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Neither a dog nor a beggar: seasonal labour migration, development, and poverty in Andhra Pradesh.

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10

Neither a Dog, Nor a Beggar Seasonal Labour Migration, Development, and Poverty in Andhra Pradesh

DAVID PICHERT

INTRODUCTION

Madiga Kurmaiah stands alone in the middle of the stone quarry on the outskirts of HITTECH City Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh (AP). Proud to work on his own account as a *swarna kuli* (a self-employed labourer), he uses his hammer to break stones that he will sell to the company, PCC, on a piece-rate basis. A little further on, Madiga Laxmaiah, a debt-bonded labourer, works under the orders of his elder brother Ramulu, his *maistri* (labour middleman), along with Sayamma, Venkata, and other ex-Untouchable Madigas. They collect stones broken by a machine owned by an ex-Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from their *Mandal*¹ of origin and load them on to the tractor.

Their food is prepared by Kajebi, a Muslim widow whose parents recently died. Her 13-year-old son, Moindaen, is paid Rs 1,200 per month as a helper to Sudhakar Reddy, a truck driver. All originate from Pedapur, a village of Mahabubnagar district (AP). Kajebi and Moindaen have been recruited through the *pedalamanshi* (hereditary

¹The *Mandal* is an administrative sub-division (10–15 villages) of the district.

title of Head of the village) of Peddapur, to whom she has to repay a loan taken from a village development project. When she does not make a repayment, N. Reddy, a rising political middleman and henchman of the *peddamamishi*, comes to take her wages, using physical and verbal intimidation. Alternatively, he accepts further delays in exchange for sex.

Alone, Kaijebi had no other way of repaying her debt. In Peddapur, a 'village community', ruled by Kumar Reddy, the *peddamamishi*, and administered by N. Reddy, was established and supported by an NGO² to foster collective decisions for the development of the village. The building of a new Hindu temple was decided: the NGO loaned Rs 50,000, and 50,000 more were collected in the village—except from the Madigas, who are denied access to the temple. The whole sum was insufficient for the project and was subsequently distributed as loans, repayable with interest. Kaijebi received 6,000 rupees from the project through the *peddamamishi* who 'protected' her: '*I provide some work, she is a Muslim and it could be seen as an offence against Hindus if she does not reimburse.*'

More than a technical failure, the sexual violence, the obligation to migrate, and the extortion of wages appear rather as regular outcomes of the articulation between seasonal labour migration, development programmes (whether funded by the state, by NGOs, or by transnational forms of government), and power relations. At this stone quarry, employing labourers under various kinds of labour 'contract', to focus on the relations of production would provide an incomplete picture of the everyday lives of the working poor and of the process of the accumulation and reproduction of poverty. Rural and urban economies and spaces have become closely connected, while the forms of labour and migration are all related to the power relations of the village and its development projects.

This chapter examines the dynamic of how poverty is reproduced among labour migrants through the interplay between labour migration, development, and power in rural Telangana, AP. Based on a case study of seasonal labour migrants originating from Peddapur, it argues that the articulation between labour migration of Madigas (characterized by lack of protection at work, debt, and segmentation of labour markets) and the anti-poverty programmes (cornered and

unequally redistributed by rural leaders) leads to the reformulation of dependencies and micro-hierarchies of caste and class, and to the perpetuation of poverty among these labourers.³

From dams and irrigation canals to the buildings ofHITECH City, Madiga migrant labourers from Mahabubnagar are employed all over India in the booming capitalist sector of construction. Madigas who have worked since the 1930s under the local system of debt bondage (Palamuru) on the main projects of the nation are now employed through a multiplicity of segmented but fluid labour arrangements. Based on caste hierarchies, inequalities, and violence, the debt-bondage system works through advance payments distributed by a *maistri* and combined with extra-economic coercion, harsh conditions, extremely low wages, and obligation to work for a *maistri* for nine months per year as long as the debt is pending (Picherit 2009). Through a complementary process of commodification and de-proletarianization (Brass 1990; De Neve forthcoming) dating back to the 1990s, Madiga debt-bonded labourers and task-paid circular labour migrants perform more or less the same tasks in the same working sites, are moved every two months to different places, and are all related by kin and caste ties. Although degrees of dependence in labour relations differ, they share a nearly complete absence of protection, and their social mobility is uncertain: casual labourers are often former debt-bonded labourers themselves, or the son, brother, or father of a debt-bonded labourer, and the opposite also applies. Trajectories are not linear, and often 'the reel runs backwards' (Parry 2003: 218). Health care and family and religious obligations require a huge amount of money that only a *maistri* can provide. In line with Lerche's concept of labour classes (2010), I consider those labour migrants as part of a continuum in a broader process of labour circulation organized through fluidity and segmentation along caste, class, and gender lines, framed by the

²This chapter is based on 24 months of ethnographic field work conducted in Peddapur and on the work sites. Between 2002 and 2005, I travelled with different groups of migrants—debt-bonded, daily-wage workers, and task-paid labourers—working in the rural and urban construction industry, and I shared their everyday lives at their work sites and in their neighbourhoods and village. By circulating along with labourers, I learned about their work and migration experiences, explored the social, economic, and political dimensions of the return of labour migrants to their village, and studied how Reddy's entrenched their local dominance over Madigas by cornering anti-poverty programmes. Additional short-term field work was carried out in 2007, 2010, and 2011.

³The NGO, based in the district headquarters, does not lead permanent projects in the villages, but provides support for self-regulated, sustainable, and collective projects, in a Gandhian mode.

uneven development of sectors and locations and by differentiated social, political, and economic forms of dependence between the village and the working sites.

The depersonalization and monetarization of debt-bondage relations (neo-bondage, as defined by Breman 1996), the increasing circular migration and the politicization of low-caste labourers in rural areas have increased the bargaining power of neo-bonded and casual migrant labourers (Breman et al. 2009; Guérin and Venkatasubramanian 2009). De Neve (forthcoming) points to the ways in which 'a dominant caste (of land-owning and powerloom-owning Gounders) seeks to retain and remould its control over a low caste labour force by reproducing labour bondage'. Deshingkar and Farrington (2009) stress how circular migration provides labourers with better opportunities to negotiate their access to development outcomes in villages but Pattenden (2012) shows how in Karnataka circulation in the village of origin. Breman (1996, 2007) has also detailed how footloose and neo-bonded labourers are forced by poverty to rely on the upper castes or on middlemen (*masiri*, political intermediaries), as there are no other options for acquiring protection. But seasonal migration is not only an economic phenomenon, and Shah (2006) insists on casual migrant labourers who, in a context of poverty, also consider migration in terms of adventure and independence. If those social processes are extremely socially and spatially differentiated, seasonal migration carries a potential social, economic, and political transformative force, at least 'within the unfolding of specific migratory practices' (Gardner and Osella 2003: xxiv). As Mosse et al. (2002) have shown, seasonal migration is embedded in social networks and lies at the core of the social, political, and economic life of the villages.

For the Madiga seasonal migrant labourers discussed in this chapter, the decline of patronage and the mechanisms of the labour market often mean the near absence of social, political, and economic protection, both at work and in the village. Security of employment and basic subsistence security have become the main issues in the processes of the reproduction of power relations and poverty, notably for the Dalits, who remain 'overwhelmingly represented in the lowest ranks of the socio-economic hierarchy in India' (Heyer 2010: 226). In India, 87 per cent of debt-bonded labourers belong to Scheduled

Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (NGEPUS 2009: 147). As this chapter will show, the enlarged spaces of negotiations and claims for independence of Madiga labourers, fostered by the changing labour relations, do not transform into bargaining power, but into renewed forms of dependence on political musclemen (*gondas*) and into an extra burden and workload in order to gain access to development resources.

In Andhra Pradesh, the neo-liberal policies driven by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and its leader Chandrababu Naidu in 1994⁴ were followed by multiple public schemes and NGO programmes to mitigate the impact of the politics of informalization of the economy (Reddy 2002). Micro-credit was the flagship for the financialization of poverty through women; but food, health, education, water, entrepreneurship, and skill development were also involved and locally organized through a number of local committees (water users' associations, Self-Help Groups, school committees, etc.) (Srinivasulu 2004; Mooij 2005). Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the Congress Party leader from 2004 to 2009, pursued and launched welfare schemes related to pensions, housing, and health, using public-private partnerships such as the Rajiv Aarogyasri Community Health Insurance Scheme. He also pushed ahead with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) (supposed to guarantee one hundred days of work per year in rural areas) and with the Public Distribution System.

The lack of security at work has reinforced the material and symbolic importance of those programmes, which have become the major sources of protection for the workers—and of political competition—in rural AP. The rising political clientelism, the power of rural leaders, and the importance of political intermediaries have been widely acknowledged in the literature. In rural Karnataka, Pattenden argues that 'whilst traditional forms of control over the laboring class have been eroded, gatekeeping increasingly allows the dominant class to exert a more subtle form of political control, which in turn facilitates processes of accumulation' (2011: 164). The state and its policies are nevertheless subjected to reinterpretation by government agents and bodies, and by the local leaders in charge of the schemes. In addition, a great variety of intermediaries (Price and

⁴Andhra Pradesh was the first regional state to receive direct funding from the World Bank.

Ruud 2010), who enjoy proximity with both leaders and labourers, regulate access to the state, to credit, to NGOs, to jobs, and to other resources, with a clear preference for people affiliated with their party (Michelutti 2008). This landscape has multiplied the possibilities of negotiating for every type of resource, with various tactics adopted to access them. One observer, in coastal AP, insightfully points to the Madigas' optimistic and pragmatic relation to the state as 'a resource [...] they can use and exploit to their advantage' (Still 2011: 316–17), while Heyer (2012) discusses the improvement in villages in Tamil Nadu due to state programmes but warns about the rarity of opportunities to change the type of employment. Further, Goringe points to the declining dependency of labourers but notes that there was no automatic diminution of vulnerability, despite the importance of Dait movements (2010: 250). The situation in Peddapur nevertheless differs from those areas: there are no unions or Dait movements;⁵ 60–80 per cent of Madigas are debt-bonded labour migrants; and there is a scarcity of jobs available in agriculture.

I intend to look at how the articulations and complementarities between the multiple forms of migration and the modes of control and redistribution of resources reformulate poverty and micro-hierarchies within and between caste and family. Harris-White (2006) argues that capitalism transforms and recreates forms of poverty. Mosse (2010: 1157) adopts a relational approach to poverty, defined as a consequence of historically developed economic and political relations, with an emphasis on social processes and relations of power, that produce identities through embodiment and/or mobilization. But poverty is in addition ensured by a complementary process of social mobility for the few, who often trample over their own kin and caste fellows in order to climb the social ladder.

This chapter aims to contribute three points to this debate. First, the processes of migration create spaces of negotiation for Madiga labourers, but the working conditions and relations (debt, absence of skill acquisition, lack of protection) in segmented labour markets push them back to the village in search of protection. Secondly, the rural leaders' changing forms of control over labour and development resources are shaped not only by local politics and perspectives of accumulation in rural and urban economies,

⁵In AP, those movements (mainly in coastal Andhra) are divided between Madigas and Malas.

but also by a renewed moral duty to protect Madiga labourers. The latter is conceived as a modern form of leadership based on reformulated caste micro-hierarchies and discriminations. Thirdly, the local history of exploitation and caste discrimination, reassessed in the everyday politics of fear, routine, and discouragement by *mainris* and political intermediaries (*gondas*), also serves as a platform for labourers' mobilizations for respect and dignity and for producing vernacular representations of poverty shaped by the fear of destitution and by claims for independence and entitlements to development programmes.

THE CONTEXT¹

Peddapur is a village of 2,000 people where Madigas (Scheduled Caste), Gollas (Backward Caste), and Reddys (Forward Caste) constitute the main castes of the village, with Lambadi (Scheduled Tribe) living in a hamlet a few kilometres away. Peddapur is located in the drought-prone district of Mahabubnagar, where no irrigation project has been implemented, and the unequal distribution of land is reinforced by its uneven quality and unequal access to water. Reddys are the main landowners, with an average of 10–20 acres each, although the *pedamanishi* has almost 120, and they have invested in private tubewells. Gollas are mostly engaged in their traditional and lucrative caste occupation of goat keepers, but they now also invest in land and tubewells. Several drillings to access water at 300 feet (for a period often lasting less than three years) are often needed, leading to some debt-bondage migration. Mechanization is all but non-existent, and there are only two tractors in the village, both owned by Reddys. Madigas are landowners (one–five acres) also, but the soil is sandy and there is no water. Their lack of agricultural knowledge, due to their regular migration over generations, makes them hardly interested in issues of land (compared with the other districts of Telangana).⁶

However, in this district, the main source of accumulation for Reddys has been through the local debt-bondage system, called Palamur, put in place in the 1930s (Olsen and Murthy 2000). This system is organized around a contractor for enterprises located in a town or in Hyderabad which are owned by an industrialist or a

⁶This may explain the weak influence of Naxalites among these labourers.

major politician (or both), who responds to government invitations to tender for the construction of canals, roads, dams, or railways all over India. The management is delegated to a *peddamaisiri*, a rural leader, often a politician at MLA, MP (Member of Parliament), or District Panchayat level (local government body). He then turns to a large number of *labour maisiri* (up to 200) responsible for the recruitment of workers at the local level. Each *maisiri* recruits a gang by distributing advance payments to 40 men and women from different low castes and neighbouring villages, organizes the labour camp (in locations decided by the *peddamaisiri*), and supervises the food and the work during the nine-month season. When he is absent from the labour camp, he relies on a loyal worker, called *gumpupampubedda*,⁷ to lead the group.

Since the 1980s, due to transformations of labour relations and the politicization of low castes, this system has coexisted with the seasonal migration of daily-wage labourers (Gollas and Lambadis) employed in the construction industry in Hyderabad and Mumbai for six to nine months a year (Picheit 2012).⁸ More recently young Madigas have tried their luck as *szamta kuli* (self-employed labourers) on construction sites and even, for the educated few, as truck and rickshaw drivers. The multiple forms of labour and of circulation between working sites all over India, and between working sites and villages, are nevertheless connected through a flexible articulation of family, gender, caste, and class relations within the village, while the achievement of solidarity is made extremely difficult.

MULTIPLE FORMS OF MIGRATION AND LACK OF PROTECTION

The PCC stone quarry offers a striking example of the coexistence of machines (owned by Reddys) and labourers working under arrangements ranging from debt bondage to the most flexible types of labour relations, from neo-bondage to casualized labour. This section examines how the multiple but coexistent forms of labour

⁷The *gumpupampubedda* is an older and loyal worker (who has always worked for the same *maisiri*), able to manage the gang (*gumpu*) and respected by other workers, whatever their castes. He does not necessarily belong to the caste of the *maisiri*.

⁸Of the villages where the field work was conducted, between 50 and 70 per cent of the working-age population (15–45 years) are working on sites away from the village.

migration push labourers back to the village in search of multiple and temporary forms of protection/dependence. It analyses how the forms of social mobility, contestations, and quests for dignity are related to the labour conditions and power relations.

A way out of poverty?

The reproduction of poverty in rural India takes very diverse forms according to the social, political, and economic context, and according to the specific avenues for social mobility that exist at the local level. Investigating the social mobility of some Madigas within the broader social and power relations enables us to grasp the character of the debt-bondage relations that have evolved.

In the context of the politicization of low-caste communities in the 1980s, of rising assertiveness among labourers, and of the changing economy, Reddys gradually invested in machines rather than in manual labour for the construction industry (they rent out tippers for work on dams and canals), and delegated the management of direct labour to low-caste *maisiris*. While Reddys have retained the main positions in the debt-bondage system (*peddamaisiri*), Gollas have taken *maisiri* jobs, and they were followed by some Madigas at the end of the 1990s.

This has had profound implications in terms of the management and protection of labour, and has offered a few Madigas a significant form of social mobility. Without doubt, Ramullu, the PCC *maisiri*, is one of them. A former debt-bonded labourer, he managed to gain the trust of a Reddy *peddamaisiri* to begin as a labour middleman, get contracts in the construction industry, and access the capital to provide advances to labourers. The *peddamaisiri* provides half of the total advances, and the *maisiri* borrows and takes the financial risk for the second half. Within 15 years, Ramullu has secured his position and is well known in the locality. He is respected by his caste fellows and by the *peddamaisiri* for his loyalty and commitment, and his social ascension represents a clear break from poverty.

This mobility has also changed his position within his caste, but the latter remains strictly limited by the segmentation of financial, political, and labour markets. Indeed, Ramullu has no chance of extending his business. The capital is controlled by Reddys, and Ramullu cannot rely on his caste fellows for loans. Reddys limit the ascension of Madiga *maisiris* by delegating their own power over labour only to small *maisiris* with no more than 40 labourers. In

addition, becoming a *peddamaisiri* and then managing up to 200 local *mairis* would require caste political support to obtain public contracts in the construction industry—support that Madigas do not have. Reddys monopolize contracts on account of their close relationships with local politicians, MLAs, and MPs.

These financial and political restrictions add to the caste segmentation of labour markets. Ramullu cannot hire and control labourers from other castes, because they would refuse to work for a Madiga.⁹ He is compelled to hire his kin and caste fellows and to intensify the exploitation of his limited pool of labourers. The implications for labour protection are numerous. Reddy *mairis* used to provide some agricultural work on their fields during the slack season, but Ramullu (like other low-caste *mairis*) has no assets and cannot do so. The social mobility of Ramullu, visible within his caste, hardly changes his position in relation to Reddys, but is based on kin and caste fellows kept in a state of poverty.

These transformations have facilitated the contestations of labourers and their refusal of personalized attachment. They more easily resist a Madiga *mairi* than a Reddy or a Golla; and they frequently change *mairis* and bargain for bigger advances. Working conditions, food, and huts may remain the same, but the intimacy of relations may nevertheless strengthen the control of a Madiga *mairi* who can invoke caste and family loyalties. This is the case of Laxmaiah, the younger brother of Ramullu, caught in a fraternal relationship which does not alleviate that of debt bondage:

He has a big house but we have a hut and I have to feed my mother... We fight sometimes—like all families. But my mother repeats that I should respect my elder brother. I once tried to change *mairi*, but others keep telling me to 'go and talk to your brother'. Anyway, what's the difference? A stone is a stone and we have to carry it.

Those kinship relations also bind the *mairi*, pushed by his mother to hire his brother, less for economic considerations than because he is the elder brother and head of the family (the father died years ago).

The rising contestations of attachment, are maintained within the caste and addressed to the most intimate exploiter, the *mairi*

⁹Except rarely in cases of a particular social stigma, such as widowhood or the fall-out from a family feud.

(often brother/cousin/in-law/husband/neighbor): '*He always pretends he is doing us a favour, but he is just interested in money. Why should we bow in front of him? I take the advance and work, that's it*', states Kondanaiah, another member of the group.

Issues of dignity have become central for labourers. Defining a *mairi* as a cash provider, and relating dignity to independence (as a monetarized relationship not based on loyalty), must be seen in the context of the local history of domination. Migrating without a *mairi* has for long been prevented, as the *mairi* and the landowner were the ones who possessed inside knowledge of the system. Even now, the date of departure and place of destination are revealed to labourers only a few hours beforehand. This know-how has been challenged by Gollas, and also by young Madigas who migrate on their own and assert their status by doing without a *mairi*.

If considerations of dignity influence the reluctance of debt-bonded labourers to attach themselves, the organization of migration and the politics of fear are powerful tools that tie labourers during the migration period. For nine months of every year, labourers are kept under surveillance by a *mairi* who controls every aspect of their lives: work, huts, food, health, money, and their consumption of alcohol. The labourers' low-calorie diet on which the *mairi* makes savings, the intensive 12-hour work days, the provision of only one day off in a fortnight, and the harsh living conditions in secluded work camps exhaust the body and preclude most contestation and routes of escape. Debt-bonded labourers never stay more than three months before moving to another working site, up to five per season, from Kanyakumari to Delhi. The solidarities that develop on work sites are understandably limited.

Mairis assert their role as protectors by incessantly reminding labourers of their vulnerability and their inability to deal with different worlds and cultures: people from the villages that surround the labour camp could attack them or sexually molest the women. They do not even understand their languages, their food or cultural habits; the police would never believe a foreigner against a local. '*This is my duty to protect them. How would they manage alone? How would they go without money? I am here to support them.*' Even though workers are unlikely to believe entirely in a *mairi*'s benevolence, the fear of the police and the feeling of vulnerability in unknown areas inhabited by possibly hostile villagers are widespread.

The changing Palampur debt-bondage system is a powerful means of tying labour through debt and migration. Although PCC gathers labourers of different status, the circulation of these workers all over India clearly limits their interactions and solidarities at work. The lack of protection from the *maistri* and the absolute need for physical rest after the extreme living and working conditions during migration turn the slack season into a period for the reproduction of the labour force, the cost of which is borne by the labourers themselves. Periods of rest and/or unemployment are times of rising indebtedness, financed by the expected future advance, which considerably reduces the bargaining position of potential migrants.

The cost of independence

Among the labourers in PCC, the *swamta kuli* represents an emerging, influential, and valued category among young Madigas, who favour working independently of a *maistri*. A bachelor and the son of debt-bonded labourers, Kurmaiah works on his own: he breaks stones that he sells to the company on a piece-rate basis. Although he is better paid than debt-bonded labourers, his independence has a cost: he works longer and harder (to ensure a better wage), pays for his food, his tools, and his huts, has no job security, and is compelled to circulate between stone quarries according to the fluctuations of the market.

The tension between independence, better wages, and self-exploitation is a common consequence of insecure, temporary, and mobile forms of labour, detached from personal relations of power but dependent on segmented labour markets. Kurmaiah has acquired no specific skills (only stamina is required, and that is partly an attribute of youth) and he cannot access better jobs in construction labour markets. Yet he continues to value his independence, which he asserts by putting other Madigas down. He congratulates himself that 'I work wherever and whenever I want. I am not like those Madigas who bow in front of their maistri!'

Swamta kuli justly conveys how he considers his position in relation to debt-bondage and to dignity. The better wages that he receives comfort him in his assertion of freedom and help to lessen the burden of his heavy workload and his feelings of self-exploitation, which are expressed at times of unemployment. He is dependent on the availability of work, extremely vulnerable to a downturn in

demand, and must constantly search for work in other stone quarries. However, the assertion of his status is limited to micro-hierarchies (it is directed against his caste fellows). It creates tensions not only with other labourers in the stone quarries but also at home in the village. Kurmaiah shows disdain for any task performed by Madigas for Reddys (unpaid work to get loans, or rituals during funerals or festivals that older Madigas can hardly refuse). This arrogance provokes contrasted reactions. Debt-bonded labourers envy his independence but never consider it sustainable over time: 'This is a three-year job, no more, otherwise you just die'. They are sure that the *swamta kuli* will end up in the arms of a *maistri* when he gets married and settles down.

Young Madigas working as *swamta kuli* would never consider themselves as poor. For the sons or brothers of debt-bonded labourers, *swamta kuli* represents the end of attachment to a *maistri* and thus constitutes a crucial element of dignity. Kurmaiah even identifies with the semi-educated young males who circulate as machine operators, or rickshaw and truck drivers (like the brother of N. Reddy in PCC). However, his connections with Reddys are never mentioned, even if this gendered form of circulation (young males only) requires their intermediation to access the stone quarries. The *swamta kuli* are dispersed in the same industry where debt-bonded and daily-wage labourers toil; they circulate in short-term, flexible, isolated, insecure, and precarious conditions; and they are unable to entirely escape the power relations of the village. Kurmaiah's refusal of dependency, his craving for dignity, and his criticism of caste fellows isolate him and worsen his financial conditions, leading him to work harder and harder in the stone quarries, rather than making claims for the development resources that are his due.

Migration and the slack season

Kajeibi, Laxmaiah, Ramullu, and Kurmaiah all work in PCC, in differing and segmented forms of labour along a continuum of degrees of powerlessness related to village power relations. The concept of labour classes, defined by Lerche (2010), helps to explain what unites and differentiates these labourers. Power is here not limited to economic issues but plays on social and religious stigma, as for Kajeibi, a Muslim widow, who is subjected to sexual and labour violence; on family ties, as for Laxmaiah, who is attached to his

maistri-brother; on capital and caste segmentation, as for Ramullu, who is subordinated to the rule of Reddy's *peddamaisiri*; and for Kurmainah, whose livelihood depends on insecure and flexible labour markets and the looming presence of the *maistri*.

The most salient features of the system are, firstly, that all labourers must adjust to the requirements of the market: the *swarna kuli* adjusts on an everyday basis, while debt-bonded labourers must do so seasonally. In 2005, a debt-bonded labourer would get an advance of Rs 8,000 for nine months' work, but with 12 hours of work every day and only one day off every two weeks. If his earnings are calculated on a daily and hourly basis,¹⁰ he is approximately four times cheaper than a daily-wage labourer in Hyderabad, who gets Rs 70 a day without being required to work every day. Secondly, the specialization of Palampur labourers in the construction industry often guarantees employment in this booming sector but hampers solidarities at work and opportunities in other labour markets. The independence of the *swarna kuli* mostly refers to his independence from the *maistri*, but he cannot change sectors and is still dependent on the building trade. Thirdly, rural leaders have managed to the labour through multiple, indirect, and articulated forms of labour control, with an overlap of forms of domination based on market, caste, class, and kinship, allowing social mobility mainly through exploitation of either close kin or of oneself.

Beyond dichotomies such as constraints and choices, agency and dependency, survival and coping strategies, the everyday lives of migrants are composed of harsh realities, of quests for dignity, and tensions between social expectations and lack of opportunities, changing according to location (village or working site) and social context. The adjustment to labour markets does not preclude refusal to be attached to a *maistri*, or pride in independence—independence expressed in relation to the local and historical context of labour and power relations. In addition, harsh working conditions, the necessary periods of rest, and rising indebtedness considerably limit effective bargaining power during the slack season, denying labourers opportunities to contest the *maistri* and to access development programmes—the main options by which labourers might ameliorate their precarious and insecure situations.

¹⁰This calculation is only indicative of the broad differential gains made by labour.

RURAL LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY

Development programmes play a central role in political and economic struggles. The Reddys have extended their control over the anti-poverty resources of the state and the development agencies as a way of maintaining their power, while at the same time diversifying and extending their economic activities to small towns and cities.

In the village and the *Mandal*, no anti-poverty scheme or programme can exist without the involvement of local leaders. Their voracious appetite for such schemes is directly linked to ensuring re-election and political power, and also to an appetite for the profits yielded by the schemes. But this is not the only motive, and the *peddamanshi* of Peddapur, Kumar Reddy, is probably committed to the development of the village and to upgrading conditions of the poorest, provided only that power relations remain unchanged. He closely associates development with profit, but leadership legitimized by development is conceived as the modern mode of domination (compared with debt bondage):

Money is politics, this is not agriculture. If you lose elections, you have nothing. We, the TDP, thanks to everything I have done, have brought money, schemes, programmes, and people vote for me. They know everything my family has done: bus, electricity, phone, and roads. It was a struggle. Many people here did not want change, but we managed. The harijan wada is clean, nice houses, water; my father started with Indra Gandhi, all my family has always taken care of the village.

Kumar Reddy is the main landowner, the leader of the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) at the *Mandal* level, and the vice-president of the local Bank. He is, first and foremost, the *peddamanshi*, a title inherited from his father and forefathers. Unlike titles such as Dora, Kapu, or Parcel—referring to oppressive forms of domination associated with landlordism—*peddamanshi* rather conjures the respect due to a powerful, strong, and fair natural leader. His family has ruled locally for generations, thanks to a combination of land, capital, politics, and caste. This heritage provides moral authority assessed by regular features of leadership in rural India: his refusal of the direct exercise of violence, his soft voice, restrained gestures, and white dress reinforce his respectable position, above the degrading

nature of everyday matters. The various and regular marks of respect that he receives are attributed to his public activities:

I went to look for NGOs to find solutions. I insisted on micro-credit and other programmes. If I had not done that, everyone would have migrated as in other deserted villages. This is my village and I brought lot of money.

Those programmes help him to appear as a modern leader by exercising what he conceives as his traditional duty: moral control of the Madigas. Rural leaders determine what is necessary and what is superficial, what the poor need or not, what development and poverty mean, and which programme should be implemented and/or supported in the village. But caste plays a central role. On account of their caste, Madigas are believed incapable of dealing with important issues or of escaping poverty by themselves. It is the moral duty of Reddys to take them in hand. A distinction is drawn between poor Gollas and the Madigas, who are considered not only as uneducated but also as unfit for education: 'I have built this school but what does it bring to them? They do not want to work in agriculture any more and prefer to roam around without money.'

Kumar Reddy's commitment to development must be placed in the changing political landscapes in the state and the historical context of the locality. In this former part of Hyderabad State ruled by the Nizam, local landlords have for long derived advantage from delegations of power. The local *samasthan*¹¹ of Wanaparthy—in which Peddapur is located—was headed by a Paligar (*Zamindar*) who relied on local Doras to establish domains with local taxes and bondage in agriculture (*zetti, baghield*) (Thirumali 2003; Vaddiraju 1999) and to interact with the justice and administrative systems beyond the village borders.¹² The Palamur debt-bondage system grew out of those connections, allowing public contracts for the construction of canals, roads, and dams.

G. Sarvanarayana notes how rural leaders in the 1970s invested in pump stations as well as in the alcohol business. This ability to extend their business beyond the locality was perpetuated by development

¹¹This *samasthan* was a local and autonomous kingdom ruled by a Zamindar (Thirumali 2003).

¹²Doras were dominant landlords, combining caste, land, money, and muscle power, sharing proximity with local government officials. The abolition of *iqgildars* in 1951 had very limited effects in this area, and local Doras kept control of their land, by contrast with the north of Telangana (Thirumali 2003).

programmes from the 1980s onwards: 'All the development programmes adopted by the government have given chance to Doras to turn into brokers and exploit the people' (1992: 39).

Reddys have historically shown huge capacities to bolster and/or adjust to changing rural and urban economies by investing in alcohol shops, in machines for the construction industry (rather than for agriculture), and in education, as well as in village development activities:

There is no profit in agriculture; there is no water and no food for cattle.¹³ My two sons went to school and now work in cities; they rent tipper for construction work. We invest in machines; it makes more money than labour or *maistris*.

The absence of profit in agriculture—and 'the costly labourers' lack of loyalty'—has always been a traditional complaint of landowners. But agriculture has never been the main source of accumulation in this drought-prone area. Adapting to the urban economy (in the form of labour migration, renting out tippers, etc.) has reinforced the obligation to maintain links with the village in order to secure the labour force needed for the urban construction projects and to ensure re-election. Kumar Reddy's son, who lives in Hyderabad, was elected to the Gram Panchayat in 2009.

However, these rural leaders differ from the Reddys of coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema (the southern belt of AP). In coastal Andhra, from the 1960s Reddy (and Kamanna) landowners have invested in education and accessed political and business positions from Hyderabad to the USA. Rayalaseema is locally known as a land of factions, vendettas, political violence, crime, rape, and bomb manufacture. These are an integral part of the nexus between business and politics, nowadays extended to global business and national politics. Since 1994, three Chief Ministers of AP have come from this area.

By contrast, the local *Mandal* generates much less money, violence, and conflict. Even though politics is organized around competing Reddy families in the village, violence is strongly constrained. Pressure from Naxalites, absent in the *Mandal* but influential 30 km away, and structural poverty in the district, indirectly put pressure on Reddys to reach a compromise for the redistribution of development resources. Conflicts are not prevented,

¹³He sold most of his cattle in 2004.

but their degeneration is at least avoided. Reddy Congress supporters in the village have been further silenced by alliances built by Kumar Reddy with the Congress Party at the *Mandal* and district levels, partly through kinship networks:

I am TDP from the beginning, but I have always kept contacts with Congress. My father was in Congress, my children contracted successful marriages and here politics has no place. One of my brothers-in-law is an MP of Congress, one is a ZPTC¹⁴ member from Congress, and my close cousin is an MLA for TDP. We all meet, they help us, I help them and everyone enjoys development.

This rosy story of mutual co-operation for development, as Kumar Reddy tells it, is now threatened by the social mobility of Gollas (Congress Reddys observe it with anger and anxiety) and by the victory of the Congress at the state level (not in the district or the village). The consensus is very much contested by Chandrashekar Reddy, the Congress leader in the village, but his influence and assets are in no way comparable to those of Kumar Reddy.

In 2003, during the *Vinayakavathi* festival, villagers were called in the evenings to gather around two Ganesha statues—one for each political party, displayed in separate parts of the village. The Congress Party never managed to gather more than 20 people, whereas the TDP attracted from two to three hundred. On the last night, young Reddy members of Congress entered into a fierce two-hour battle with TDP Gollas. When the police came, they installed themselves in the courtyard of Kumar Reddy and interviewed only TDP members. The Congress Reddys were found guilty: 10 were jailed for two weeks and excluded from the village for a month; 20 had to report every day at the nearest police station.

The TDP lost the state election in AP in 2004, but maintained its leadership in the district and in the *Mandal*. Although the Congress victory in the elections raised the expectations of its local leaders, none has managed to challenge the *peddamanishi*. Political, familial, and economic networks ensure (at least for the time being) the TDP's ability to corner development resources, which are redistributed unequally through a renewal of caste-based and

class-based micro-hierarchies. This is often in line with the design of the programmes. As the head of one micro-credit organization in Mahabubnagar explained:

We have never targeted the poorest: how could they reimburse? Our targets are the ones who are just above the poorest, as they have relations to support them in case of troubles. Some may loan to the poor, and that is why micro-credit is in crisis. But we are not responsible as we have never supported the very poor.

The government's Indiramma housing scheme for the poor provides a subsidy of about 40 per cent on the construction of houses, the remaining money being borrowed. Nine Gollas in 2011 were able to benefit from this scheme, but none of the Madigas. Misappropriation always reinforces inequalities. The State government admitted that 240 crores of rupees had gone astray.¹⁵ Even N. Reddy got a new house under this scheme.

The shift from the TDP to Congress at the state level has awakened competition in the village and has obliged Kumar Reddy to reinforce his hierarchical networks in order to ensure the loyalty of his followers, notably the Gollas who are the first beneficiaries of the TDP. Madiga labourers are kept away from politics and decisions about anti-poverty programmes. Congress can hardly base strong opposition on their support. The structural absence of labourers from the village limits claims for development to the sphere of redistribution. Even the Madigas who have reserved seats in the Gram Panchayat are the manual labourers of Kumar Reddy. They are called 'dummies' by their caste fellows.

State and development resources are distributed in the name of the *peddamanishi*, and are represented as the result of the work that he has done for it. This renewed clientelism is reinforced by moral discourses about historical caste and familial duty, while direct and visible violence is delegated to *gonads*. Madigas are called to vote for the TDP; if their votes are uncertain, henchmen are present to reduce this uncertainty through a combination of friendship and violence, proximity and distance. Here ends the role of the *peddamanishi*, proud of his non-violence (defined by Heuzé, 1994 as an absence

¹⁴Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency.

¹⁵http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_andhra-pradesh-govt-admits-rs260-crore-scam-in-ambitious-housing-scheme_1635563

of links with degrading realities), and here begins the sphere of the political middleman.

THE VIOLENCE, THE FEAR, AND SOME REPRESENTATIONS OF POVERTY

After a few months in PCC, Sayamma followed *maistri* Ramulla to Karnataka to work on an irrigation canal 300 km from Peddapur. Late one evening, she asked me to take her ID pictures and those of her husband to N. Reddy, the political middleman and henchman of the *peddamanshi*, in the hope that he would transfer her ration-card benefits to her mother-in-law, who had stayed back in the village. When I expressed scepticism about N. Reddy's willingness to help, she merely replied: '*Who else? This is for Madigas and he has do it.*' Resort to the *maistri* was not seen as an option in such matters. Unsurprisingly, N. Reddy laughed and threw the pictures away. Three months later, Sayamma and the group came back to Peddapur. She had brought new photos and spent the following days around his house doing small and unpaid tasks with her husband. Like other Madigas, they also visited other Reddys to secure credit, or a small job or any form of support. It took three weeks before N. Reddy agreed to help Sayamma:

I am the only one; they don't know anything about administration and schemes, so I help them. The Telugu Desam Party does a lot for them.

This section looks at the significance of development outcomes rather than a specific programme. Schemes such as the Public Distribution System and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act have fostered among scholars and development actors huge expectations in terms of citizenship, empowerment, or mobilizations; but I argue that the routine of violent and unequal social relations (social, symbolic, and physical if need be) strongly hampers any transformative effect of those schemes where Madigas are involved. Labourers are in such a condition of poverty and inequality that the increased negotiation spaces make for multiple but temporary dependence (on the *maistri* and the political middlemen) and a triple burden, notably for women (migrant work, development schemes, and domestic tasks).

The political intermediary: dependence and triple burden for women

Negotiating for water, rice, health care, cash, credit, jobs, state services, NGO programmes, and help from development organizations requires dealings with the political middleman. He is a key figure in the everyday lives of labourers, who seldom encounter state officials or rural leaders in person.

N. Reddy used to be the Village Development Officer and in charge of collecting the money of micro-credit groups at the Cluster *Mandal* level. The Cluster was headed by his grandmother, and his mother was the main moneylender of the village. He was also the one in charge of mobilizing followers during political meetings and organizing demonstrations of TDP power during village religious festivals. He used to go many places to recover loans and to collect debts from migrants. He dealt with the low castes, supporting them in everyday life while using violence to keep them under his control, being both close to and distant from them, using his skills to divide, individualize, or unite them according to the context. But, first and foremost, he ensured that everyone voted for the TDP through his control of the protection of the poor, and by playing subtly on caste, class, gender, and identities in redistributing resources.

N. Reddy has benefited most of all from anti-poverty and development programmes, and has also cornered many of the emerging businesses for the poor in rural areas, using his power to sell off subsidized products that are provided to help them. In the last five years he has built a new house, bought a motorbike, enrolled his two children in the English-medium school in the nearby town, and acquired two mobile phones 'for fashion'. He proudly elaborates:

We have to secure the votes if we want money for development. No vote, no development, no money and no job. I have been put in charge of contracts for NREGA and I make some good commissions. I am also in charge of subsidized materials that I sell in Wanaparthy. I sold 163 TV cable connections, and also life insurance. People know that I have contacts and I get 10 or 20 per cent commission. Now I am well respected.

Displaying his influence, success, and power, appearing well connected with and close to the powerful, is his job. N. Reddy is

the man of influence with whom labourers must negotiate on an everyday basis.

Like other Madigas, Sayamma tries by every means to get access to every scheme, even from the working camp itself. But that often means a double dependence and extra burden, notably for debt-bonded labourers who are not allowed to return to the village to deal with those issues. For Sayamma, getting ID pictures meant working harder on the migration site to obtain the favours of the *maistrri*. She had to wait for a day off in order to go to the nearby town, receive the approval of her husband and the *maistrri*, find cash for the transport and the ID pictures, and so on. It is a never-ending struggle which at each step requires—at best—visits, compliance, and deference to the *maistrri*. At worst, sexual services may be demanded. This routine, a tactic of fear and discouragement, is pursued in the village: N. Reddy expects deference, presence, availability for the periods when he has total control. In this specific case, Sayamma used my presence to avoid the *maistrri*.

The latter is discounted as a source of support in accessing the benefits of development. He would not be prepared to interfere in the businesses of upper-caste political middlemen. Further, Sayamma has no other backers in the village and has only such middlemen to rely on. Politics requires a regular presence, but the system of migration prevents any efficient organization of Madigas. Those left behind are the elderly. Comparing the Madigas' situation with that of the Gollas clarifies matters. The Gollas migrate seasonally as daily-wage labourers to Hyderabad, return regularly when needed (ID pictures would not be an issue), and rely on caste fellows who have assets and are influential in politics. Even debt-bonded Golla labourers have (albeit limited) caste support. What is more, the way in which development programmes are organized, and the routine of violence and poverty, not only make exploitation and dependence a 'normative' way to negotiate, but also discourage any attempt to change the way in which things work.

The time, work, and energy required have become an extra burden, notably for women, targeted by most programmes as reliable and compliant agents of change. During the slack season they work in agriculture, where they do jobs almost entirely reserved for women (Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu 1999); are paid half as much as men, perform domestic tasks, and have to participate in development programmes.

Madigas know well how to make use of deference in a pragmatic way (Still 2011). However, in this context of structural poverty and highly unequal relations, they are obliged to comply with the dictates of the powerful and to perform unpaid work. When Venkata, a debt-bonded labourer, arrived back from migration, he spent three days making himself available to a Reddy landowner in order to borrow Rs 150. By shifting heavy bags of rice, bringing food from the shop, and cleaning outside the house, Venkata obliged the landowner to loan the sum, a small debt that he would have to repay out of his future advance from a *maistrri*. This is a temporary form of dependence: as soon as the sum is borrowed, Venkata stops coming and reproduces this tactic with another landowner.

His wife, Kushnemma, focused on a micro-credit group to get a small loan for everyday expenses.¹⁶ After the couple's long absence, she had to convince other women about her credit-worthiness, to participate in Self-Help Group meetings but also to perform all the menial tasks related to the SHGs (physically carrying the ledgers, washing dishes used during meetings, etc.). But she had to ask N. Reddy to support her. He often uses his power to threaten or influence the everyday workings of micro-credit. In charge of visiting the villages for micro-credit programmes, he maintains a politics of fear through arbitrariness, symbolic violence, friendship, and sexual favours.

Unpaid work and services are part of the 'participation' needed to benefit from anti-poverty programmes. N. Reddy individualizes, plays, and redistributes according to the multiple local micro-hierarchies and recreates dependencies that are temporary and multiple: caste and class are categories mobilized and dropped according to the context (by the middleman as much as by labourers). However, his tendency to use violence prevents N. Reddy from being at the service of labourers.

Kurmainiah, the proud *swanna kuli*, did his best to mitigate dependency by working harder and by refusing to defer to Reddy's to access development resources. But he mainly avoided direct confrontation and was criticized by his parents and caste fellows for not supporting their quest for protection during the slack season. His claim to dignity represents one strategy for escaping poverty, and it pushes him to claim support from the state as a right on the

¹⁶Micro-credit loans are limited to around Rs 1,000, compared with the advances of the *maistrri* (up to 15,000 per person).

basis of his status of a hard and independent worker, rather than as a dependent and poor Madiga. But he is unable to do so too openly. Beyond economic issues, Madiga labourers come back to the village for respect, the village being where respect has to be achieved.

This situation points to the changes happening locally. For other debt-bonded, casual or self-employed Madiga labourers, those claims of independence are not sustainable. Debt-bonded labour migrants are, without doubt, last in line for the redistribution of development resources and get only the crumbs of any scheme. No Madiga has emerged as a middleman, and labourers negotiate mostly through the Reddy political intermediary and have no possibility of gaining any significant 'advantage' over others or of escaping from poverty. They all benefit marginally from the schemes, but never as a right. If their absolute conditions have improved over the years, their relative position in the village has not changed.

The Palamur, the dog, and the beggar

Claims expressed in terms of rights and entitlements to development outcomes are nevertheless on the rise, but those claims are made on the basis of patronage, deference, and unpaid work—forms of negotiation that the Madiga know about. Between dignity and dependence, insecurity and survival, assertion of rights and unpaid work, freedom to negotiate and incurring extra burdens, the margins are very narrow. This implies contested representations of poverty, while the failures of development offer an easy way to condemn labourers as responsible for their own plight.

On one occasion, during the public distribution of rice in the village, about a hundred people gathered to collect their ration. Bags were missing (as usual), and everyone began shouting. On this rare occasion, Sayamma started publicly blaming N. Reddy:

You treat us like dogs [*kukkala*] but I am not a *biccagadu* [beggar]; we are Palamur labourers, I have toiled all my life on dams, canals, roads, I have carried stones and stones and I have nothing; you have to respect [*marayavada*] us [*Madiga*].

A Mandal Revenue Officer looked at me and loudly commented within Madiga hearing: 'We have done so much for them, but they prefer to *have like dogs and beg for rice*.' No one replied. With his characteristic sense of impunity, N. Reddy later dismissed Sayamma and other

Madigas: 'They make a lot of noise, but they always come back from migration to eat from my hands.'

Alongside the administrative categories of poverty (Below Poverty Line, Scheduled Caste, Poorest of the Poor, women, youth, elderly, and so forth) that confer the right to benefit from such schemes are a number of vernacular categories related to poverty which also produce representations, mobilization, and discriminations. I will now examine how this relates to destitution, work, and dignity, and how poverty is expressed in terms of the social relations of power.

The term 'Palamur' (which is the former name of Mahabubnagar District which has given its name to the system) has long referred to its institution of debt bondage. It is now widely used by all manual labourers originating from the district, irrespective of caste and the form of migration. Well known in the construction industry, it has become a brand with various complimentary significations: labourers use it as a marker of hard, compliant, serious and/or docile workers when they want to be hired as daily-wage labourers in the Hyderabad construction market. The *swarna kuli*, proud of their 'independent' status, always refer to Palamur to emphasize stamina and skills of labourers. Furthermore, the *masiri* and *peddamaistri* sell a 'Palamur labour force' to construction sites and always praise these labourers for their commitment to hard work. This pride references migrant work under harsh conditions, with poverty as its reward.

Manual labourers, whatever their caste, use rather the label 'dog' to emphasize the inhumane conditions of their work and life and their material deprivation. They are treated and maintained like 'dogs'. But only upper castes use 'dog' when addressing a Madiga, calling on stereotypes about their innate violence and lack of hygiene and their predilection for alcohol. 'Dog' has to be understood in relation to the Palamur and the beggar. As exemplified by Sayamma's outburst, the epithet stresses the exploitation that Madiga labourers suffer. 'Dogs' are distinguished from the destitute—the *biccagadu*, or unemployed beggar who is without social relations and dignity. Ironically, the term thus becomes a claim for respect as a hard and committed worker. Madigas have seen destitute wanderers in the cities and do not identify with the position of such destitute people (cf. Harriss-White 2005). And they know many stories of debt-bonded labourers, like the one about the man I once encountered in the nearby village, who had been expelled from it a few months

before on account of having taken two advances from two different *maistris* and then run off with the money. On that day he had tried to come back to his village. Drunk and followed by 20 people, he walked fast and determinedly towards the main square. He was shunned, and a few musclemen barred the road to his home; he had to leave the village once more. He was a *biccagadu*, living on alms and cut off from society, and I was strongly discouraged (by Madigas, among others) from approaching him. I never saw him again.

The distinction between the dog, the Palamur labourer, and the beggar underlines the borders of contestation between assertion of dignity and the fear of destitution. Sayamma nuances her criticism by stressing the need to preserve some form of patronage. Claims for dignity and entitlement to resources of development are formulated on the basis of hard work, caste and/or poverty (dog). Madiga labourers deserve ration cards because they work hard, but because they are Madigas they are treated like dogs. Their claims to dignity are nevertheless met with aggression. The development officer's comment displaces the failures of development programmes on to the Madigas themselves, whose poverty is seen as rooted in their unchanged (caste) 'nature'. But Madiga labourers never comment on poverty without relating it first to the landowner, to the political intermediary, and to the *maistris*, and second to their hard work, which means that their claims to self-respect are made at the expense of those—like the elderly—who are incapable of work. The long history of caste domination and debt bondage shapes the perspectives of contestation, but also limits the imagination of what is possible under the fear of destitution.

CONCLUSION

'*They always come back to eat from my hands*' is the regular boast of N. Reddy. If this reflects his compulsive need to show off, it also points to the impunity and confidence of rural leaders and their henchmen about the present state of social and economic relations. They have a deep faith that the mechanisms of the informal urban economy and of the organization of labour migration will maintain their power over labourers who are back in the village during the slack season. The indirect control over labour and development resources exercised by rural leaders, and the lack of protection for labourers, maintains a system of clientelism that cannot be understood only in terms of

economic and political calculations. The unequal redistribution is also reformulated as a modern moral duty of Reddys to protect Madiga labourers, while the engagement with development is seen as a modern form of leadership. Reddys consider themselves as having the duty of bringing development to the Madigas, who on account of their 'nature' are considered as incapable of taking advantage of it for themselves. Caste hierarchies and discriminations are renewed with development. Moral control is exercised over what Madigas need, do, wear, earn, or eat, and this control has been stripped of long-term personalized forms of attachment.

Unlike Gollas who benefited from development as a result of their political weight in the TDP, Madigas are not in political competition with Reddys, and the latter do not consider them a threat. Chatterjee argues that electoral democracy 'makes (it) unacceptable for the government to leave the marginalised groups without the means of labour and to fend for themselves' (2008: 62). For manual Madiga labourers, this appears over-optimistic. The politics of fear, the batons of policemen in the cities, and the humiliations suffered at the hands of state agents in the village are very efficient tools for preventing Madiga labourers from claiming their share. In the context of states' non-implementation of labour laws, rights, and social protection (Lerche 2012), labourers are kept in a state of unsecured and permanent mobility which, as in the case of the labourers depicted by Breman (2007), strongly affects any attempt to forge solidarities at work and any possibility of using politics to influence the redistribution of state resources, which is a theoretical option as much in rural as in urban areas (Goopra 2007: 1933). Furthermore, poverty is a powerful historical and daily experience transmitted and reassessed through the routine of domination. It is also a social relation of power between rural leaders, middlemen, and labourers (Harriss 2009), as well as within the family and the caste.

This history may serve to provide a platform for labourers to insist that respect be accorded to them. Seasonal migration encourages workers to strive to benefit from anti-poverty programmes; to use whatever caste, class and gender linkages they have access to as well as to use local patronage to improve their position. This is the nexus between migration, power, and development that perpetuates the poverty of Madigas. Maintained as a mobile, flexible, and dependent labour force in a state of poverty, Madigas are prevented from challenging the unequal redistribution of development resources,

from securing a stable economic and political basis in the village, and from contesting openly and directly the power of the rural leadership.

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