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## Problematising Historiography: Agrarian Labour in South Asia

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### Abstract

This article clarifies the historiographical challenges that have been prevalent, particularly in south Asian agrarian studies, where caste plays a major role in determining socioeconomic and labour relations. In addition, certain binaries also obscure the path to historical reality. Here is an exploration of these threads as well as suggestions for solving these issues while reaffirming the classical position.

**Keywords:** Agrarian, proletariat, agricultural labour, caste, class, bondage

### Introduction

Labour studies have been often equated to the study of the organised sector or more especially factory *proletariat*, but one can see a different trend which can be seen as an effort to expand labour studies, not just in India but also globally. This essay would be an attempt to elaborate – leading agrarian studies by scholars, especially by investigating the semi-feudal and deproletarianisation theses, (in-)formal labour and caste, caste and class (overstating and understating) and the concept of labouring poor.

The early studies in India on agrarian labour containing some prominent names that investigated labour relations in the colonial period, and Surendra J. Patel is one of them. His thesis focuses on the “dramatic change thesis” that is based on the synthesis between socio-economic structure and colonialism. Additionally, one essential premise is that in the pre-British period, Indian society had a homogeneous village community in which agricultural labourers did not make a sizeable part deserving to be counted or plainly. In other words, their proportion was so negligible it did not deserve to be taken into consideration; that is why the British authority did not pay much attention <sup>[1]</sup>. Patel illustrates, ‘there is a common consensus in pre-nineteenth century India, there was no noticeable large class of agricultural labourers <sup>[2]</sup>.’

That prevailing homogeneity got disturbed, as the aftereffects of the imperialist intervention in the Indian society show. Precisely, various producers such as cultivators and artisans were living together in the self-sufficient natural economy and used to work with communitarian assistance and family labour. The noteworthy point is that after the intervention of the colonial the natural way of functioning of the society was dissolved as the colonial intervention; the intercourse of the local structure of Indian society with the colonialism culminated in the emergence of a substantial class of landless agricultural labourers who either were possessing the small land plots or had nothing to sell but their labour power for securing their mere subsistence <sup>[3]</sup>. Consequently, this process (of change), from the old village communities to the new emergence of agricultural labourers brought by the British was vital which gave a way to monetisation of the economy and set the economy in motion;

<sup>1</sup> Jan Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 3; Neeladri Bhattacharya, “Labouring Histories: Agrarian Labour and Colonialism,” (*Noida: V.V. Giri National Labour Institute*, 2003): para. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Surendra J. Patel, *Agricultural Labourers in Modern India and Pakistan* (Bombay: Current Book House, 1952), 32.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Breman summarises Patel’s view in a footnote- In Pre-Nineteenth century India there were domestic and menial servants; but their numbers were small and they did not form a definite group. The large class of agricultural labourers represents a new form of social relationships that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India; Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation*, 1974, 3; Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 188; Jan Breman, *Outcast Labour in Asia: Circulation and Informalization of the Economy at the Bottom of the Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.

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in short created a labour market for easing the capitalist production, however for facilitating the mother country, the British economy. Patel rationalises the process of emergence of the sizeable class as the culmination of the British intervention in Indian society, as is demonstrated:

In the course of about a hundred years, the whole social basis of a traditional society which had cultivated so many previous invaders, could be so completely smashed by a handful of adventurers from an island in the far-off Atlantic and by a few of them native allies, in a country divided from the place of their birth by half the globe; that of its cultivators and artisans one-third could be turned into landless labourers and one-half into petty cultivators, tenant-at-will and share-croppers are accomplished for which one would look in vain a parallel in the whole history of mankind <sup>[4]</sup>.

Dharma Kumar challenges the “radical thesis” in the 1960s and attempts to reinstate the revisionist thesis of continuity and change. In her research, she challenged that thesis <sup>[5]</sup>. Many other scholars also criticise the radical thesis on methodological grounds, Jan Breman and J. Krishnamurthy <sup>[6]</sup> and to some extent, Neeladri Bhattacharya too raise some important issues regarding this thesis. For instance, Bhattacharya states that Patel’s thesis is pervaded by a sense of loss of self-sufficiency. He relates that Patel’s writing suffered from the uncritical reading of the colonial sources because it ‘accepted colonial representations without questioning them, if he was using census data unproblematically, then he was doing what most academics did in the early nineteenth century <sup>[7]</sup>.’ Some issues, she takes, into consideration:

The growth in the number of agricultural labourers must of course be related to the size of the agricultural population as a whole, since it is possible that the labourers were recruited not only from former land owners, but also from village artisans and others. Outside agriculture, in 1901 the proportion of those engaged in agriculture to total population was about 70 percent [...]. In 1852 the agricultural population formed about 60 percent of the total, and this would also have been the case at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It would have formed 17 to 25 percent of agricultural population at that time. What is more, if the growing dependence on agriculture took place from the beginning of the nineteenth century, so that agriculturists in 1800 were a smaller component of the total population than in 1852, then it follows that agricultural labourers in 1800 would have formed an even larger proportion of the agricultural population <sup>[8]</sup>.

She concludes in the concluding pages of her work that

It was not the case that a class of landless agricultural labourers was wholly created during the British period by the impoverishment of the peasant proprietors and the village craftsmen. Even before British rule, there was a sizeable group of landless labourers at the lowest rung, both

economically and socially, of the village hierarchy. Whether the economic conditions of this group deteriorated over the nineteenth century is still uncertain <sup>[9]</sup>.

By underestimating changes Kumar overestimates the continuity thesis, seemingly discarding the radical change thesis has also been criticised by scholars. In this respect, Kumar in fact presents a totally different picture which was quickly identified with an optimistic picture of British rule, she offers continuity between the pre-colonial and colonial period. Now in these two paragraphs from her book wherein she did not give enough space for the change that took place during the pre-colonial and colonial period. However, ‘she is rightly saying that in 1900 the most agricultural labourers as in 1800 were from lower castes but does this empty that there was no propounded change in the social form of labour?’ In reacting against Patel’s simplified picture of dramatic transformation, we need not throw over board the very idea of change itself. Bhattacharya made a precise comment that ‘instead of the binary between continuity and change, the *longue duree* and the *even*, we need to see how they are intimately connected, how they constitute each other <sup>[10]</sup>.’

Another issue that should be under reconsideration is that she limits her study to the estimation of lower castes, assuming that they constituted the bulk of the labour force, she excluded from her estimates those impoverished peasants who turned to be agricultural labour for their livelihood. So this exclusion in her book is problematic. Another well-researched work in this direction is *Patronage and Exploitation* by Jan Breman. He looked at the cultural constitution of the relationship between landlord, *Anavil* Brahmins and labourers, *Dublas* in Gujarat specifically south Gujrat. *Anavil* Brahmins were the principal local landholders and *Dublas* were from a tribal caste of landless labourers, so this relationship between them was known as the *hali* system. The *Anavil*’s behaviours in a village system were accustomed to command, not to obey, when they would speak other people expected to listen submissively, the master did not want the debt repaid because he did not make a “loan” to press for payment afterwards but rather to be able subsequently to assert himself as a patron. The size of a servant’s debt was a measure of his commitment, of the control which could be exerted on him by the *Anavil*. The master repeatedly, and often based on false figures, told the *dubla* that he got much more than he was entitled to. In this way, he managed at once to demonstrate his liberality and to emphasise his servant’s dependence to behave like a patron. According to Breman the right of the servant was the obligation of the master, but the former was not guaranteed in any way. The great economic, political and social power of the *Anavil* made it possible for him to dictate. His power was not limited to the *Dubla* but his family as well. He had to comply with the letter’s every wish which might include sexual intercourse with the *hali*’s wife. When the economic opportunities by the completion of railways they found and this process got pace after the Economic crisis of nineteen thirty and slightly a decade before, after the world war first, the decline in the cultivation of this highly labour intensive crop led to vastly diminished demand for permanent labour. This means, the possibilities of finding a livelihood outside agriculture for themselves in the region gradually increased.

<sup>4</sup> Patel, *Agricultural Labourers*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, 188-89; Breman, *Patronage*, 4; Bhattacharya, “Labouring Histories,” para 5.

<sup>6</sup> J. Krishnamurthy, “The growth of Agricultural Labour in India: A Note,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 9, no. 3 (July 1972): 327-32.

<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharya, “Labouring Histories,” para 3; Jan Breman substantiates it that because the colonial literature in British India did not give proper consideration to the existence of a subaltern landless class held captive in a state of unfreedom; Breman, *Outcast Labour*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste*, 191.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar, *Land and Caste*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Bhattacharya, “Labouring Histories,” part, I.

For the reciprocity of this system, Breman writes, ‘Bondage was certainly not one-sidedly imposed on the Dublas. On the contrary, by becoming *halis* they were assured of at least a minimal existence in the more or less closed village economy, servitude lost much of its attraction for these landless labourers. Fewer and fewer Dublas were prepared to enter into an agreement which, in practice bound them for life’<sup>[11]</sup>.

Regarding the functioning of the *hali* system, Breman undertheorises the role of contestation, as James Scott points it out, ‘the public script of loyalty and deference can exist with a hidden script of everyday resistance. This resistance may not subvert the system, but it does alter its contours’<sup>[12]</sup>. Resistance can be expressed in different ways as shown by James Scott, who spend two years (1978-80) in a Malaysian village called Sedaka (not its real name). This was a small (seventy-household) village. He emphasises the issues like resistance, class struggle and ideological domination. The struggle between rich and poor in Sedaka is not merely a struggle over work, property rights, grain and cash. It is also a struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labelled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blame a contentions effort to give partisan meaning to local history<sup>[13]</sup>. He shows the resistance through symbols<sup>[14]</sup> and indicates the notion of hegemony and its related concepts of false consciousness, mystification and ideological state apparatuses not only fail to make sense of class relations in Sedaka but also are just as likely to mislead us seriously in understanding class conflict in most situations the concept of hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able based on their daily material experiences, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology<sup>[15]</sup>. He writes at another place in the book that ‘Gramsci is I believe, misled when he claims that the radicalism of subordinate classes is to be found more in their acts than in their beliefs’<sup>[16]</sup>.

For the first point I have some questions – can hegemonic ideology be fully understood if one’s perspective is limited to a single village; second for Gramsci, religion and state have played a central role in establishing hegemony. I think village focus obscures the major role that interethnic politics and conflict have played in any plural society. For the second point, Jean-Pierre Reed provided a better way in an article (2012). Reed delineates:

Counter-hegemony [...] requires the latter social actions to consider existing subaltern—cultural practices as potential political resources. Counter-hegemony cannot be separated from, nor it unfolds independent of population beliefs, for these are essential constituents of a precondition for a new type of politics and future social formation to emerge<sup>[17]</sup>.

It means because Gramsci emphasised both domination and agency in his cultural theorising, he effectively revealed how cultural practices that maintain a status quo order can

paradoxically function to undermine or resist it. Gramsci focuses on the subaltern mentalities – their cultural and emotional potential – as the medium through which political struggles are embodied has proven significant for the ‘agency, from below’<sup>[18]</sup>. During the 1970s, a major debate sparked that unraveled and threw light on the new strands in Indian society, specifically, on the mode of production in agriculture. A major focus of this debate remained to trace the capitalist features of production in the mode under operation.

So, is appropriate to switch to another major issue in the study of agrarian labour in India. Daniel Thorner in the early 1950s gave an indication of penetration of capitulation in Indian agriculture after the intense surveys during 1953, 1958-9 and 1966-7. Whether he indicated an emerging agricultural capitalist in the Indian countryside but he posited question on the data provided by S.C. Gupta and G. Kotovsky and argued the number (or in a sense, degree) suggested by both scholars was exist to a lesser degree; he suggested the increasing number of agricultural capitalists at the all India level<sup>[19]</sup>. He was criticised by Mohanty for saying that Throner's conclusion was based on limited experiences<sup>[20]</sup> He could not generate any major debate in this regard.

In India major debate regarding the mode of production was generated by Ashok Rudra’s essay<sup>[21]</sup>. Ashok Rudra, Paresh Chattopadhyay and N. Ram argue that in India two broader classes were being started to emerge<sup>[22]</sup>, but Utsa Patnaik argues that those emerging classes were not so clear. So for this stand, N. Ram<sup>[23]</sup> and Paresh Chattopadhyay<sup>[24]</sup> warn against the blind following of a theory and they argue that the existence of the landless labourers was a condition but there might be some specificity or in other words, a different way to transition also might be followed by a country. Simultaneously Chattopadhyay criticises those scholars also who overemphasise specificity, like K.N. Raj who does not think about the “concept of class” can grasp the social and economic realities of India. To understand this point, I would like to quote from Capital, Vol. I.

In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch making that act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasants, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take

<sup>18</sup> Reed. “Theorist,” 584.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Thorner, *The Shaping of Modern India* (New Delhi: Allied Books) 251-53; B.B. Mohanty, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Agrarian Transition: India in the Global Debate* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Mohanty ed. *Critical Perspectives*, 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Mohanty, ed. *Critical Perspectives*, 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Mohanty, ed. *Critical Perspectives*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> B. Ram, “Development of Capitalism in Agriculture,” in Ashok Rudra et al., eds. *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1978), 141.

<sup>24</sup> Paresh Chattopadhyay, “On the Question of Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture,” in Ashok Rudra et al., eds. *Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1978), 174-5.

<sup>11</sup> Breman, *Patronage in Exploitation*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Bhattacharya, “Labouring Histories,” para. 25.

<sup>13</sup> James Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), Preface, xvii.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Weapons*, 236-7.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Weapons*, 317.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Weapons*, 322.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Reed, “Theorist of Subaltern Subjectivity: Antonio Gramsci, Popular Beliefs, Political Passion and Reciprocal Learning,” *Critical Sociology*, 39, no. 4 (2012): 565 and 584.

as our example, has it the classical form <sup>[25]</sup>.

Breman provides a conceptualisation for that. He focuses on the difference between capitalist development in Asia and Western societies. He argues, that in Europe, capitalist development went together with an enormous expansion of the formal labour market, government intervention to protect labour trade unionism and a general increase in the standard of living. In Asia, the pattern has been reversed <sup>[26]</sup>. So the issue that is closely linked with the semi-feudal thesis is free and unfree labour. The major debate regarding unfree labour has taken place among Jairus Banaji, Tom Brass, Jens Lerche and Surinder S. Jodhka; specifically between the first two scholars.

An important part from Banaji <sup>[27]</sup> - 'to counterpose free labour to unfree the way Brass does it to ignore. Contract law's role in making actual domination appear free, natural and national - contract law denied the nature of the system by creating an imagery that made the oppression and alienation appear to be the consequences of what the people themselves desired,' indicates that he is positing a question on the dichotomy between free and unfree, especially as construed in the "deproletarianisation thesis" by Tom Brass. Brass delineates his stand in a response, my focus is on the way the distinction between free and unfree labour informs and shapes class formation and class struggle; a dynamics whereby deproletarianization is one method of workforce decomposition/decomposition used historically by capital to restructure its labour process – the element of freedom lies not in the fact of the contract itself, but rather on the ability of workers to exit from these same relations subsequently that is, the retention/reproduction of the capacity of personally to recommodify their labour power <sup>[28]</sup>.

Unlike the "semi-feudal thesis" which maintains that capitalism and bounded labour are incompatible, the "deproletarianisation thesis" is based on the idea that capitalism and unfree labour (which is called *neo-bondage* by Breman) <sup>[29]</sup> are compatible <sup>[30]</sup>. Theoretically, David Harvey suggests the existence of primitive forces and capitalism, simultaneously. So for this, he provides a premise:

Class power was being increasingly consolidated right now through a process of this sort. Since it seems a bit odd to call them primitive or original, I prefer to call these processes

accumulation by dispossession.... We should not regard primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession as simply being about the prehistory of capitalism <sup>[31]</sup>.

Guerin on the one hand concludes that changed bonded labour relations display a very high degree of "unfreedom" on the other, she argues that unfreedom itself is a matter of a degree under capitalism <sup>[32]</sup>. Like Isabelle Guerin and many other scholars – Jodhka, Neeladri Bhattacharya and Lerche questioned on the binary between free and unfree <sup>[33]</sup>. The issue of "informality" is very significant for new labour relations.

In the changed labour relations, informality has been playing a crucial significant role. Breman argues that the informal sector is not a closed circuit as suggested by Keith Hart in the case of Africa, but is organically related to the formal sector, constitutes a "reserve army" of labour and suggests that it represents an "exchanged workforce." Breman argues further that labourers which are not protected by legislation <sup>[34]</sup>, work under non-standardised conditions and wages are unable to put forward their political and social voice due to the lack of social and material resources, and form a category that is present in both formal and informal sectors <sup>[35]</sup>. In this whole scenario, caste has been playing a significant role.

Caste is an ideology of domination, whereby the higher caste members dominate the lower caste people by limiting the latter's access to better economic activities. Caste also operates as a mode of ideology that either commands domination or subordination, depending on the caste membership and its role as a structure that determines the status and the position of its members. An important intervention in defining the nature of the division of labour and thus becoming part of the production, distribution and consumption process. Breman argues that the labour market is highly segmented there is an absence of equality of opportunity in finding work <sup>[36]</sup>. It is the caste membership rather than cultural capital in terms of educational qualifications and expertise that plays a crucial role. However, a strong social position is related to an opportunity for access to education. In some cases; both inherited and acquired cultural capital play a major role in accessing jobs. So this leads some classes to emphasise their

<sup>25</sup> Emphasis is not original but added; Karl Marx, trans. Ben Fowkes, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I* (London: Penguin Classics 1999), 876.

<sup>26</sup> Breman, *Outcast Labour*, 46 and 299. That is why he argues that the capitalist agricultural development policy executed in the post-colonial era has further exacerbated the vulnerability of life at the bottom and of the Cultural economy; Breman, *Outcast Labour*, 300-1.

<sup>27</sup> Jairus Banaji, "The Fictions of Free Labour: Contract, Coercion and So-called Unfree Labour," *Historical Materialism* 11 (2003): 76.

<sup>28</sup> Tom Brass, "Why Unfree Labour is Not 'So-called': The Fictions of Jairus Banaji," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 31, no. 1 (2003): 104; Tom Brass, "Unfree Labour as Primitive Accumulation?" *Capital and Class* 35, no. 1 (2010): 25 & 33 Tom Brass, *Labour Regime Change in the Twenty-First Century: Unfreedom, Capitalism and Primitive Accumulation* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 80-81.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Breman and Isabelle Guerin, "Introduction: On Bondage – Old and New," in Jan Breman, Isabelle Guerin and Aseem Prakash, *India's Unfree Workforce: Of Bondage Old and New* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Brass, *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates* (London: Frank Cass, 1999) 150-58; Tom Brass, "Capitalist Unfree Labour: A Contradiction?" *Critical Sociology* 35, no. 6 (2009): 743.

<sup>31</sup> David Harvey, "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation," in David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London/New York: Verso, 2010), 310; David Ludden also tries to show the same thing, David Ludden, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV: An Agrarian History of South Asia* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 203.

<sup>32</sup> Isabelle Guerin, "Bonded Labour, Agrarian Changes and Capitalism: Emerging Patterns in South India," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, No. 3 (2013): 406; Jens Lerch, "Unfree Labour Category and Labour Estimates: A Continuum within Low and Labour Relations," *Manchester Paper in Political Economy: Working Paper no. 10* (2011): 19-20.

<sup>33</sup> Respectively, Surinder S. Jodhka, "Agrarian, Unfreedom and Attached Labour," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 31/32 (1995): 2011-13; Bhattacharya, Second Last para; Lerch, "Unfree Labour," 19; Guerin, "Bonded Labour," 406.

<sup>34</sup> Prabu Mohapatra questions this premise in an essay – "Regulated Informality" – Published in Jan Lucassen and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, eds., *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History 1800 – 2000*. (New Delhi, 2005); I have the draft of that chapter given by author, my teacher but not the published chapter one that's why, cannot give page numbers but para number.

<sup>35</sup> Sujata Patel, "The Ethnography of Labouring Poor in India," in *The Jan Breman Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008) 6; Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "Introduction," in Rana P. Behal and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *India's Labouring Poor: Historical Studies, c. 1600- c. 2000* (Delhi: Foundation Books, 2007), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Patel, "The Ethnography," 7.

caste identities resulting to acquire the benefits or opportunities in the formal sector; a reverse process plays its part with the lower castes. In other words, it can be said that caste played an important significant role in access to economic opportunities, education and making social status. But it does not mean that this nexus is unshakable. As Breman showed earlier when employment opportunities opened for the *dublas* in the late nineteenth century and the *hali* system came to an end.

Raj Chandavarkar attracts attention to a methodological point; he illustrates - in India, where the working class was constituted by rural migrants, the line of historiographical reasoning moved in the opposite direction. It was precisely because of the supposedly traditional or "pre-capitalist character" of Indian society in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that historians have taken it for granted that its working class cannot be made. Indeed the very notion seemed anachronistic as if Indian society belonged to some previous epoch, through which Britain and the West had already passed<sup>[37]</sup>. The subaltern studies group is one excellent example of this ridiculous historiographical position.

Depesh Chakraborty wastes his energy in demonstrating that 'rural migrants imported a peasant culture into the industrial setting... this peasant culture was primarily a pre-capitalist, in an egalitarian culture marked by strong primordial loyalties of communities, language, religion, caste and kinship<sup>[38]</sup>.' Chandavarkar argues that to insist that the culture of migrant workers was characterised by "strong primordial ties of community" is to obscure the extent to which their interaction produces something quite different and it is to remain blind to the extent to which their "culture" was also informed by work and by politics, and indeed, by the daily struggle of workplace and neighbourhood<sup>[39]</sup>.

The questions of caste and class are also important, P.C. Joshi observed this finely. The concept of class in India was applied mechanically to analyse the agrarian society; very few exceptions are there like E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who has made a significant contribution by indicating the cultural barriers to structural transformation in India<sup>[40]</sup>. A reverse process also has been going on that is the 'rejection of class conception' in India because according to some scholars, the grassroots reality cannot be understood through this conception of class<sup>[41]</sup>. An insightful perspective is presented by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, firstly he criticised the narrow focus on the factory proletariat and he argued about a more inclusive concept of "labouring poor" as belonging to non-wage and informal sectors. He explicitly argues, 'I am aware that the latter is a fuzzy concept ... "labouring poor" is more appropriate to transitional economies in less developed countries where individuals and families are simultaneously located in more than one part of the conventional class categories which counterpoise

wage labour and non-wage labour<sup>[42]</sup>.' The binaries are not appropriate, while analysing the social reality, overstating the primordial loyalties limits the way to historical as well as the existing social reality. Regarding the labour relations in the colonial period, the conception of class, in a limited sense, as well as caste too reduces our focus from the concrete Socio-economic reality. Under such conditions, the category of "labouring poor" rooted primarily in Marx's *magnum opus*, transcends the caste, class and work-based binaries. The relationships between knowledge (theory) and empirical reality could be summarised by Mao Tse-tung who argues, 'it is precisely in the particularity of contradiction that the universality of contradiction resides<sup>[43]</sup>.'

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<sup>37</sup> Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "'The Making of the Working Class': E.P. Thompson and Indian History," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 43 (Spring 1997): 184.

<sup>38</sup> Chandavarkar "'The Making of the Working Class,'" 184-5.

<sup>39</sup> Chandavarkar "'The Making of the Working Class,'" 187

<sup>40</sup> P.C. Joshi, *Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspectives* (Bombay: Allied Books, 1975), 22 & 60.

<sup>41</sup> Andre Beteille, *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 33; One of the best efforts has been done by Vivek Chibber in an article "On the Decline of class Analysis in South Asian Studies," *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (Feb. 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Bhattacharya, "Introduction," the Same stand – reconsideration for constructive purpose – can be found in Marcel van der Linden and Karl Henz Roth, eds., *Beyond Marx: Theorizing the Global Labour Relation of Twenty-First Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 469-72.

<sup>43</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "On Contradiction (August, 1937)," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 311-47 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1975 (1965)), 316.

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