

AJEI - CESSMA Workshop

May 29th 2017 - Paris

Université Paris Diderot

“Competition and solidarity networks in contemporary South Asia's Labour Market”

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CALL FOR PAPERS

- * **April 9th 2017** : deadline for the submission of papers' proposals (title + abstract max 1000 words)
- * **April 17th 2017** : authors will be notified about the acceptance of their proposal
- * **May 10th 2017** : full papers (max 10.000 words) should be submitted
- * All submissions should be sent to **ateliers.ajei@gmail.com**

Hegemonic neo-liberal discourse assumes that free competition on all levels sparks a virtuous cycle of economic growth, which eventually trickles down to poor populations. Over the past three decades, the idea that restrictive labour laws hamper such competition has justified the deregulation of labour in the North and the un-regulation of labour in the South, notably in South Asia, where labour relations had already mainly been informal¹ (Lerche, 2012).

Company managers claim they look at the objective categories of “merit, “abilities”, and “skills” when hiring an employee. To the contrary, empirical work in contemporary India has shown that hiring decision-making remains strongly influenced by social representations and personal ties, and is shaped by membership of specific groups (Jodhka, 2015). In South Asia, such groups and their common identities and shared practices, and their members who often act in solidarity with one other, are traditionally structured along a variety of lines, which include location, religion, ethnicity, class, caste and kinship (Harriss-White, 2007; Lachaier, 1992; Lerche, 2011; Tambs-Lyche, 2013;). In such a context, a few dominant groups with traditional involvement in trade and industry still monitor the largest portions of production, as is for instance the case in India (Naudet, 2016). Dominant peasant castes, alongside petty capitalists (Breman, Guérin, Prakash, 2009) in the rural hinterland maintain joint control over economic resources. They for instance treat the landless proletariat as a source of seasonal and casual migrant labour (Breman, 1996, Guérin, 2009; Picherit, 2009, Srivastava 2005a, 2005b).

Due to rapid urbanization and liberalization however, South Asian societies have been undergoing significant social changes. This has been transforming the construction of social groups and hierarchies in the region. With the erosion of patronage systems, oppression is slowly becoming multifaceted (Breman, Guérin Prakash, 2009). Caste and kinship ties have meanwhile never been systematically significant in the contemporary labour market. De Neve has for instance shown how, in the Tamil Nadu loom industry, family ties are often phony and kinship ethics delicate (2005). Kumar has also noted how, in the so-called 'traditional' (and old) artisan worlds of Varanasi, not every occupation is ruled by caste and kinship ties (1988). Leaving aside these ties, recognition of the skills of workers or owners is key in legitimizing hierarchies and social statuses in this unorganized sector's metal industry, for example (Kaba, 2014, Ruthven 2006). As such, in these segments of labor, workers widely share and internalize ideologies of merit. Women are increasingly gaining strength, organizing through trade unions and emerging as an interest group in the labor market (Martens & Miller, 1994; Ratnam & Jain, 2002). Meanwhile worker solidarities based on type of activity, sector, or socioeconomic condition, have long been observed in South Asia (Heller, 1996; Chandavarkar, 2002).

¹ We are aware that the terms 'informal' and 'unorganized' are subject to debate that goes well beyond the scope of this call. We will use the term 'unorganized sector' in the sense of the Indian statistical category referring to all forms of labor that are not fully protected by the law.

These observations have fed into wide-ranging debates on the discriminative effects of the caste-based social order and how they have evolved through labor market reform and its articulation with the class formation process. A continuum of positions exists; some argue that caste hierarchies have evolved and reconfigured but continue to prevail, particularly through highly developed informal economy networks (Basile et Harriss-White, 2000). Bétéille theorizes that castes have shifted to classes as villages have been abandoned (1992). Others argue that the effects of caste have gradually been disappearing and that the shift towards a liberal market has created new opportunities for social mobility (Panini, 1996; Srinivas, 2003).

Various sociologists have noted that intensified economic interactions and the rise of competition have made individuals more likely to activate their social networks to protect their individual interests (Jodhka, 2014). In this respect, to what extent do social networks shape relations in the diverse South Asian labour markets? How do new forms of social groupings reconfigure competition and solidarity relations? What forms of social interactions prevail, emerge and weaken in the market: chosen solidarity and inherited solidarity; inter-caste and intra-caste solidarity; class solidarity; corporate solidarity etc.?

More generally, how do market structures, which are supposedly more flexible and competitive in the current political frame, evolve and organise in line with social transformations – social heterogeneity, rural and urban social links, caste reconfiguration, and the emergence of the middle class, etc.? Conversely, how are social structures responding and recomposing in the current context of institutional de-regulation, un-regulation and informalisation?

We invite papers from PhD candidates and post-doctoral fellows. They will be discussed by senior researchers specialized in issues related to the paper presented. Proposed papers may be theoretical or empirical, qualitative or quantitative in their approach, but must rely on in-depth knowledge of the issues discussed. Research papers relying on qualitative as well as quantitative studies on historical or contemporary relations in the Indian labour market are welcome.

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