

INDIA'S INDISPENSIBLE INFORMAL WASTE ECONOMY

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ECOLOGICAL 'METABOLISM' AND WASTE – nature as tap and sink – bio- geo-physical versus economic cycles



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TAPS = NATURAL RESOURCES; SINKS = DE/RE-COMPOSITION

- Depletion of **taps** accepted because not yet an immediate obstacle to the production of value
- **Sinks** are increasing constraints on ec devt
- **Development** is the co-evolution of natural laws, economic laws and social/institutional norms
- **Restitution** (original goal of 'general human development') not possible under capitalism. Full costs of physical processes of restitution not YET needed. At best re-use; re-cycle ; re-process.
- In political economy, the disconnect between material flows and social relations is the 'social-ecological **metabolic rift**'

NEW MARKETS FOR RE-USE



WASTE ESSENTIAL INPUTS



Relevance to urban environments:

- Carey's **robbery system**: Towns and cities drive progress but break nutrients cycles and working of 'natural laws';
- So need for knowledge of stocks and flows of matter and energy to discover extent of rift/direction, type of flows and role of politics. But without dedicated data collection urban and rural are **black boxes / 'data containers'**;
- Neglect of the **informal economy : paradox** that balance of regulative forces varies locally while 'policy' operates at higher spatial scales and in different spatial units
- Value of political ecology / enonomy grounded in **field research** for actually existing regulation and 'policy processes and possibiities';

What is India's informal economy?

- It is the economy **outside state regulation**
- Huge **size – and growing**
93% of livelihoods
GDP (NCAER: Trade Liberalisation) – over 60%
- **Diversity**
Scales / Sectors / Occupations / Types of enterprise / Forms of regulation
- **Inside the state / formal / corporate sector/globalised**
Leakages: Servicing those who service the export services / In- and out-sourcing / homeworking in global value chains

DELIBERATE / ELEMENT OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Liberalisation and Social Institutions in India's (Informal) Economy

- **Social institutions** – class, gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, place, business associations/collective action of capital and informal practices of the state outside its own reach - are **regulators of most of the India's informal economy including labour arrangements and markets**
- Liberalisation widely predicted to dissolve archaic institutions – such as caste

versus

- Contradictory processes acting on them - dissolution, creation, persistence, re-working
- **Balance of forces is often localized – GIVES THE ECONOMY ITS CHARACTER – EXPRESSES FORMS AND DISTRIBUTION OF POWER –**
hard to research – take a localised case study.

THE CASE OF WASTE

- Waste has **no value** and useless to capital. This stage may be short (fleeting and hard to catch) as waste re-enters production as a raw material – or geologically long (waste metal and plastic) + ?negative value?
- Society as a whole, expressed through the economy, **cannot avoid** producing gaseous, liquid and solid waste in production, distribution, consumption and social reproduction – even in the handling of waste.
- One of **fastest growing , unstable** sectors (260ktonnes/day - 1/3ag;1/3ind;1/3 hh)
- Waste is classified in many **incoherent** ways.

TWO ASPECTS OF THE **WASTE** **ECONOMY.**

1.MARKET RELATIONS OF WASTE

2. SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WASTE

FORMALITY AND
INFORMALITY

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, THEIR
REGULATIVE ROLE, AND
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

CASTE IN A SMALL-TOWN WASTE ECONOMY

- Munic. Sanitation Workforce: 40% D 30%A Rest = BCs/OBCs/MBCs
- Unregistered / informal work dominated by Dalits – Paraiyars; 'D->A' – Arundathiars/KattuNaickers/'Pigmen' – some upward mobility - and Adivasis – Irulars.
- But private recycling, reprocessing and bagging firms tend to be owned by Nadars ; and emerging 2nd hand mkt for re-use by Muslims

PART -1: FORMALITY AND INFORMALITY IN AN URBAN WASTE ECONOMY



BUSINESS MODELS IN THE WASTE ECONOMY ,

2015 (with indicative examples)

- **Public sector labour force** - i) large labour force (130+) , full rights at work, unionised (e.g. Municipal Sanitation Workforce); ii) small labour force (<5) – variable work rights – some permanently casualised (e.g, Government Liquor shops and glass bottle recycling)
- **Private business** – registered **joint family** with 10-500 wage workers – local and migrant (e.g. scrap yards; medical waste; gunny bag depot)
- **Private companies** subcontracted to state (30-300 wage-workers) – local and migrant labour, no union, no work rights (some bonded), side jobs (e.g. urban consumption waste and ‘municipal’ rubbish; hospital cleaning and security; railway sanitation)
- **Waste ‘departments’** inside big companies – specialised labour (3-40) to clean-up segregate, pack – disproportionately Dalit/Adivasi (e.g. clothing accessories, industrial alcohol, paddy milling, wedding halls, private hospitals, big meals hotels)

STRUCTURE CONTD

- **Own account enterprise** - ?25? Firms- family labour with 1-2 wage labourers and more or less tied suppliers (some with bikes/vans) (e.g. general waste wholesalers; second-hand goods; septic tankers)
- **Self-employed agent** - unknown number - (e.g. reprocessing; vehicle / two-wheeler scrap; glass bottle recycling)
- Self-employed –number unknown – barter – with **cart or scooter** - (e.g. cloth for plastic kitchenware, iron waste for salt, dates turmeric, onion and tomatoes)
- Self-employed individual **gathering on foot, with bike or cycle cart** (e.g. hundreds in general waste (scavenging before and after the MSW) , scores on dumpyard; scores in vegetable market; clearing up veg waste from meals hotels; animal waste from slaughter and sales)

HEURISTIC

* **SUB-CIRCUITS OF WASTE:** PRODUCTION OF WASTE IN:

- Production
- Distribution – physical and economic
- Consumption
- The production of labour
- The reproduction of society

* **LIVELIHOODS:** CAPITAL, LABOUR AND PCP



PRODUCTION OF WASTE IN PRODUCTION



WASTE IN PRODUCTION: FORMAL - INFORMAL

CAPITAL

- (Selective) receipts **ONLY** in
 1. heavily regulated industry (liquor)
 2. Long distance transactions
 3. Recycling to reprocessing – passing from zero to positive value

LABOUR

- Formal (**INCOMPLETE**) contracts **ONLY** for
 1. Recording /accounting
 2. Relatively skilled labour ('we're bonded')(deliberate casualisation and
dalitisation of waste handling-
sometimes as an expression
of contempt)

DISTRIBUTION WASTE



Distribution waste -contd



WASTE IN DISTRIBUTION (PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC): FORMAL - INFORMAL

CAPITAL

- Licenced and registered companies – >registered contracts
1. Between private companies and the state
 2. Wholesale , long distance contracts
- (scale, inspectability and consequentiality)

LABOUR

1. Many wholly unregistered retail companies (but paying daily rent to auctioneer)
2. Forced supplementation of formal 'salary' (IR)
3. Incomplete F contracts -> I supplementation.
4. Co-produced by wholly I labour force and animal agency

CONSUMPTION WASTE



Consumption waste contd



WHOLESALE HIERARCHY



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE



THE DUMPYARD



WASTE IN CONSUMPTION : FORMAL - INFORMAL

CAPITAL

1. State sets existence conditions for IE (public finance; official supervision; timing and quantity of payments; technological perversity in response to 'demand')
2. Waste/raw materials partially and strategically receipted – driven by Comm Taxes Inspectorate

LABOUR

- Formal regulative labour force politicised
- MSW = aristocracy of waste = incomplete contracts -> delib casualised and unable to fulfil duties -> illegal activities.
- Equipment privately purchased for public duties
- Sub-subcontracting to state
- Informal accommodations (dawn)
- Informal side jobs hard-wired
- Labour sponge for permanent-temporary destitutes
- 'Animals' and acute stigma
- Huge economy of self-employed

HUMAN WASTE –WASTE IN THE PRODUCTION OF LABOUR



WASTE IN PRODUCTION OF LABOUR :

FORMAL - INFORMAL

CAPITAL

1. Disposal of human excrement is strictly state-regulated

but in fact human waste is unregulated and untreated and now mixed disgustingly with general consumption waste in gulleys and open drains.

2. Septic tanks 'fined' by police but not regulated by municipality ; faecal sludge is dumped untreated

LABOUR

1. Abolition of manual scavenging - > discretionary change in gendering of labour;

2. Formalisation of labour and transformation (mixing) of form of waste

3. Human waste is also the responsibility of bonded labour in partially subcontracted private firm

SOCIALLY REPRODUCTIVE WASTE – WASTE IN THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIETY - ALCOHOL



SOCIALLY REPRODUCTIVE WASTE - MEDICAL

Photos courtesy of Dr Sarah Hodges,
Warwick University







WASTE IN THE RE-PRODUCTION OF SOCIETY : FORMAL - INFORMAL

CAPITAL

1. State subsidises private health (training-staff/last resort safety-net)
2. State regulates strategically through Health, Sanitation, Pollution Control and Municipality)
3. Records kept for formal scrutiny; but leakages occur esp in registered pvt sector

LABOUR

1. In registered pvt sector a flexible continuum between full formal contracts and permanent verbal contracts – depg on discretion, patronage and need – very long hours – viring nursing/theatre and waste work – illiteracy and drugs mgt
2. (Liquor) black mkt supplements : bottles / hooch

THE LOCAL STATE / 'POLICY'?

- The state
 - acts **for and against** the informal waste economy – selective extortion / harassment
 - fails in its **three roles** – mobilising / allocating resources and compensating victims – rampant culture of **fiscal non-compliance**
 - **Poor quality** law – loopholes - reveals intentionality
 - 'Unorganised' versus **dis**organised (revenue/ party political competition / social invisibility/ political resistance through caste not through problems of waste work/ 'emasculatation' of trade unions) – who benefits?

CONCLUSION

- **Informal economy of waste** is not residual, temporary, antagonistic, only partially pre-emptive of regulation, not simply useful to capital, not newly penetrating the formal economy under the neoliberal dispensation, not a negotiated political compromise,

IT IS INDISPENSIBLE to the **formal waste economy**.

- And the WASTE ECONOMY IS INDISPENSIBLE TO THE **PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY**

**PART TWO - OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE WASTE
ECONOMY – A CASE STUDY OF
DISCRIMINATION**

DISCRIMINATION

- individuals with the **same endowments** (assets, entitlements, rights, skills, education, experience) but differing in **social status-groups** (caste, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc.) commanding **different tangible returns** (income, development benefits, realized entitlements) and **less tangible ones** (such as dignity and respect). Prakash 2015; Vidyarthi 2015. Prakash A 2015 *Dalit Capital - State, Markets and Civil Society in Urban India*, New Delhi, Routledge; Vidyarthi *op cit*.

Indirect discrimination – and class formation

- ‘If, however, some group’s economic capabilities are sufficiently *differentiated by preparation*, the level playing field is no longer sufficient to equalize a priori chances of success. Instead, the free enterprise system will be seen as disproportionately favouring the better prepared..... Class differences create differentiated capabilities among the public’....

(RaghuRam Rajan, Feb. 2015, Goa)

Oppressive work conditions

- Physical danger (e.g. sharps – pollution) / offensiveness (90%MSW die <retirement)
- Assaults; brawls
- Medical waste - infection
- Hard, heavy work – long shifts
- Bondage; extortion
- Even in MSW incomplete contracts
- In IWE very low returns



Discrimination in work-related contacts

- ‘complaints about the SC Indian Railways cleaners touching the inside of the compartments’.
- Sexual targetting of women - experienced as discrimination (IR)
- Unpaid, extra dirty-work
- General shunning of Irulars (and confined to one scrapper – bonded – discriminatory prices) and of ‘permanent transients’

NON-CASTE-RELATED DISCRIMINATION

- **Poverty** - It is hunger that drives us to do this. At least we get our half-meals this way.'
- Contact with **dirt and disgusting substances** – 'Yes, we face discrimination because it's a dirty business. Our women don't like us doing it.'
- **Lack of education** 'We definitely do this dirty work because we don't have education'
- **Language** - 'They do not know when they are verbally abused'
- **Gender** - 'Dalit women are still not treated as human beings'
- **Liquor** - 'Alcoholism – such a horrible job handling stinking waste and maggots - 70% of us drink'

DISCRIMINATION OUTSIDE WORK

- **Education** – ‘Dalit children are sat at the back of classes ‘. Access to HE of D and A compromised by incomplete certification.
- **Housing** - Municipal Dalit colony is dilapidated with ‘more defective water, electricity and drainage’... ‘ it is hostility.’ ST: Lack of patta. Irulars: Physical marginalisation. Permanent transience.
- **Public space** – shops, transport, banks, temples and processions.

INCOMPLETE HUMANITY

- Treated like machine versus treated as animals : Irulars and combination of individual characteristics of other WE castes: sites; work; housing; illiteracy; alcohol
- 'We have been temporary for three generations'.
- Those most needy are least entitled.
- Some animals are well treated and have 'agency'. . . .

TRIBAL COLLECTORS



ANIMAL AGENCY



WHAT IS BEING DONE – 2 - POLITICS

- Trades unions
- Political parties
- Legal activism
- Civil Society
- Caste associations
- Clan and kinship

-> The manifold problems of waste workers as *waste workers* are only represented through their identities as Dalits and Adivasis.

WHAT IS BEING DONE? 1 - social solvents / drivers of change

- **Literature** – caste-neutral work, education and migration – here narratives of workers ->
- **State** – for and against, both and neither.
- **Education** – mostly for exit (elite: for professionalisation)
- **Migration** and **cosmopolitanisation** ('smartness'; relabelling)
- Markets, **self employment** and self-respect

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: DISCRIMINATION = COMPLEX PROCESSES

- **DESTRUCTION**: X beck and call; secularisation of public space;
- **CREATION**: relabelling; political activism; access to education; new forms/sites of disc (e.g. in banks)
- **PERSISTENCE**: dangerous dirty work; labour sponge; gender oppression; shunning of Irulars (Q stasis or balance of forces? Attention to policing of change)
- **RE-WORKING**: ethnicity converging with caste; caste and class/ caste-group and individual discrimination (progress or vulnerability?); state as simultaneously agent and opponent of change

DRIVERS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE (OTHER THAN RELATIVE PRICES AND TECHNOLOGY)

- philanthropy,
- political consciousness, aspiration and organisation,
- the control of interest groups over state and corporate policy processes and outcomes,
- battles over market segments and public space,
- conflicts of interests in resistance to the policing of conformity (penalties vs progress),
- the social control of technology including media and communications,
- the generation of – and struggle for - ideas and knowledge,

HAZARDS – FISH MARKET FLIES



HAZARDS – CBD DRAIN

