since my focus is on third world countries, I will leave aside these very big areas of debate with the comment that when all the so-called precapitalist forms of unfreedom are ended, problems of capitalist unfreedom within the workplace, in the broader society and within the family still remain and appear in their stark form.

Unfreedom within the family should in fact be included as the inevitable accompaniment of capitalism as we have known it. Although Marx and Engels predicted in the *Communist Manifesto* the disappearance of the family itself before the onslaught of capitalism, patriarchy has in fact served as a powerful lever of labor control and a device for subsidizing the social reproduction of labor, and hence capital itself in all capitalist countries. Engels (1884/1970) laid the basis of the Marxist theory of the family as a system of control and reproduction in class societies, but it has been only in the last 30 years or thereabouts that radical social scientists and feminists have laid bare the tentacles of patriarchy and their transformations in advanced capitalist societies. In all colonial and ex-colonial countries, the alien rulers and indigenous ruling strata have collaborated in the reproduction of patriarchy, even as they have striven to individuate labor power including that provided by women; we will illustrate this later with the help of Sen (1996).

### **Marxist Historiography and Mind-Body Dialectics**

Frederick Engels wrote the first systematic biography of the workers as a class (1845/1962). Marx and Engels devoted their lives to the study of workers in their subjugation to the capitalist mode of production, and their potential as the creators of a new mode of production and a new society where the subjection of the workers to the capitalists and to the imperatives of a profit-driven market would be at an end. In Marx's single-minded concentration on illuminating the nature of the working of the capitalist mode, he did not pay very much attention to the workers' agency, even when they are subject to the dictates of capital. His attention was centered on the social and political devices by which capital seeks to bind them down. But Marx and Engels certainly did not believe in the mind-body dualism or in the thesis that workers, as soon as they become sellers of labor power, miraculously shed all their other identities except in relation to their fellow-workers, and the capitalist control they have to confront daily. In his astonishingly precocious book on the working class, Engels fully recognized the cultural identity of particular groups of workers, — the Irish as against

the English, for example — and similar references recur in their works and correspondence in later years also.<sup>3</sup>

In his path-breaking work, Engels extensively commented on the degraded living conditions of Irish workers in England (Engels 1845/1962:124-127). But unlike cultural determinists, he did not attribute the degradation of the Irish to culture but traced it to the degraded condition under which they lived in Ireland. He went further and drew the connection between absentee landlordism and British colonialism in Ireland and the desperate poverty of the Irish. Engels, and later Marx, traced the huge waves of immigration from Ireland to the Irish famine, caused by the failure of the potato crop, against the backdrop of the abject poverty of the ordinary Irish (Marx, 1853; 1887: ch. 25).

Thus, Marx and Engels were fully aware of the actual working person's cultural conditions and his/her further degradation caused by enforced competition with one another. It is surprising, therefore, that Marxists should be accused of being, in a sense, corporeal determinists. That is to say, the opponents of Marxism as a framework of conceptualization (and hopefully, organized action) have often accused Marxist scholars and activists of neglecting the thought processes of workers except in so far as they should be (without finding out whether they actually are) directed towards the overthrow of the capitalist order. Certainly the activists among the Marxists consciously or unconsciously attributed to the workers a degree of class consciousness they might not possess, and prolepsis was a method of exhortation for them. Marxist or radical scholars also often tended to focus more on the emergence of the "new man," unfettered by the trammels of the old society, than on the actual nature of consciousness of the workers (Gorky's *Mother* is a celebration of the "new woman" as well).

Such accusations, however, cannot be made about the three most prominent Marxist historians of labor, society and consciousness in the first industrializing society in our times. Christopher Hill's primary focus, throughout a long and active career, was on the state of consciousness of the revolutionaries and their opponents, the artisans and the magistrates, the country and the court in Britain between the 1640s and the 1760s (Hill, 1940;1974;1975). Eric Hobsbawm has written as much about the consciousness of the laboring poor as about their material conditions of living (see, for example, Hobsbawm, 1962: chs. 11-13). E. P. Thompson made his mark as a major historian of postwar Britain with his magisterial *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson, 1963). The investigation of the consciousness of the British workers and the poor in general has since then become a major preoccupation among non-Marxists as well as Marxists.

### **Mind-Body Dualism in the Indian Historiography of Labor**

What can we say about the mind-body dualism in the Indian historiography of labor? In this field, as in most other fields of academic studies, Marxists were (and probably still are) in a grievous minority. But almost from the beginning of serious academic discussion of Indian labor history — starting with Rajani Kanta Das (1923) — studies covered wages and working hours, the work environment,

and the constraints workers were subjected to or the protection they were given by legal measures adopted by the colonial state. The studies, however, tended to be bounded by data thrown up by official inquiries into the conditions of labor instituted by a number of Factory or Plantation Labor Commissions, or by officials looking into complaints of shortage of labor, or finally by the Royal Commission on Labor.

The legislative protection given to labor, say, in the form of limits on the hours of work, or safety provisions, was limited to those factories which were subject to the jurisdiction of official inspectors of factories. Data on wages and employment were also collected on the basis of the same jurisdiction but were periodically supplemented by information collected during the censuses or occasional inquiries into conditions of labor. Moreover, the attention of the major trade union movements and organizations was primarily focussed on getting workers in organized factories into their fold. These limitations of the inquiries and trade union activities tend to be reflected also in works on labor history. One part of the history would cover wages and other conditions of work in factories, and another part would deal with the trade union movement (cf. Singh, 1965).

However, the more perceptive historians of workers' conditions, while in the main sticking to this kind of bifurcated description and analysis, also inquired into the ways in which the so-called organized and the unorganized sectors interacted. For example, Buchanan (1934) devoted four chapters in his book to "Labor: Sources and Conditions," "Wages and Subtractions: Debt," "The Worker's Standard of Living," and "The Labor Movement." In these chapters he inevitably had to glance over the factory walls towards the larger world the workers came from, the selection process in which the jobber took a prominent part, and the occasional strikes in which the worker's local environment and loose associations played a part. Out of 18 chapters in Mukerjee (1945/1951), three were devoted to "the agricultural background" and to the methods of recruitment in plantations and mines, one to female and child labor, one to the standard of living of the workers (in addition to several chapters on the wages of labor) and one to trade unionism. The world outside the factory gates made its appearance in virtually all these chapters, and the interaction between the organized and the unorganized sectors made its presence felt in a separate chapter devoted to contract labor.

Other examples of this genre include: the chapters on "Trade Union Movement" by V. B. Singh, "Condition of Workers (1880-1950)" by Jurgen Kuczynski and on "Levels of Living of Industrial Workers" by K. Mukerji, in Singh (1965). While none of these books devoted separate chapters to the workers' consciousness, none of them treated the workers as simply animate machines either. And none of them can be accused of treating an organized trade union movement as the only evidence of workers as thinking beings. Virtually all of them pointed out that workers resisted through unorganized or rather non-visibly organized strikes or work stoppages and other kinds of protests. They also pointed out the difficulty of workers organizing themselves

when they had to work up to 15 hours a day under inhuman conditions, on a pay which did not allow them to live for long.<sup>4</sup>

In later years, a number of sociologists carried out “social anthropological” studies of Indian labor. Lambert (1963), Sheth (1968), Holmstrom (1976), Ramaswamy (1977), and Holmstrom (1985) are some of the leading examples of such studies which looked at the workers’ immediate work environment, the workers’ response to that environment, and their consciousness in general. Not all of them, however, tried to relate the workers’ consciousness to the larger socio-economic environment or to their historical origins.

The question of the proletarian consciousness of plantation, mining and jute mill workers has come up in the books and articles of Amalendu Guha (1977) and Ranajit Das Gupta (1984, 1985, 1994). The issue of worker consciousness became the fulcrum of Chakrabarty’s study of jute mill workers (Chakrabarty, 1989). More recently Chandavarkar has published his study of the work environment, the habitat and consciousness of the cotton mill workers of Bombay, and assessed the influence of E.P. Thompson on Indian history in general and historians of Indian labor in particular (Chandavarkar, 1994, 1998).

Hopefully, the age of mind-body dualism in Indian historiography of labor is over. The task in future will be to relate the worker’s consciousness to her environment in the work place, her home and familial environment, her existential links, and to see all of them in relation to the continuities and changes in politics and economics of the region and the country as a whole.

Debates continue, however, about the nature of worker consciousness, and the means employed to read that. In spite of the work of social anthropologists and the increasing use of the resources of private papers and oral history, the chief sources of historians’ evidence are official documents of the British period. In the very nature of the material they reflect the preoccupations of the officials and the (mostly European) employers and managers rather than those of the workers. The reports purport to reproduce workers’ statements; but we must remember that those statements were made in the presence of people whom the workers saw as their bosses or rulers rather than as interlocutors before whom they could express themselves freely. Moreover, the statements would have been made overwhelmingly in the vernaculars and the process of translation into English itself would produce meanings that the workers may not have had in their minds. For example, when the workers made statements to the effect that they regarded their European managers as their “ma-baap” (that is, their parents), were they expressing what they truly believed or were they saying what they thought the “sahibs” expected to hear and would be annoyed if the workers did not profess such sentiments? (Bagchi, 1990). Moreover, attributing a univocal meaning to workers’ statements in such contexts is to miss the dialectical tensions that mark the relations of the workers and managers, the propertyless and the propertied, the ruled and the rulers. As E. P. Thompson (1991:66) noted, in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, “The same man who

touches his forelock to the squire by day — and who goes down to history as an example of deference — may kill his sheep, snare his pheasants or poison his dogs at night” (see also Sarkar, 1997:58-59).

Apart from the issue of how we read the officially recorded evidence, there is also the question of how the workers express their will as free agents. There are at least two different issues involved here. The first is the issue of the role of so-called “outsiders.” The second is the way the workers express their protest when they find their lot unacceptable.

On the question of the role of “outsiders,” some of the best evidence and arguments were recorded by the witnesses before the Indian Factory Labor Commission of 1908 and the Minute of Dissent to the *Report* written by T. M. Nair, M.D. (Nair, 1908/1990; see also S. Bhattacharya, 1985; Upadhyay, 1990). Nair summarizes the evidence regarding the excessively long hours (going up to 13-15 hours in the case of cotton mills, and even up to 20 hours in the case of some other factories); the helplessness of the illiterate, ill-nourished and overworked operatives, and the callousness of the general run of managers and the millowners regarding the housing conditions and health of their operatives (including children not yet in their teens). At the same time, there were mill-owners (such as the Tata group) who themselves wanted legislative restriction of hours of work. They realized the efficiency of shorter hours in the long run, but they knew that if hours were not regulated for all factories, the Tatas by themselves could not go very far in restricting hours of work in their own factories. Legal restriction of hours of work of adults was also after all “outside” interference, instigated not by the organized movement of workers but by the lobbying of Lancashire interests, and desire for amelioration of workers’ conditions by the government and a few farsighted Indian capitalists. Moreover, if any workers were found capable of reasoning on the basis of legal enactments and other supposed measures of protection for workers, they would have been thrown out by the management and probably faced imprisonment by the state as well. Thus if any such persons had somehow found employment in the mills, they would no doubt become “outsiders” soon. Mukerjee (1945/1951:364-366) expressed alarm at the fact that “men [had] entered into the field of trade unionism in India who [were] indoctrinating the workers with ideas and beliefs that [ran] counter to such fundamental institutions as property and the state.” However, he commented cannily:

The employer’s objection to “outsiders” is largely based on his expectation and experience that the executive formed from among the rank and file of the workers will be docile and accommodating. This, if true, would nullify the aims of the trade union which has to conduct negotiations with the employers with courage and determination, not only in times of peace but even during strikes and lock-outs (Mukerjee, 1945/1951:364-365).

Thus historians of labor who bristle at the evidence of social inequality between workers and their spokesmen ignore the more basic inequality between employers, who were supported by a highly coercive state apparatus, and workers with few resources at their command.<sup>5</sup>

There is plenty of evidence of workers' agency, with or without the help of "outsiders" in the history of labor in colonial India (Punekar and Varickayil, 1990:303-341). And it is not only in the major textile centers of Bombay and Calcutta that we find numerous examples of strikes and other protest action by the workers (Chakrabarty, 1989; Bagchi, 1990a; Das Gupta, 1994). All over India, even with exiguous records, we find evidence of workers in plantations, mines, quarries and small and large factories workers resorting to peaceful protests, and sometimes riots, in expressing their grievances.

In 1904, for example, a seven-month long strike at the Government Press, Madras, was entirely conducted by the worker leaders. In 1913, the workers of the Perambur workshop of the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railways struck work for more than six months, under a leadership from among their ranks (Veeraraghavan and Thankappan, 1990). In 1930, the workers of the Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) stopped work in protest against a new registration system introduced by the mine managers. Under this system, all miners would be regarded as criminals unless proved otherwise (Nair, 1990). The solidarity between the permanent workers of KGF and the contract laborers proved strong and the workers were able to continue the strike despite the adoption of highly repressive measures by the mine authorities. The Mysore government became alarmed, however, by the disruptive effect of the strike and deputed an official, M. A. Sreenivasan to investigate the living conditions of the workers (Sreenivasan, 1980). The authorities were perturbed by the invisibility of the workers' leaders (Nair, 1990:PE-79). In this case, it was the authorities rather than the workers who conjured up "outsiders" as representatives of the workers, for easing their negotiating strategy. In the Meerut Conspiracy Case, by contrast, the authorities damned the "outsider" leaders of the workers as conspirators against the state in order both to demonize them and to curb the militancy of the workers.

Outsiders, of course, could not just impose themselves on the workers; they had to prove their worth in the course of workers' struggle. We here cite just one example of a workers' movement which has been carefully analyzed by two scholars, Vinay Bahl (1995) and Dileep Simeon (1995). The Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA) was set up in 1920 to organize the workers of the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), with the help of the Indian National Congress. The JLA then led the 1920-21 strike of the TISCO workers (Bahl, 1995: ch. 4). During the course of another major strike, which took place in 1928, however, the workers repeatedly rejected the JLA leadership. They followed leaders either from among themselves, or the leadership of "communist" outsiders or of Maneck Homi, a local advocate (Bahl, 1995:ch. 6; Simeon, 1995: ch. 2). In many recent accounts of workers' consciousness (e.g., Chakrabarty, 1989) community affiliation has been generally seen as a barrier to worker solidarity and an enemy of the consciousness of workers as a class. However, during the 1928 strike of the TISCO workers, places of worship (such as the Golkhali Jhopra mosque), and ethnic networks such as those of the Punjabis and Pathans were utilized to

support the striking workers (Simeon, 1995:52-53). This is not to deny that in other contexts, community affiliation could turn into communalism. But it is in the nature of the difficult terrain which workers in India and other third world countries inhabit that worker solidarity can turn into fissiparousness. But the opposite also happens in the crucible of struggle. The political and economic context has to be analyzed in every case.

### **Dualism and Dialectics of Freedom and Bondage**

In the historiography of colonial workers, another frequently posited duality is that between free labor under capitalist colonialism and bonded labor in precapitalist, precolonial times. This dualism is linked up in the conceptual apparatus of the analysts with precapitalist values of precolonial labor and society. These values are regarded as leftover baggage impeding the thinking and actions of the workers, and the generation of values imparted by pristine capitalism. These values also are a major obstacle to the attainment of civil freedom that capitalist colonialism seeks to foster (cf. Chakrabarty, 1989). The origins of ideas of civil freedom can be traced to the thinkers of the Scottish and the French Enlightenment, and more proximately to European liberalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and finally to Marx and Marxism.

An initial stumbling block in disentangling the various strands out of which this brand of dualism has been composed is the unquestioning acceptance by this group of analysts of two related propositions: (a) European (and white North American) workers enjoyed civil freedom in a real sense at the time the major parts of the third world were colonized; (b) there was a ruling-class discourse of freedom which included both propertyowners and the propertyless in its fold.

Both of these propositions have to be substantially qualified, however, before we reach the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Irish Catholics were repeatedly subjected to the loss of their civil freedom between the reconquest of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell's army in the 1650s and the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 by the British Parliament. This Act was not simply an expression of the enlightenment associated with liberalism. This was produced by the threat of an Irish insurrection. The Duke of Wellington, then Tory Prime Minister of Britain, in introducing the bill for Catholic Emancipation in the House of Lords, noted that civil war was the only alternative to Emancipation:

This is the measure [viz. civil war — A. B.] to which we must have looked, these are the means which we must have applied...if we had not embraced the option of bringing forward this measure (cited in Beckett, 1981:303).

British colonialism in Ireland starting from the Norman invasion of that country in the 12<sup>th</sup> century is almost a case study of colonial unreason, denial of civil freedom to the conquered people, and ideological and legal buttressing of that denial through the device of racism. For example, there is clear evidence that from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an Englishman could claim "that he [was] not held" to answer a case on the ground that the plaintiff was Irish "and not of free blood" (cited by Bartlett, 1994:215). An exactly similar

argument would be used in 1851 by Theodore Dickens, an English lawyer practicing in Calcutta when he argued that the Indian subjects of the British Crown could not claim the same benefits of the law and the law courts, as true-born citizens of Britain (Bose, 1981; Bagchi, 1998).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Europeans, led by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, began conquering lands outside Europe, virtually all of Europe, except England and the Netherlands, were governed mainly by feudal institutions. In Spain and Portugal, feudal obligations restricted the civil freedom of a major fraction of the population. Civil freedom was enjoyed by ordinary people in the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Britain, at the time they acquired their major colonies in Indonesia, India, Africa, and the Caribbean and its littoral. However, in both countries, the rule of the propertied very greatly restricted the reality of civil freedom for the property-less workers (Boxer, 1973; Parry, 1973; Schama, 1987: chs. 12; Thompson, 1991; Corrigan and Sayer, 1985: ch. 5).

If we confine ourselves to Britain, we find that while the remnants of feudalism were terminated by the short-lived commonwealth and the Restoration monarchy instituted in 1660, an Act of Settlement and Removal was passed in 1662, with the main object of exercising surveillance over the poor (Porter, 1990:127-128). Every native of England was deemed to possess a "settlement" in one parish, and in one parish only. Tax rates for succoring the poor were levied on property owners since 1597. They were fixed by overseers working under the supervision of magistrates. "In law a person needed a certificate before leaving his parish of settlement to seek work... Officers had the power to drive back to their native parish vagabonds and all those without a settlement, liable to become a burden on the rates" (Porter, 1990:128). These powers of the magistrates and the overseers could lead to enormous cruelties, including the death of unmarried pregnant women whose children the parishes did not want to be burdened with. In England, the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a criminalization of a whole range of offences against property and many of them invited the death penalty. Most of the laws, excluding those which invited capital punishment or long jail sentences, were administered by the magistrates, who were chosen from among the propertied men of the locality. During his travels in England and Ireland in the 1830s Tocqueville remarked that "The whole of English society [was] based on privileges of money" (Tocqueville, note dated May 11, 1835, 1958:90-91). He then proceeded to provide a catalogue:

A man must be rich to be a Minister since the style of living expected from him runs him into expenses much greater than what he receives from the State....

A man must be rich to get into the House of Commons because election expenses are immense.

A man must be rich to be a Justice of the Peace, Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Mayor, or Overseer of the Poor as these duties are unpaid.

A man must be rich to be a barrister or a judge because the education necessary to enter these professions costs a lot.

A man must be rich to be a clergyman again because the necessary education is expensive.

A man must be rich to be a litigant since one who cannot give bail must go to prison. There is not a country in the world where justice...is more the privilege of the rich. Apart from the Justices of the Peace, there is no tribunal for the poor man.

The extreme inequality between the propertied and the property-less not only deprived the latter of any political power (since they were all excluded from the franchise till perhaps the Act of 1867) but also seriously restricted their civil freedom. Through all the centuries when capitalism was emerging as the dominant mode, women enjoyed few freedoms. They could not assume any powers of the ruling class even if they had property (the monarch in England was an exception). In England, marriage meant a civil death for the woman, for, a married woman could hardly enter into any legally valid contract without her husband's explicit consent. If freedom meant command over an adequate range of "functionings" (A.K. Sen, 1987, 1993) then, of course, before the advances in sanitation and medicine, and the spread of education to all ranks, that is, before the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very few people even in England enjoyed adequate freedom.

When we turn to the discourse of freedom in Europe, we find the real-life difference between the propertied and the property-less being mirrored in that discourse, especially from the time capitalism became triumphant. The political theory in England from the time of Hobbes down to Mill's *Representative Government* was concerned as much with the nature and necessity of political authority as with the rights of persons subject to that authority. Political theorists are still debating the exact manner in which Hobbes' or Locke's theory of political obligation is to be interpreted. But it is rarely denied that most theorists of democracy or republicanism set out to defend the right to property against arbitrary authority; and many theorists, including the 17<sup>th</sup>-century proponents of republicanism during the English Civil War equated property and "propriety" (Macpherson, 1962; Dunn, 1969, 1984; Pocock, 1985). Of course, most of the theorists, including Locke, would confine the right to rule to men of property, but would not deny civil liberty to the property-less. But they had a horror of a situation in which the latter could have a part in decision-making regarding the affairs of the realm. For radical republicanism — extending to advocacy of universal male suffrage — we have to wait for Rousseau in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and James Mill in the 19<sup>th</sup>. Locke explicitly denied "that a man who has been deprived of the means of production (given by God to all men) can be forced into subjection through control over these means" (Dunn, 1984:43). However, few of the theorists who influenced public policy paid much attention to the liability of freedom to be abridged by extreme inequality of economic conditions. The horrors of child labor and the killing factory towns of industrial England would throw such concerns into relief and lead to measures to curb the freedom of contract in the interest of the right to life and the minimum requirements for the toil-poor to enjoy civil liberty (Atiyah, 1979).

Thus, the ruling classes of the colonizing European powers harbored at best a paternalistic and at worst a disdainful, attitude to the poor or the lower orders of society.

Hence it would be strange if their officials in the dependencies were not imbued with very similar attitudes towards the lower classes under their tutelage (cf. Cain and Hopkins, 1993). Although the imperatives of sustaining colonial rule modified some of these attitudes, they colored the colonizers' treatment of labor and property in the dependent territories.

If the civil and political liberty of workers was systematically breached in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, the workers did not fare much better in the USA as the long struggle of US workers to gain recognition for trade unions and collective bargaining demonstrates. The USA did not have formal colonies until the acquisition of Cuba and the Philippines in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But US workers could not escape the consequences of racism which had laid the foundation of the prosperity of slave-run plantations, or of colonialism. The Irish immigrants, fleeing from poverty, English landlordism and famine to the land of promise, soon tried to prove that they were "white" by distancing themselves from anti-slavery campaigns in the USA, and they very often drove the blacks out of their craft occupations. Capitalists were happy to use those among them who were willing to be so used to displace black workers and resort to wage-cutting. Racism long remained a problem fouling white workers' struggle to gain civil freedom, effective political rights and a decent standard of living (Roediger, 1991; Ignatiev, 1995). Thus colonialism and racism had a major impact on capital-labor relations in the most advanced capitalist country without any trammels of formal feudalism. Capitalism created new structures of unfreedom in that land even as it promised unlimited freedom for capital to expand.

In the formal colonies of the imperial countries, of course, "freedom" for the native was often regarded as a prize to be handed out by the rulers for good behavior or withdrawn as a measure of punishment. Moreover, there were at least three different ways in which the imperatives of colonial rule induced the imperial proconsuls to take a nuanced view of how much freedom could be given to workers in the colonies. The first was the imperative of public works. In all colonial territories in the beginning the new conquerors wanted to impress workers forcibly for building roads, carrying loads, acting as carters, and often as foot soldiers. They also often commandeered carts, drought animals, boats and fodder from the hapless subjects. In some cases, this was justified as a continuation of the practice of the indigenous rulers whom the colonial power had displaced. But, in many cases, the practice was renewed and expanded under colonial rule. The "mita" exacted from the Amerindians for work in the mines and building roads in Spanish America is a prime example of such extension (Bagchi, 1982: ch. 3). This cannot be regarded as an exception to be found only in the colonies of backward Spain and Portugal. In 1806, the Bengal Regulation XI laid down that it was the duty of the "native" officers "to provide troops with whatever bearers, coolies, boatmen, carts and bullocks which may be desirable for the troops to prosecute their route" (Das, 1941:154). Bengal Regulation III of 1820 rescinded some of the provisions but

retained others, and "the impressment of bearers, coolies, and boatmen found sanction alongside the appropriation of carts and bullocks" (Anderson, 1993:98). Similar legislative measures were passed in Bombay and Madras.

Secondly, explicit legal provisions and practices in the colonies restricting the freedom of the workers were introduced and sustained in the interest of white employers — mainly owners of plantations, forests and mines, but in some cases, also of factories. While a strong anti-slavery agitation was building up in England, equally strong opposition was offered by the planter interests of the Caribbean. Even if ultimately slave trade was banned in British territories in 1807, actual slavery even in the Crown colonies was not abolished until 1833. As we have seen, this legislation was the direct outcome of the perceived threat to empire portended by the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831.

The abolition of slavery in the Caribbean was followed by the introduction of indentured labor mainly from British India into European-owned plantations and mines in the West Indian islands, Mauritius, Fiji, Ceylon and South Africa (Tinker, 1974). Thus slavery was followed not by a system run on the basis of free wage labor, but unfree, migrant labor. A system of indentured labor was also introduced into the Assam plantations from the 1860s. In South Africa, southern Rhodesia and Kenya, government measures deliberately restricted the access of Africans to land. In South Africa and southern Rhodesia, of course, the system evolved into one of a strict separation between whites, blacks and the so-called "coloured" on strict racial lines. South African Apartheid did not have its origin solely in the racism of the Dutch settlers — the Boers. A series of measures taken by the British officials of the Cape Colony and British settlers also hastened the process. In 1820 the British government of the Cape Colony introduced new white settlers into the territory occupied by the African peoples such as the Ngunis, the Khois and the Sans. The settlers systematically dispossessed these peoples through so-called frontier wars, and African lands and herds were systematically taken over by the settlers of both Dutch and British origin. The British authorities also introduced a Masters and Servants Act, and laws against vagrancy; it became illegal for proletarianized Africans to live in any place without proof of employment by somebody. Between 1845 and 1876, in Natal, another British colony, Theophilus Shepstone, a British administrator, and the self-proclaimed Great White Chief of the Natal Zulus, provided a model of labor control along racial lines. He created "reserves" for the black Africans, from where they could be drawn for servicing the white-controlled commercialized sector (Welsh, 1971; Freund, 1984: ch. 4; Sparks, 1990:32, 66; Worden, 1995). Following the same model, the administration of Cecil Rhodes' South Africa Company, imposed a hut tax on the Africans; confined them to reservations, and introduced pass laws to control their movements (Ranger, 1969; Chaiwa, 1985:202-207). Thus the 20<sup>th</sup>-century horrors of apartheid and racist rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe were built on the foundations of the colonial regime of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Proletarian workers were created by freeing Africans of their possessions but were subjected to extreme

degrees of unfreedom almost at once. In the Belgian Congo, an extremely coercive state power put itself behind private enterprise bent on extracting as much profit as possible from exploitation of forest and mineral products. These "new systems" of African slavery led to extreme cruelty and to genocide (Conrad, 1899/1902; Stengers, 1969; and Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1985). These restrictions on worker freedom were operating, be it noted, not in the benighted 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but in the age of liberalism in Europe, and in South Africa, down to the 1980s (Sparks, 1990).

Restrictions on freedom of the Africans and their access to land in the white settler economies of Africa were motivated in the first place by the need to make white plantations viable; without a forcibly proletarianized and low-wage labor force, those plantations would not have been feasible in the first place. The same observation may apply to gold mining in South Africa. However, in many of the settler economies, contradictions built up as conflicts of interest among the white capitalists surfaced, particularly when global crises and African resistance reduced the effectiveness of coercive measures over time (Mosley, 1983: chs. 2,4). But while colonial or white settler control lasted, coercive methods of labor and land control remained on the statute books, if not always on the ground.

Territorially the most widespread factor motivating colonial rulers to restrict the civil liberties of the workers was the need of governance itself. The colonial rulers had to generate revenues for maintaining the apparatus of government and the flow of tribute to the metropolitan country. The imperatives of governance also required the local collaborators to be kept content with the colonial dispensation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Africans in territories occupied by Republican France were from the beginning defined as subjects rather than citizens, because it was argued that the latter were too primitive to be given political rights. In French West Africa, slavery was legally recognized down to 1905, when legislation was passed to make it no longer legally enforceable. However, the practice of using forced labor, or the so-called *prestations*, for public purposes was continued (Conklin, 1998). In a decree passed in 1912, "prestations were defined as annual labour requisitions owed by each African over the age of fifteen to the administration, and were not to exceed a maximum of twelve days a year" (Conklin, 1988:439). Instead of abolishing this practice, the French colonial government at Dakar made it legally possible by means of a new labor code, for the government to put prestations at the disposal of private enterprise (a practice which had grown up through official connivance without explicit legal backing). Forced labor was receiving official sanction down to the 1930s in the name of improving the condition of the conquered peoples (Conklin, 1998:440).

When the British launched their final drive for the conquest of Nigeria in the 1890s, the Sokoto Caliphate was the nominal sovereign of most of northern and central Nigeria and the neighboring territories of Niger and Cameroon (which came to be occupied by the French and the Germans). These territories together had a huge slave population, estimates varying from one million to more than 2.5

million (Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1993:1). From 1890, George Goldie, as the head of the Royal Niger Company became the spearhead of British expansion in the emirates owing suzerainty to the Sokoto Caliphate. Goldie's forays and annexations seemed to threaten the stability of the Sokoto Caliphate itself. Concerned at the prospect of French expansion at the cost of the Caliphate, the British government then authorized the raising of a West African Frontier Force, and appointed Frederick Lugard as its commander. Lugard completed the final overthrow of the Caliphate and installation of British rule by 1903 (Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1993: ch. 1).

During these campaigns Goldie and Lugard had used anti-slavery rhetoric as one of the main justifications for their annexation policy, and had in many cases sheltered and used fugitive slaves as soldiers and auxiliaries. In 1897, Goldie had abolished "the legal status of slavery in the conquered territories. Under this approach, slavery was no longer recognized as a legal institution in the courts, although slavery itself was not abolished and slaves were not emancipated..." (Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1993:6). This approach was first tried out in India, as we shall presently see.

The colonial government was concerned to contain the desertion of slaves because it adversely affected production in the conquered territories. Moreover, revolting or absconding slaves posed a threat to colonial rule. In 1905-1906, at Satiru in Northern Nigeria, revolt broke out against both the Caliphate, which had surrendered to the British, and against the conquering British. This revolt was inspired by radical Muslim clerics, who freed slaves, and the latter flocked to their banner. The revolt was put down by the British, but they remained wary of fugitive and potentially rebellious slaves.

The dilemma posed to the colonial authorities in managing the transition from production based on slavery to that based on nominally free workers has been well put by Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993:65-66):

Once slave status was abolished, slaves wanted to desert their places of work, concubines began to move off for other men, the supply of food failed because land fell out of cultivation, the once-powerful and proud became desperate, and ex-slaves began to take the law into their own hands. The proto-colonial state was put into serious jeopardy, since it lacked sufficient soldiers of its own to control the vast spaces, and it was unsure if it had local allies enough to sustain order, let alone trade, food, markets, and prosperity. In short, the old system — slavery by any other name — had to be maintained for the transition.

The British colonial authorities took only one step in the direction of ending slavery after the abolition of the legal status of slavery, and that was to prohibit the enslavement of children born after 1901. In other ways, they sought to curb any tendency the slaves had to run away by two major items of legislation. One was a vagrancy act, which empowered the government and the Islamic courts to arrest and return vagrants to their places of origin. The other move was effectively to make the state the owner of the land, recognize the rights of the older, mainly slave-holding aristocracy or free peasants to land on payment of a tax (called

“rent” as in British India), and to deny run-away slaves or vagrants access to waste land. This system kept slavery in place. With further progress of commerce, and economic crises, slavery as an institution declined; but economic crises, insecurity on the side of the poor, and scarcity of labor experienced by some landowners tended to reproduce slavery in a “voluntary” form, and gave rise to a clandestine slave trade. In an enquiry made by the League of Nations, in 1936, Nigeria was reported to have about 120,000 slaves but the real number would come to 400,000 or thereabouts (Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1993:270-280). Only in that year did the government feel forced to bring in an ordinance freeing all slaves. But from the way in which the real numbers of slaves had been concealed from official gaze, it would appear that unofficial slavery remained in place even after that date.

In northern India, except in Bihar, most slavery was of the domestic variety but there was a large number of agrestic slaves in the South. The abolition of legal status slavery by the British government in 1843 had been preceded, as in the case of Nigeria later, with considerable debate in official circles. The majority of the Indian Law Commission submitting their report in 1841 recommended the legal abolition of slavery. But most officials were concerned to protect the integrity of the existing provisions of “traditional” family laws of Hindus and Muslims (which provided for slaves as heritable property), and the property rights of the masters of slaves, as much as to allow the slaves to enjoy civil liberty (Anderson, 1993:100-103).

In South India, unfree labor was known as “banniyals,” “parakudis” or “puliyas,” and in Bihar as “kamias” (Sarkar, 1985; Prakash, 1990). Their condition could not easily be slotted into the categories of Roman or British jurisprudence. The British produced approximations which did not fit the ground reality. Moreover, right after the termination of “legal status” slavery, the British were almost immediately forced to interpret “the freedom of contract” to mean the possibility of being forced into unfreedom by contract because of debt as per terms of contract, or if the persons concerned had incurred obligations they could not discharge (Prakash, 1990). Although British Indian courts denounced “perpetuity” implied in the setting up of “waqfs” or other religious trusts (Kozlowski, 1985), they often recognized hereditary or perpetual bondage contracted through debt (Bagchi, 1992; Bhattacharya, 1983, 1985; Fox, 1984).

Ironically enough, although British India had no contract Act before 1874, the unfreedom and criminalization of labor found to be guilty of breach of contract were legalized as early as 1819 by the Bengal Regulation VI of that year (Das, 1941:154-155). That Regulation was abolished in 1862. But other items of legislation such as a Masters and Servants Act and legislation authorizing the recruitment and indenture of labor for the Assam plantations and for employment overseas, and criminalizing breach of contract had been already put in place (Tinker, 1974; Guha, 1977; Sarkar, 1985; Anderson 1993; Das Gupta, 1994).

Hence the history of labor in India can hardly be written in the idiom of civil rights bursting forth under colonial rule. The duality of freedom and unfreedom often got

blurred in ideology, legislation and practice, and the civil freedom of workers had often to await struggles by the workers themselves, the perceived threat to imperial rule posed by worker protests and wider political movements aimed at redressing the workers’ grievances, and contradictions within the policy framework of imperial rule.

One of the paradigmatic examples of such conflicts has been provided by Samita Sen (1996). She has shown that there was a three-way conflict raging behind the framing and implementation of the Assam Labor and Emigration Act (Act VI of 1901). First, in order to redress the sex imbalance in the plantations in Assam and overseas colonies, the Assam planters and the suppliers of indentured labor wanted to recruit as many Indian women as possible. Secondly, however, the Indian patriarchal society was determined to assert the right of husbands and fathers to decide the fates of women of the household. And third, the British Indian government was committed to upholding the sanctity and integrity of the Indian family and also to protecting the freedom of choice of the intended recruit. The Act was an uneasy compromise between the three objectives and the three kinds of interests, with provisions for registration of the intending migrants and establishing the nature of their migration. In many cases, the interests of the recruiting agencies, and the callousness or collusion of the district administration defeated the patriarchs, and allowed the recruiters’ interests to triumph. Were these instances to be regarded as the victory of freedom (as a wage laborer) over bondage (in the household)? How free would the woman be to exercise her choice or much “freedom of well-being” (to use a phrase from A. Sen, 1993) did she possess once she got to the plantation in Assam, Natal, or Mauritius? Once she was taken to the plantation, she would have no means at her disposal to seek other employment, or indeed to physically leave the plantation and go somewhere else. Suppose on the other hand, patriarchy triumphed, how free either in terms of well-being or exercise of choice would the woman remain, if she simply was kept as an exploited drudge of the household? The posing of duality of freedom and unfreedom by linking it to the other duality of the enlightenment of Europe rule and the benighted nature of precolonial rule misses out these dimensions of the meaning of freedom altogether.

The persistence of personal and familial bondage into a period when private property became the dominant mode of control of assets and unfree persons were regarded as the private property of their masters meant that even when such bondage was abolished by legislation, the legally free exbondsmen (and exbondswomen) did not really come into the possession of their full civil rights, let alone human freedom in the fullest (Marxist or Amartya Sen’s) sense. In the U.S.A., slavery was abolished during the course of the American Civil War. But it was not until the passing of the Civil Rights Act (1964) exactly a century later that African-Americans could enjoy their minimal rights as US citizens. Moreover, as an ethnic minority at the bottom of the social ladder the African-Americans had lost, by the 1980s, many of the gains they had made upto the 1970s (Carnoy, 1994; Darity and Mason, 1998).

In colonial and pre-colonial India, while not all untouchables were bondsmen, virtually all bondsmen belonged to the so-called untouchable castes. Of course, "untouchability" itself was a severe infringement of civil freedom. The practice of untouchability was made into a legally cognizable offence only after India's independence. But the so-called untouchable or scheduled castes (so-called because their caste names were entered in a separate schedule of the Indian constitution, as deserving of special consideration in the way of affirmative action), who are now designated as Dalits (the oppressed), were overwhelmingly property-less and illiterate. There have been no land reforms benefiting the poor or landless peasants, including the Dalits, except in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura, and to some extent, Karnataka. As a result, the Dalits are regularly denied their civil and political rights. In such states as Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Rajasthan, they have also been targets of violence by landlords. This violence has also been one of the major reasons for the ability of Naxalite groups in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh to rally peasants in acts of counter-violence against the landlords. Dualism has generated its own particular variant of dialectics in the Indian countryside. (I have not cited any specific references here for *The Economic and Political Weekly* regularly contains numerous articles bearing on this theme.)

### **The Dualism of the Formal and the Informal, or the Primary and Peripheral Sectors**

Economists, historians and social theorists have postulated another class of dualisms pervading the structure, behavior and condition of the working class. These have been characterized variously as workers belonging to the (a) traditional versus modern sectors (b) agriculture versus industry, (c) unorganized versus organized (and equivalently, formal versus informal) sectors, and (d) workers with connections and workers without such connections, and (e) casual versus permanent workers. These types of postulated divergences bear a close family resemblance to the family of models of segmented labor markets, segregated places of residence of workers and primary versus peripheral or secondary sectors of industry or services in advanced capitalist countries.

In the historiography of Indian labor (and money markets) the distinction between organized and unorganized labor (and money) markets precedes the coming of the distinction between the formal and informal sectors by Keith Hart and its popularization by the International Labour Office, followed by the World Bank (Hart, 1973; ILO, 1972). However, early historians of Indian labor were aware of the close interconnection between the unorganized and organized sectors, and between conditions in rural and urban areas (Das, 1923; Buchanan, 1934: chs.14-15; Mukerjee, 1945/1951: chs.1,2,14,15). It is now fairly widely recognized that the conditions and standards of living of the workers in formal and informal, or the organized and the unorganized sectors are closely linked. Any differential between the conditions and standards of living of workers in the two sectors in the colonial dependencies or in the developing countries of today had more to do with the re-

quirements of capitalist growth and the nature of the society the workers belonged to than with "illegitimate" protection given by the government or won by the trade unions (see, for an excellent discussion of these issues, Portes and Schauflier, 1993; Chandavarkar, 1994: ch. 3). However, with decreasing rates of growth of employment in most developing countries, the World Bank, governments, and policy advisers of those countries continue to regard the "informal sector" and dismantling of the few measures of legal protection accorded to a small group of workers in the so-called formal sector as the panacea for employment growth (for an extreme, but by no means, atypical statement of this position, see De Soto, 1989).

Along with differences in wages, general working conditions, location and general standards of living, the difference between formal and informal sectors has also been connected with differences in culture, e.g., attitude to work, propensity to form trade unions, tendency towards and against riotousness, acceptance or rejection of urbanity and so on. As serious students of Indian labor history have pointed out, however, such a picture misses out the numerous ways in which the workers in the two sectors interact socially, politically and culturally, and share the vicissitudes of their living in an urban environment (Holmstrom, 1985: ch. 6; Chandavarkar, 1994: chs. 3,5).

The postulation of a difference between the formal and informal sectors builds (although not always consciously) on a generalization about the history of industrialization in western Europe. The creation of a stable and increasingly immobile labor force in factory towns and villages required their deliberate disciplining to the hours of the clock rather than roughly measured movements of the sun across the sky, and assurance of a more stable employment at a higher wage than the perceived opportunity cost of labor (Thompson, 1967; Hicks, 1974/1977). Since skill formation within the new industries was very often an idiosyncratic affair, with considerable dependence on in-house learning by doing, the upgrading of the skills of labor went hand in hand with the formation of an increasingly disciplined, "committed" labor force, leading eventually to what have been dubbed as internal labor markets.

However reasonable this may seem, even this bit of the folklore of history cannot be applied to the history of the Indian, or more generally, colonial workforces in general. First of all, in many cases, workers were forcibly pushed into wage employment in factories and mines by various fiscal devices, and through public regulation authorizing coercion (Arrighi, 1970, 1973; Bagchi, 1982: ch. 6; Freund, 1988: chs. 3,4). The denial of access to land and forests to a large section of the colonial peoples on the grounds of lack of title, conformity to customary usage or even conservation of resources (some of these grounds have been referred to earlier) served the same purpose of impressment of the colonial peoples into barracks, "coolie" lines, mining settlements, or other slums.

Secondly, in most colonial countries with settled agriculture and large artisanal populations, workers, many of them skilled in craft work, were rendered destitute through processes of deindustrialization (Bagchi, 1976). I have ar-

gued earlier that deindustrialization in the regions and phases in which it occurred was basically caused by an absolute fall in demand for the artisanal products due to a contraction in domestic demand. The latter was in turn caused by an absolute fall in incomes of the consumers and penetration of the domestic market by factory produce from abroad. There was an associated fall in exports caused by competition from foreign factory goods. This kind of displacement of workers cannot be looked upon as an inevitable preparation for the rise of factory industry, or as a process of substitution of more profitable agricultural exportables for the less profitable artisanal products (Bagchi, 1976).

Thirdly, in many colonial countries, including India, before the trade unions made their presence felt, employers were rarely prepared to pay an increasing or even a steady premium for skilled as against unskilled labor. In fact, it has been contended that in the initial years factory industry tended to pay “too high a wage” in order to attract labor, and the margin between factory and non-factory wage was eroded over the years (Buchanan, 1934: ch. 14). The quality and availability of data on wages in colonial India or other colonial countries remain problematic (for a useful discussion of the nature of the relevant data in India, see Mukerji, 1965). But careful scrutiny of these data has failed to reveal any large or persistent difference between the earnings of labor classed as “general labor” or “coolies” in the factories and the wages of unskilled labor in the surrounding area (Mukerji, 1965; Bagchi, 1990a).

In colonial countries, the duality of wages and living conditions of urban versus rural labor, “advanced and traditional” sector workers, or even skilled versus unskilled labor was conditioned and even reversed by various constraints of unfreedom and stigmata of discrimination under which workers led their existence. European planters in Assam or Ceylon planters imported labor from, say, central or southern India, under conditions of indenture rather than employ local labor because agricultural wages in surrounding areas were higher than in the plantations. It is the same kind of reverse differential between industrial and agricultural wages that led to the increasing substitution of non-Bengali for Bengali labor in the Bengal jute mills (Bagchi, 1972: chs. 4,5). The use of trained engineers and technicians in jute mills or other British-owned factories in eastern India was minimal because the racist governance structure of those factories would not allow the employment of such personnel in the mills if they happened to be black or “native” (Bagchi, 1972: ch.5; 1976a; Chakrabarty, 1989). As Mukerjee (1945/1951) remarked, the highest position to which Indians could aspire in most European-controlled factories was that of the *sardar* who acted as the intermediary between the European supervisory staff and the general run of Indian manual workers. In South Africa, the racist regime sustained, itself by systematically bribing the white workers with higher wages and better opportunities of moving to supervisory positions, and denying the latter to the blacks however skilled they might be. Systematic discrimination in wages and employment on the basis of gender was, of course, a universal phenomenon in all countries.

But appeal to the special nature of being “white” would have been elicited when the employers faced special challenges from women workers (see, e.g., Hyslop, 1995).

Finally, capitalism all the time tends to reproduce duality between advancing and declining sectors, and privileged and underprivileged workers by continually and unpredictably changing the structure of production, and making the workers with no other assets than labor power compete among themselves for jobs, and better deals (Shulman, 1984; Botwinick, 1993; Mason, 1995). This is where Marx’s macroeconomic theory of the capitalist reproduction of the reserve army of labor combines with his theory of capitalist competition to provide us with an analytical framework for discussing segmentation and dualism at many levels — in terms of sectors, race, caste, gender and locality (on the last aspect, see for example, Tabb and Sawers, 1984).

### Conclusion

We have been concerned in the present paper primarily with the historiography of labor. But our analysis has implications for current dilemmas before labor movements everywhere. Through improvements in medical technology, advances in education and improvement in nutritional standards — however unevenly distributed that improvement is — advanced capitalism has overcome the problem of reproduction of labor. It now seeks to reduce labor power everywhere to a commodity sold in auction markets without any legal or trade union protection. On the other side, by making capital fully mobile while imposing ever-increasing restrictions on immigration of workers from poorer countries, they have now imposed a double disability from workers in those countries. The workers can neither depend on protection from a disarmed nation-state which is supposed to govern them nor can they look forward to a better standard of living by moving to countries with higher wages as European workers did between the 1850s and the 1920s (Hatton and Williamson, 1994). Moreover, by seeking to incorporate so-called labor standards in the regime regulating international trade, the G-7 countries are trying to further curtail the markets of less developed countries which are in the throes of a massive recession. Unfortunately, some trade union leaders of the advanced capitalist countries are collaborating in these policy initiatives that would effectively deprive all workers of their well-being, freedom and agency without realizing that they are helping to further enfeeble the power of resistance of workers in the advanced capitalist countries. It is hoped that recalling the historiography of elite-imposed dualism on workers’ lives and consciousness and the resistance provoked by them will help to render more transparent the terms of the current policy debates facing trade unionists and supporters of an egalitarian and free society everywhere.

### Notes

Non-incriminating thanks are due to Raj Chandavarkar for his comments on an earlier version of the paper.

<sup>1</sup> Stoics and most sects of Christians advanced many arguments for treating all men as equals. However, it is not always clear whether women were subsumed under the general category of “man.” It is characteristic that in the widely-used textbook on political theory by Sabine and Thorson

(1973), there is no entry for "woman" in the index nor is there any discussion of the position of women in society and politics. Despite the Stoic-Christian ideals of equality among men, enslavement of Europeans survived in many European countries down to the Renaissance times. Serfdom in eastern and southern Europe was abolished only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and women did not attain political equality with men until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, Sen's idea of freedom is much closer to Marx's idea of emancipation or end of alienation for class-bound human beings than to the bourgeois-liberal idea of freedom as a mere absence of arbitrary interference with people's lives (Sen, 1987; 1993). A person's agency and her well-being are both involved in the concept of freedom. The denial of well-being can fracture freedom just as the denial of agency fractures it. For a slightly different view of capitalist unfreedom, see Cohen, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Engels may have been influenced in some of his views on Ireland by the authors he consulted and used such as James Kay-Shuttleworth (Kay, 1832) and Thomas Carlyle (1840). But, of course, he drove his analysis down to the social and economic roots of the problems of the workers (including Irish workers) and would not rest content with moralizing on the evils of modernity, or with meliorist prescriptions.

<sup>4</sup> These examples again demonstrate the hollowness of the claims of the more strident proponents of the Subaltern School of historiography that it was only the advent of that school that restored the notion of agency to peasants and workers. Of course, these proponents do not hide their intention of trashing Marxist and radical historiography (see, for example, Prakash, 1994 and Chakrabarty, 1998) but one could wish that they were less cavalier in their treatment of historical evidence.

<sup>5</sup> In colonial countries, where state coercion of workers in the interest of capitalists was a common practice, capitalists and their agents refused to tolerate a situation in which workers might have something to say about the management of an enterprise. Thus in the Indian cotton textile industry, when in course of the great Bombay mill strikes of 1928 and 1929, leaders of militant workers acquired better knowledge of managerial practices, the mill-owners took the first opportunity to dismiss them and convert them into "outsiders." Schemes of rationalization very often fell through because of the unwillingness of the mill-owners and their managers to negotiate with leaders or engage in collective bargaining on any matters involving the internal management procedures (Chandavarkar, 1994: ch. 8).

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