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# The Funeraleque as the Experience of Workers at the Margins of International Business: Seven Indian Narratives

## Abstract

**Purpose:** We intend to show that the experience of workers on the margins of international business is akin to the funeraleque. We understand the funeraleque as the appropriation of the value generated by workers across the production networks of international business.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Drawing from our engagement with crematorium workers, we articulate the narratives of workers, describing the insecurities and injustices experienced by them. We draw from a six month long qualitative engagement with seven workers in a crematorium in Ahmedabad, India.

**Findings:** The experiences of marginal subjects provides important insights on how international business, in conjunction with states, structures inequality for marginal subjects. Precariousness, social exclusion, low wages, and subjectivities of humiliation are the experience of marginal subjects. The reproduction of marginality in globalising cities is an important element of the funeraleque through which extraction and re-distribution of value across international networks is legitimised.

**Practical implications:** In understanding international business as the funeraleque, we demystify the power relations constituted by it. We provide a metaphor for dethroning the legitimacy of international business, and indicate that its modern practices are similar to the practices of value appropriation that occur in a funeral.

**Originality/value:** We develop the metaphor of the funeraleque to gain insights into the experiences of workers on the margins of international business. We are thus able to theorise the underbelly of globalising cities in a poetic, subversive way.

## Introduction

By drawing from the narratives of Dalit crematorium workers in Ahmedabad, India, we attempt to understand how the experiences of workers at the margins of international business mirror the setting of a funeral. International business processes, in the context of a globalising city like Ahmedabad, can reproduce a political economy, where elite economic roles and assets are held within dominant networks, while precarious and stigmatising labour such as crematorium work, is performed by Dalit subjects. Banerjee (2008: 1550) argues that “the effects of creating a ‘business friendly climate’ are often violent, leading to ... the creation of death worlds”. By exploring the exploitation that persists in the employment relationship of crematorium workers, we argue that the imposition of marginality on crematorium workers is necessary for creating a ‘business friendly climate’ in a globalising city like Ahmedabad. Through our engagement with crematorium workers, we hope to access “organizational practices that are not otherwise captured within the limited scope of dominant theories in the field” (Prasad, 2014a: 235).

Dalits have been historically discriminated against, and marginalised on the basis of caste in India (Gorringe, 2005). Caste has formed the basis of inequality in India by violent enforcements of hierarchy and prohibition of marriages between Dalits and members of other castes (Gopal, 2012). Caste is associated with “entrenched structures of discrimination and subjugation” (Gopal, 2012: 230), and stigma is violently deployed to reproduce exclusion (Jaspal, 2011). Labour and caste intersect in the production of stigma, as it is argued that Dalits’ “perpetual association with dead cattle, evil spirits and the death of humans defines their low status vis-à-vis other caste groups and thereby legitimises their physical and social exclusion” (Jaspal, 2011: 43). Dalits have been and continue to be excluded and stigmatized, including in places of worship; Dalits are constantly humiliated by denying them access to shared cooking utensils and crockery, and are asked to eat in community meals, only after others have finished eating (Jaspal, 2011).

### **Dalits in India: Marginalisation and Resistance**

The twentieth century Dalit scholar and political activist, Ambedkar led a mass religious conversion of Dalits from Hinduism to Buddhism; the latter being religion that he proclaimed was “cleansed of the Brahmanic interpolations of karma and rebirth” (Gore, 1993: 259). Apart from religious conversion as a protest against caste inequalities normalised within Hindu practice, Ambedkar argued for embedding principles of social justice in the constitution of India, by making mandatory provisions for affirmative action known as reservations<sup>1</sup> in India, in the legislature for Dalits (Dreze and Sen, 2002). Reservations were also extended to educational opportunities and employment in the government and the public sector for Dalits. However, such reservations have often been a contentious issue in India, and there has been a strong privileged caste backlash against them during different points of time.

It is also a fact that the Dalit movement for dignity has been a fractured and fragmented movement. The fragmentation of the Dalit movement has hindered the embodiment of the politics of resistance in the institutional fields of liberal, representative democracy from the beginning. There was a backlash to the radical Dalit politics of Ambedkar from the beginning, as members of Dalit castes such as Charmakars refused to ally themselves with Ambedkar’s politics (Zelliot, 2004). Consequently, Ambedkar lost the election to the Indian Parliament in 1952 to a Charmakar candidate of the liberal, nationalist political party – the Indian National Congress (Paik, 2011). At a larger level, the Dalit proposal for reservations has seen backlashes from “members of the privileged upper classes and castes” who have emerged as “serious critiques of compensatory discrimination” (Banerjee-Dube, 2014: 524). They contend that “bourgeois equality and merit” are necessary “for the proper functioning of democracy” and argue that “positive discrimination is a negative force that reinforces inequality and caste identity” (Banerjee-Dube, 2014: 524).

Visvanathan (2001: 3124) argues that the contemporary condition of Dalits in India needs to be theorised around atrocity, as Dalit experiences are often punctuated by “stoning, beating, arson, rape, branding and the sheer sense of horror and helplessness”. Drawing on the work of Louis (2001), who describes several atrocities taking place against Dalits in contemporary times, Visvanathan (2001) argues for engaging with Dalit experiences from the perspective of racial discrimination and inequality. Further, while engaging with Dalit experiences, Visvanathan (2001: 3124) calls for a sociology of “hate, oppression, despair, humiliation and horror” as

distinct from a sociology of “class, order, mobility, deprivation, pollution”. While legislation was introduced in the late 1980s to prevent atrocities against Dalits, even in contemporary times, several atrocities such as “physical abuse, humiliation, sexual exploitation, residential segregation, social boycott and discriminatory treatment” (Sooryamoorthy, 2008: 289) continue to be reported from different parts of India (Gorrige, 2005; Shah et al., 2006). Violence especially informs the experiences of Dalit women, as “they are brutally raped and killed at the slightest provocation of conflict” (Sooryamoorthy, 2008: 288).

While atrocities against Dalits still continue, caste has often been situated within the traditional/modern binary, and it has been contended that “caste as hierarchy, caste as community, is still pre-modern” (Ganguly, 2005: 136). It has been argued that globalisation and modernity offer democratic opportunities to Dalits, as “the horizontal mobilisation of larger lower caste communities was gaining them power, status and wealth which allowed them to challenge and overturn the hierarchy of caste as ritual rank” (Rudolph, 1979: 26). However, institutions of modernity such as multinational corporations (MNCs), rather than playing a democratising role, often exacerbate identity based inequalities. For instance, it has been found that MNCs have actually facilitated selective female feticide in India, thus reproducing gender oppression (Mir, Calas and Smircich, 1999). Since neoliberal enactments of modernity are capable of instrumentalising life for corporate profits and reproducing the state, caste based inequalities can be used as a resource by institutional agents of neoliberal modernity such as MNCs. If caste based inequalities help in reproducing precarious and vulnerable labour, which helps in guaranteeing profits, then MNCs may contribute to the institutional environment which reproduces caste based marginal identities.

Through our exploration of the experiences of Dalit crematorium workers, we hope to puncture the homogenous international business conceptualisation of India as a rising brand and investment destination (Rangnekar, 2005). We contend that this process of brand creation is contingent on the reproduction of inequalities for marginal, labouring subjects like Dalits, and thus we hope to add one more layer of voice towards theorising the underbelly of the Indian boom (Corbridge and Shah, 2013). It has been seen that after the acceleration of economic globalisation in the 1990s, inequality has increased in India (Himanshu, 2007). This provides implicit evidence for ongoing processes of colonising subjects within marginalising socio-political frames in order to produce them as compliant and cheap sources of labour. International business has a role to play in these processes as inequality has increased along with a greater integration of India into the global economy (Jayadev, Motiram and Vakulabharanam, 2007).

### **Framing the Experiences of Dalit Crematorium Workers as the Funeraleque**

It is interesting to note that the crematorium, where funerals and social engagements with death are structured, is also a site where social ties and networks are affirmed (Boni, 2010). In the enactment of the funeral, social capital is often reaffirmed, restored and recreated. Social capital is at the heart of the rhetoric and practice of international business (Kontinen and Ojala, 2011). However, workers in the crematorium, which is the site where social capital is regenerated, are hardly likely to constitute the mainstream of international business, and are all too often relegated to its margins.

Internationalisation of business inhabits various contradictions and embodies colonialist discourse in subordinating diverse contexts to dominant cultural themes (Fougere and Moulettes, 2012). States have often been mobilised to inflict regimes of terror in order to create conducive operating conditions for multinational corporations (Peralta and Beverly, 1980). International business has been a violent process with “corporate strategies to ensure ‘safe havens’ for their investment” including “support for dictatorial regimes, violent reprisals using state military and police to suppress dissent, and bribes and kickbacks to political elites” (Banerjee, 2008: 1550). In the context of such violence, it is necessary to “identify and explore the experiences of a community’s systematically oppressed class(es)” (Prasad, 2009: 360) such as Dalit workers in a crematorium.

The intersection of the discourse of globalising cities with international business valorises multinational corporations and leads to state and national elites often lending their support to them (Berry, 2003). If globalising cities are sustained by international business, then the responsibility for the violence and inequalities that operate in these cities, among other agents, must also rest with international business. There have been “widely publicized cases involving violence and multinational capital” (Banerjee, 2008: 1550) where trade union leaders and striking workers have been killed. Marginalisation brought about by international business may also be studied in sites such as the crematorium through the mechanism of encountering and responding to the Other (Prasad, 2014b).

The denigration of subjects like Dalit crematorium workers, which we describe in our study, is a structuring of regimes of marginality within the global metropolis. Banerjee (2008: 1553) argues that globalisation is ubiquitous to the “privatization of sovereignty, which is another enabling condition of necrocapitalism” explicating the linkages between violence, death and capital. Prasad (2014a) argues that the personal and the political are deeply interlinked and thus the experiences of Dalit crematorium workers can offer an entry into the politics of international business, which articulates itself as the modern Other of pre-modern forms of organisation such as caste.

Crematorium workers are already denigrated subjects in the anticipated epistemology of international business as they are marginal to corporate functions of multinational firms. We argue that it is this epistemological project that structures the experience of marginal workers on the lines of a funeral. Marginality is linked with international business as “the protection of foreign capital results in the creation of new states of exception where violence can be used with impunity” (Banerjee, 2008: 1554). Prasad (2009) argues that such marginality needs to be analysed in terms of material inequalities, deprivations, recognition and inclusion. We attempt to situate the funeralesque as a metaphor embodying marginality indicated in the above processes.

A funeral is not only an indicator of a subject who has died, but it is also a site for negotiating social relations (Boni, 2010). The funeral is a site for arguing and speculating on the social and economic value of the subject who has died (Boni, 2010). The funeral is also the moment when the value of the subject who has died will be distributed among contending factions (Boni, 2010), thus leading to the emergence of a world post the subject whose existence has ended. Thus, we conceptualise the funeralesque as a process of distributing the value of a dying subject over whom contending socio-economic claims exist.

The value generated by the living body of the worker is at stake in the moment of international business. International business constitutes a funeral in that the value generated by the body of the worker is distributed across international networks and global value chains, by those who claim ownership on the worker's produce. International business can reduce workers to being the objects of sovereign power and deprive them of political voice (Banerjee, 2008). At the same time, workers may not be passive victims and the funeralesque may also be an opportunity for accessing "resistance against the systems of domination that define(s) organizations and forms of organizing" (Prasad, 2014b: 529).

The funeralesque is embodied in the exploitations and the lack of freedoms experienced by workers. The crematorium workers with whom we engaged, are beginning to witness the implicit privatisation of the crematorium, with workers being appointed only on temporary contracts. While ties of social capital are being forged and sustained in the crematorium, the workers do not belong to the place of these tie formations.

Instead they belong to the place of insecurity, where it is not clear, how their lives and livelihoods are going to be sustained. And yet, the stigma of doing dirty work rests on the crematorium worker, as this is considered to be polluting work within the violent, discursive practices of caste. Crematorium workers usually belong to a caste known as chandals and are considered to be the most ritually polluted within the Hindu caste system, and thus occupy the lowest segments of the caste hierarchy (Sharma, 2010). Further, their economic marginalisation is reiterated through the precarious employment contracts which regulate their work. As Parry (2013) indicates the contract worker inhabits a derogatory existence in India and is prone to exploitations and abuse of various kinds.

The funeralesque is the re-appropriation of the material embodiments of a subject in terms of negotiating the process of distributing the socio-economic remains of the subject. Crematorium workers are cast as subjects who have no control over the distribution of their socio-economic remains. Yet production processes of the globalising city appropriate what they produce and distribute them through negotiated networks of international business. It is towards the deployment of such a funeralesque of international business that we turn attention to in this article.

## Methods

In this study, we draw from our engagement with seven workers in a crematorium in Ahmedabad to account for how international business may be embodied in the everyday lives of marginal workers. Out of these seven workers, five were Dalits and worked as operators or contract workers in the crematorium. One of the operators was a woman. We also interviewed the administrator of the crematorium, who is not a Dalit. Finally, we interviewed the water department labourer working in the crematorium who is Muslim.

We argue that by situating our study in a crematorium in Ahmedabad, we can selectively understand the implications of international business for marginal Dalit subjects. The state of Gujarat has articulated Ahmedabad as a globalising city and has expressed its intention to

integrate Ahmedabad into the global economy. Ahmedabad has witnessed a mix of political and economic events embodying the intersections between an authoritarian, neoliberal state and international business. Every year, an annual spectacle known as Vibrant Gujarat takes place to attract investments to the state. Simultaneously, Ahmedabad has also witnessed slum demolitions, an attack against informal markets and riots against religious minorities (Mathur, 2012). Also, the state and local government have been reformed with jobs being contractualised, welfare spending being minimised and elite infrastructure projects being rolled out.

In order to understand the everyday ways through which de-politicisation of Dalit crematorium workers is nurtured, we engaged in several unstructured conversations over a period of six months in 2010. We felt that unstructured conversations over a length of time will enable the generation of rich and subversive knowledges (Jagannathan and Rai, 2014). Over the six month period, we visited the crematorium at least two to three times every week. Each of these visits lasted for three to four hours. We tried to visit the crematorium during different times of the day and night. We had at least twenty different conversational interviews with each of the seven workers with whom we engaged.

Our conversations focused on genealogies of employment, narratives of insecurity, injustice, low wages, discrimination, contractualisation of work, and the practices through which discourses of guilt, inadequacy and exclusion were nurtured among marginal workers. For our engagement with crematorium workers, we first entered the site as strangers and built rapport over a period of time after explaining our research purpose. We promised confidentiality to all participants, and have anonymised their identities in the study. We did not record any of our conversations, which enabled us to engage in long, informal conversations and discussion of each other's experiences pertaining to work, power, deprivation and resistance.

We maintained detailed field notes after each day's engagements, and found that the lack of audio recordings did not restrain us from accessing substantial experiential insights (Jagannathan and Rai, 2014). We do not claim to speak or theorise on behalf of our respondents, and only comment on the marginalities fostered by international business.

From our field notes, we brought together different experiences of workers and reconstructed them as narratives embodying knowledges of vulnerability. We analysed our field notes by writing memos and reflections on the experiences of crematorium workers. Sometimes, we also undertook a poetic reconstruction of the data in order to discern the affective experiences of workers. In our memos, we traced how the experiences of crematorium workers were shaped by neoliberal politics and by economic restructuring being undertaken by the state. We did not draw coherent themes from our analysis, but instead explored contradictions and the implications of the subjective experiences of workers in the context of emerging regimes of political and economic governance. Through our analytical memos, we traced "the multiplicity of discourses and plurality of narratives" that informed the experiences of crematorium workers and tried "to create space for questions, which have been silenced, to be asked" (Jagannathan and Rai, 2014: 7).

Next, we describe the organisational context of the crematorium before presenting narrative extracts embodying the experiences of workers.

## **The crematorium as an organization**

The workers with whom we engaged, were working in a crematorium, where many services were being contracted out. Until a decade ago, the crematorium was fully managed by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), and all the workers were on the pay roll of AMC. All the workers had employment security and received reasonable wages which were revised regularly through collective bargaining. Healthcare and housing was provided by the employer along with other benefits such as pension. However, caste based discrimination and stigmatisation was present, on account of which members of non-Dalit castes refused to participate in crematorium work. Also, the castes associated with crematorium work were socially segregated and faced several exclusions such as the inability to marry outside the caste, barriers for access to education and occupational mobility. Consequently, the employees belonged to families who had been associated with the crematorium for many generations. So there was a good possibility of the children of crematorium workers taking over the jobs of their parents. But with the contracting out of services in the crematorium, employment security, pay and other employment benefits diminished. Also, with the modernisation of the crematorium, a new set of skills such as operating electric and gas pyres had come into play. So, it was no longer possible to assume that the children of crematorium workers would find 'good' jobs in the future in the crematorium. For the moment, some employees continued to be on the payroll of AMC, and given their intimate association with the crematorium for many years (and generations), their employment contracts were not altered. They were assured of their jobs and benefits until they retired. Yet the old sense of autonomous functioning was no longer present for them, and they had to consult the various contractors for different day to day matters. The contractors also listened to these employees on matters such as recruiting contract workers. The contractors did so with the objective of managing the crematorium effectively, as these employees had a lot of intimate knowledge about the crematorium.

There are different tasks that are performed in the crematorium, and there is a hierarchy associated with them. There is an administrator of the crematorium who is a junior level officer in the AMC. The administrator is assisted by the registry clerk of the crematorium, who is charged with the responsibility for maintaining records. The administrator and the registry clerk constitute the bureaucracy of the crematorium. While these employees may be from any caste, many times they are non-Dalits, and the context of caste plays an important role in their jobs.

For the administrator and the registry clerk, the primary identity is that of being an AMC employee. Many times, they do not disclose the reality of their working in the crematorium to their friends and relatives. Also, there may be practices such as taking a bath on returning home from work, in order to cleanse themselves of the ritual impurity of the crematorium. These practices reproduce caste based inequalities and inform the work context of the crematorium. Since the administrator and registry clerk are AMC employees, they are transferred between departments, and thus their tenure in a crematorium may not be for more than two to three years. Other workers in the crematorium, such as those who operate the wood-fired funeral pyres or the electric furnace are usually Dalits. They are low down in the organizational hierarchy of the AMC and often have no chances for promotion.



They are tied to the crematorium where they work, and their occupational identity is associated with the crematorium. They resent the AMC bureaucrats, as they receive better pay and have structured promotion opportunities. Also, there is a sense that the operators perform the labour of the crematorium, while the bureaucrats exercise managerial control over them. Several jobs of operators are now moving away from AMC payrolls, and are being contractualised, leading to further inequalities. Contract workers receive lower pay, are not eligible for housing and healthcare, and receive no social security benefits.

A water department labourer is also attached to the crematorium to look after the water supply from the water tank. Currently, the water department labourer is also an AMC employee, and is generally transferred every two to three years to a different site for maintaining pumps and valves.

### **Narrative Extracts**

We discuss the narratives of the crematorium workers using three broad themes. These themes encompass the right wing political context in Gujarat, the dynamics of caste, class and inequalities associated with short term contract work. These three themes inform the performance of labour in the crematorium, and imply the existence of value extraction regimes which are redistributed in a funeralsque manner to sustain the infrastructural expansion of international business.

### **Right Wing Political Contexts**

Ahmedabad and Gujarat have witnessed right wing political mobilisations during the past decade. Right wing political mobilisations have the capacity to normalise violence against religious minorities and thus consolidate the power of the state. Right wing political mobilisations also have the potential to normalise the violent character of the state and reproduce the marginality of dispossessed subjects.

Rahim, who works as a water department labourer in the crematorium, said,

After Narendra Modi became the Chief Minister of Gujarat, not only did riots occur against Muslims<sup>2</sup>, there were other problems as well. Unions have been destroyed. Also, a lot of privatization has been undertaken.

Ajay, who is the administrator of the crematorium endorsed the right wing policies of the Gujarat government,

Sometimes people need to be shown their place. Once, the Muslims were taught a lesson during the riots, there have been no tensions. There has been peace.

Parvati, who operates the electric furnace in the crematorium, was more skeptical of the government,

It is said that lot of development has taken place, but I am not sure. Look at Sanjay, who is a contract worker for the company which maintains the electronic panels. He does not even earn enough to take a room on rent in Ahmedabad, so he sleeps in different crematoriums during the night.

Development, nationalism, memory of the riots are complexly linked in the emerging space of Ahmedabad. When the state allows violence against minorities to take place, the state has signaled its intent of intimidating marginal subjects into political silence. The machismo acquired by the state is then paradoxically deployed for implementing unbridled programs of deregulation.

Sanjay, spoke about the colonial politics of divide and rule,

My village is about two hundred kilometers from here. Ten years ago, there were riots in my village as well. Many were killed. They say that the British used to divide and rule. But is it any different today? Poor people still continue to suffer.

Rajesh, who does janitorial work in the crematorium and is a contract worker, said,

Where are the jobs for young people like us? I am already thirty years of age and earn only Rs. 1500<sup>3</sup> per month. I cannot look after myself with this kind of money. Where is the question of marrying?

Rahim spoke about the divisive strategies of the state,

The government operates on fear. For most riot victims, justice has still not been done. They live in fear. Whoever speaks against the government is treated like an enemy. Even big officers are afraid to speak out. Thus, if it is ordered that give these benefits to these big businessmen – nobody will speak. But who will speak for the worker?

Thus, crematorium workers read development as an unequal process that benefits large businesses and, in the process, renders workers marginal. Workers are marginalised to such an extent that their wages are not even enough for them to be able to sustain themselves or marry. Workers are also resentful of the politics of hate and contest this by looking upon poverty as a universal experience that spans across religion.

Sunil, a contract worker in the crematorium, said,

The police did nothing during the riots. More than the poor, it was rich people who behaved like animals. They entered shops and homes, killed and looted.

Amar remembered how neighbourhood solidarity broke down during the riots,

People who were the closest friends became afraid of each other. Neighbours did not trust each other. Poor people suffered. But the rich who looted and murdered became MLAs<sup>4</sup> and ministers.

Rahim points out the setback to the labour movement as a consequence of the politics of hate,

People were fighting for their lives. People are still fighting for the loved ones they lost. The loss of a job, forcing people to take voluntary retirement<sup>5</sup> and breaking the union look small in front of murder.

Ajay presented an alternative perspective,

It is wrong to blame the government. Only English TV news channels presented that there was lot of violence. Actually nothing much happened. At the same time, you must understand that lower caste youth and Muslim youth do not study. They are unemployed. They have a criminal mindset. It was these people who did mischief. These people need to be kept in their place. For instance, look at Rajesh. He used to work as a loader in an international cola company in the Gandhinagar highway. He used to earn Rs. 5000 per month there. But what did he do? He stole empty bottles and sold them in the market. The company dismissed him. These people have a habit of making holes in the very plate they eat from.

The politics of hate that was unleashed during the riots was not directed against Muslims alone. State consolidation helped to nurture it against marginal subjects and their institutions such as trade unions. The riots were discursively seen by the state as a mechanism of punishing recalcitrant subjects who defiled the nation by being cultural others. If workers and trade unions defiled state narratives of development by confronting neoliberal trajectories, they also needed to be shown their place. Thus, reproduction of marginal identities such as Dalits, contractualisation and insecurity became the norm.

### **Caste, Class and Labour**

The consciousness of caste becomes acute in times of distress. There are limited social and economic resources that a Dalit can fall back on during times of distress. Spaces such as the crematorium are segregated as Dalit spaces, which mark a Dalit as an unequal subject. The Dalit subject needs to be denigrated in order to reproduce her as a marginal, labouring subject, whose labour can then be appropriated for the profits of corporations and states.

Rahim points out the tragedy of being trapped in their jobs for crematorium workers,

Things have become better now. Their children go to schools and study. They are becoming educated. If they study well, they can get good jobs also. But there is nobody to guide them. Who will tell them about what to study and what will get them good jobs?

Parvati does not want her children to continue working in the crematorium,

We have worked for generations in the crematorium. I do not want my children to continue doing this work. I want them to study and do well in life. Let them repair computers, let them do anything else in life.

Amar, who has been working in the crematorium for more than twenty years said,

What is our life? Throughout the day and night, I am in the crematorium. I take my bath here and sleep here. As people working in the crematorium, we face several difficulties. Does anybody call us to their home for tea? Do people invite us for their children's marriages? We have friends only inside our caste. Sometimes I feel that if I was doing some other work, things would be better. If I was a teacher, then would people have called me to their homes? Perhaps, I would have been treated with more respect.

Caste brings forth a frame of humiliation for labouring subjects in the crematorium. Class struggle can be an important avenue for resistance in contesting the marginalisations of caste and restoring the dignity of labour. However, the attack against trade unions and the individualisation of employment relations has meant that caste based inequalities persist under conditions of modernity.

Rahim described how the trade union in the water department had been systematically dismantled,

In the name of modernising the plant, they closed it. All of us were transferred to different places. Solidarity was broken down and the union was finished.

Ajay felt that the government had done well in dealing with trade unions,

Unions encourage indiscipline. If person does not work, even then you cannot give them a memo. The union will come and fight. Similarly, if you are a Dalit, even if you do not work, nothing will happen. In the municipality, officers are afraid of their juniors. If you tell something, they threaten you with filing an atrocities complaint<sup>6</sup>.

Sunil spoke about the lack of access to secure, permanent jobs for Dalits,

The contractor earns money and does nothing. The companies which provide gas and electricity are big companies. But we have no share in the profits. In the old days, we did all the dirty work in the village. Still, we could not live in the village. We were untouchables. Even our shadow was thought to be polluting. Today, we do all the dirty work in the city. Still, we do not even have permanent jobs. At any time, the contractor can remove us. We are not paid wages in time. There is a lot corruption. Those who know the officers and the ministers get the contracts.

Thus, state processes are complicit in producing marginality for Dalits by labeling them as undisciplined and threatening subjects. Their labour is required for Ahmedabad to realize its global aspirations. But the value generated from this labour is appropriated and distributed in dominant state-corporate networks.

Sanjay spoke about the constant sense of insecurity,

I feel tired. I feel like an old man. If I had any land in the village, I will leave this job immediately.

Amar spoke about the days of the independence movement and describes how Dalits feel let down,

My father was a freedom fighter. He was close to Gandhiji. But what have we got? We are not even treated with respect.

The tragedy of the Dalit subject is that marginality is accompanied by a lack of access to economic resources. Dalits hardly own any land or assets. They only own their labour and through processes of caste based hegemony, this labour has been exploitatively devalued. Under neoliberal globalisation, regimes of value extraction have only intensified.

### **Contract Workers and Exploitation**

The condition of contract workers in India has deteriorated to such an extent that the language of democracy and rights can no longer be asserted in the workplace. Instead, a language of the benevolence of the employer has acquired greater currency. If the employer offers even a few benefits, the employer is able to portray the image of being responsible and virtuous.

Rahim spoke about the contraction of the state,

Unlike me, my son will never get a job in the government. There are no jobs. There is no provident fund, pension, gratuity, bonus and health care.

Rajesh speaks about the difficulties he faces,

I was in great difficulty after I lost my job with the cola company. Amar Kaka<sup>7</sup> is an elder and a relative. It was he who spoke to the contractor and got me a job here.

Parvati speaks about the futility of labour in present times,

Rajesh's father also used to work in the crematorium. He was a permanent employee. He had three sons. Only one of them has got a permanent job in the municipality. For the next generation, even that will not be there.

Thus, the temporality of contract work is a temporality of the erosion of security and well-being. While the past contained several instances of discrimination for Dalit crematorium workers, it also contained some guarantee of permanent jobs in the municipality. In the present, while Ahmedabad becomes embedded in the circuits of international capital, even this minimalist guarantee of a job in the municipality has been eroded.

Ajay spoke about the advantages of employing contract workers,

You only need to compare permanent and contract workers. Contract workers are committed to their work. Many times, permanent workers do not do any work. It is they who harass contract workers by asking them to do their work as well.

Rahim spoke about the employment conditions of his son,

My son works in a mehndi<sup>8</sup> manufacturing unit. He is paid Rs. 5000 per month. His employer takes a lot of care. He is a good man. He sends all employees to vacation for a week every year. This year my son and his wife went to Goa<sup>9</sup>. The employer also gave them an allowance for shopping.

Rajesh spoke about his struggles,

I am always looking for a better job. My father was able to save money during his life. He was able to buy a home. My other two brothers are married. I stay along with my brothers, their families and my mother. I am dependent on them. Without them, I am homeless.

The contract worker experiences vulnerability in various sites of life and work. There is a sense of individualisation, guilt and inadequacy that plagues the subjectivity of the contract worker. In the absence of strong Dalit and labour movements, the contract worker begins to blame herself rather than social relations in the political economy for the material insecurities faced by her.

Rahim speaks about how workers subvert the utilitarian climate that surrounds them by extending support to each other,

A new born girl baby had been left on the streets outside my home. I took her and adopted her. I am sending her to a good school for education. Just because her parents left her, she should not be deprived of opportunities in life. I believe in God. Certainly he will do justice. We can only help others in small ways.

Parvati speaks about extending care to contract workers in the crematorium,

I just put myself in the place of a person like Sanjay. I can at least give him food when it is late in the night. I can at least give him a blanket when it is cold.

Rajesh speaks about discovering hope in a general climate of despair,

The city has changed. There are many cars, buildings, malls, hotels. The airport is bigger. The roads are wider. But without my brothers, I won't have enough money to eat. But what will happen when their children grow older? The only hope is that there are many people like me. Surely, we will get noticed some day. We also live in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad is not only about malls, roads and airports. We only need an opportunity. If there is some money, even I can start a business.

Rahim is contesting the patriarchal structure of Indian society, where a girl child is still looked upon as a curse. In the midst of inequality, Parvati embodies the politics of care. Since there are no other collective discourses of resistance which are readily available, Rajesh succumbs to the seductive discourse of the entrepreneurial self. Yet, he does not normalise inequality and refuses to accept that he is himself responsible for his poverty. He laments the inequality in accessing financial resources and entrepreneurial opportunities. Resistance for him is to make visible the underbelly of Ahmedabad, which is constituted by people like him, and not let Ahmedabad be dominated by the seductive infrastructural narratives of development brought in by the forces of international business such as the cola company which employed him earlier.

### **Discussion: Structuring Inequality and Exclusion as the Funeraleque**

When Rahim says that things have not been all right after Narendra Modi assumed power, he refers to two contradictory processes going hand in hand. On the one hand is the process of the personalisation of the state, with the charisma of Narendra Modi informing the personality of the state (Kanungo and Farooqui, 2008). And on the other hand is the process of deregulation and privatisation, where the state is being restructured in order to make it subordinate to market forces producing insecurity for workers, and adverse social outcomes pertaining to poverty and malnourishment (Dixit, 2010). The riots against Muslims in Gujarat are an appropriate metaphor for the operation of these contradictory processes.

Kumar (2007: 30) argues that there is a link between psychological authoritarianism and political fascism and riots staged by fascist forces in Gujarat have strengthened the political influence of authoritarian leaders like Narendra Modi. The riots in Gujarat clinically dismantled the state, as access to safety and justice was no longer available to minority Muslims, who suffered greatly during the riots (Kumar, 2007: 24). Thus, cities like Ahmedabad become global, but as Rahim points out, the insecurities of young workers increase, as states and markets engineer vulnerable jobs for them. It is interesting to compare these processes with the organisational apparatus of a funeral.

Contemporary organisational life marks several funerals through which fiefdoms are reiterated, kept alive and expanded, as funerals are linked to questions of succession and optimal reconfiguration of social capital networks (Steier, 2001). Rahim's narrative indicates that the collective voice of workers is first eliminated, and as modern human resource management practices of individualisation and dispersion advance, the funeral of the institution of the trade union is organised. Workers must not be allowed to collectively protest, and it is individual workers who must experience the insecurities of retrenchments, low wages and privatization.

It is important to note that the religious minority is only a convenient subject against whom violence can be inflicted. The religious minority is transformed into a resource for legitimising the power of the state (Jagannathan and Rai, 2014). This power of the state can then be deployed for the expansion of international business, thus indicating the complicity of violence, death and capital (Banerjee, 2008). International business has been known to prey on conflict and violence and manipulate those in power to generate profits (Ayres, 2012). In the instance of Gujarat, the consolidation of state power achieved in the wake of the riots, was used to carry out an unbridled neoliberal agenda.

As Rahim points out, the state played an active role in dismantling the strength of trade unions and undertook an energetic privatisation agenda. While Ajay asserts that by teaching the minority subject a lesson, peace was achieved, it is necessary to consider the violent implications of such a discourse. Death, violence and riots were inflicted on Muslims by converting the marginal subject into a treacherous subject, who was a threat to peace. Once the state consolidated its power, it could now transform other marginal subjects as well into hostile, treacherous subjects. Thus, trade unions and workers who were marginal subjects were transformed into treacherous subjects to be repressed in the calculus of Narendra Modi's developmental model.

State action in weakening the strength of trade unions meant that international capital could appropriate the modernisation and developmental processes of society. Thus, exploitative employment contracts could be unleashed in the maintenance of electronic panels in the crematorium. When Sanjay cannot even earn enough to rent a room where he can sleep, and is forced to sleep in the crematorium, his life has been colonised to a great extent by the corporation. There is no distinction now between the place of life and the place of death. Sanjay is a resource who is consumed by the corporation in a globalising city like Ahmedabad, and then consigned to the place of death to fulfill his processes of life, thus completing the metaphor of the funeralsque. In the spirit of necrocapitalism, Sanjay's labour is appropriated, and then he is dispossessed of basic entitlements of life such as housing (Banerjee, 2008).

It is interesting to examine whether modernist processes such as school and college education can subvert caste inequalities (Paik, 2009). But as Rahim points out, modernity and education are only a rhetorical promise. They are like the casino seductively inviting the gambler inside, but the lottery of life has already been decided. The Dalit subject has very little chance of winning in life. What will a crematorium worker's child tell her/his friends in school?

The moment the child says that her/his parents work in a crematorium, processes of exclusion begin. Patriarchal families encroach upon a child's imagination and body (Alam, 2014). Parents

teach caste to their children and the performance of the disciplined body demands that friendships are not enacted with Dalits. When Parvati desires an escape for her children from labouring in the crematorium, she desires an escape from the violence that is inflicted on the Dalit subject. But implicit in such a desire for escape is imprisonment within human capital logics. It is perhaps necessary to note that such human capital logics are central to the funerals of international business.

School and college education within modernity also reproduce the human capital myth (Adamson, 2009). The educated subject is reduced to an accumulated history of grade sheets and the network of educational brands which awarded these grade sheets. The promise is now that the human being is only a curriculum vitae (CV) and therefore Dalithood and discrimination will vanish. But the CV is only another ruse for structuring neoliberal inequalities. In order to produce the CV, more investments will be required, and the labouring Dalit subject is invited to make these investments.

Amar feels that he would have been treated with greater respect if he had been a school teacher instead of a crematorium worker. A shift in occupations, especially occupations which are not tainted by Dalit stigma, is thought to be the escape from Dalit existence. Paradoxically, this indicates a normalisation of the correlates between occupational and caste identities. This is similar to the discourse of career which is used to discipline the subjectivity of a worker (Grey, 1994). Within the neoliberal discourse of career, the desires of escape from inequality and oppression may be shaped as the worker rises in her career to become a manager.

Class struggle and democratising the work organisation are not important objectives within conventional discourse of career. If work organisations were democratic and the outcomes were democratically shared, then crematorium workers would not be an excluded and oppressed category. Caste is violently enforced so that several productive labours can be extracted in exploitative ways. The only escape from caste that is rhetorically promised, and which may never be materially met, is investments in human capital. These investments are another method of extracting surplus from labouring Dalit subjects like crematorium workers. It has also been found that human capital transformations can lead to contradictory dismissal of working class roots (Lehmann, 2014). The labouring Dalit subject is thus a funerals source of value who can subsidise the prosperity and luxury of subjects who gain from the spectacle of globalising cities, which are at the heart of international business.

If we understand the funeral as the process of reiterating fiefdoms either through coronation or consolidation, then the funeral is complicit with sovereignty as an organising principle of social relations, and sovereignty is legitimised by transforming the funeral into a civic-ritual spectacle involving “intense emotions” to “connect individuals to the collectivity through the manipulation and invocation of symbols” (Black and Smith, 1999: 264). Sovereignty could be located at the level of the state with nationalist riots providing the majoritarian, cultural colour for the state to reproduce itself by producing minorities and refugees (Butler and Spivak, 2007) or at the level of corporation where insecurity or benevolence laced security informs the reproduction of the fiefdom. Thus, the employer for whom Rahim’s son works is benevolent, but the benevolence is structured as the good fortune of the worker. Benevolence is the autonomous, sovereign choice of the employer, and not open to critique, protest, struggle and negotiation; and the withdrawal of



benevolence can mean the death of entire industries and workers associated with them (Linstead, 1997: 71). The wages of Rahim's son are so low that he cannot afford a vacation for himself and his family.

Not only does the employer pay for the travel to Goa, but he also pays for their consumption and shopping. Rahim's son and other workers are the labouring subjects who produce the prosperity of the employer, and while their labour impoverishes them, it enriches the employer. The distribution of the productive labour is such that the employer has to be benevolent in order for workers to experience a minimalist sense of leisure, vacation and travel, and this present day condition of benevolence is structured by the "established patterns, practices and instances of fitting the world together" (Linstead, 1997: 72) through conditions of depressed wages and lack of career mobility. The vacation also becomes a funeral as the fiefdom of the employer through his characterisation of being benevolent is consolidated, and embodies processes of organisational outflanking (Clegg, 1994) through which resistance can be prevented. This is very different from the working class ethics of vulnerability that Rahim demonstrates when he adopts a girl from the street.

For Rahim, the funeralesque is a site of subversive mourning, and he takes upon himself the ethical responsibility of reconstructing the life of the girl whose parents have abandoned her. The funeral is also a site where the subject becomes an orphan, and the immediate ties of blood, care and love structured around the relations of the family are cut, but in modern funerals, these transitions almost remain hidden, as the funeral is robbed of movement and constrained by limitation of times and spaces in modern cities (Cook and Walter, 2005: 377). The orphan then becomes an entity in the sea of the social, alone amidst the storms of numerous insecurities – life, safety and livelihood, and the funeral ritual structures for the orphan an expression of identity, both in relation to others and to herself (du Bois, 1986). Rahim picks up the orphan and provides her immediate safety, and helps her to acquire an education that will enable her to construct a meaningful livelihood. The funeralesque can thus also be a site of subversive mourning through which workers can offer each other solidarity in helping each other repair the injuries of life inflicted by states and the forces of global capital, and these solidarity relations also alter the funeral – "funerals are no longer given; they too must be negotiated. We might term them democratic, rather than authoritative, rites" (Cook and Walter, 2005: 386).

The forces of global capital embodied by the multinational corporation are more explicitly present in Rajesh's life. Rajesh is initially employed by an international cola company, and it is interesting to note that he is paid exactly the same amount of Rs. 5000 per month, as Rahim's son working for a local mehndi company. The local and the international intersect in providing the same degree of low wages to employees, and often multinational corporations have been known to pay far lower wages than national arrangements, leading to wage reductions as high as 50% (Zuberi, 2011). The wages are so low that if Rajesh has four other family members depending on him, then his entire family slips below the official poverty line of India, notwithstanding the fact that the official poverty line itself has been placed at a murderously low level to show that the proportion of people below poverty in India are declining; at the same time, multi-dimensional analysis of poverty involving size and composition of poor population, access to nutrition, health, education and good quality living environments are ignored (Vaidyanathan, 2013: 42). Thus, by paying abysmally low wages, international capital is directly

complicit in structuring the margins of globalising cities, as families below the poverty line often have one or more members in formal employment, but find these incomes inadequate to escape poverty (Newman, 2006). And unlike the benevolence of the local employer who sponsors vacations, shopping and consumption, international capital is officially rational, with emphasis on “transactions and interests ... in terms of their instrumentality and efficiency ... the efficient maximization of return from effort” (Linstead, 1997: 74).

Thus, there is little space for benevolence and building personal ties with workers, and organisations appear as “structures of deference” where “objection to an *obeyed* command” (Linstead, 1997: 75) is deferred, thus inhibiting resistance and change. It is interesting to note the implications of the alliances that international capital forges with the state – it is, indeed, these alliances which enable international businesses to structure marginality, as international financial institutions are often complicit with mechanisms of corruption within nations that reproduce accumulation by dispossession (Rocha, Brown and Cloke, 2011: 161). The same forces of international business rooted for Narendra Modi to become the prime minister of India, as they believed that he would help in accelerating neoliberal reforms and provide decisive leadership in deregulating and privatising the state, even as several issues of environment, health, education and welfare could remain unaddressed (Shah, 2013). Again, it is the promise of dismantling organisational capacities that is fueling the leadership fiefdoms of Narendra Modi, and it was through a systematic dismantling of the organisational capacities of the police, that riots against Muslims were facilitated in Gujarat in 2002 (Dhattiwala and Biggs, 2012). The funeralsque is embodied in spotting opportunity in the deaths of others to forge possibilities of territorial domination, but the funeral is also a site through which the dominated seek to confront social, religious and political marginalisation (Eaton, 2003).

Territorial domination is clear in the actions of the cola manufacturing company when it dismisses Rajesh on accusations of theft. But what about the profits that the cola corporation has mobilised on account of the labour power of subjects like Rajesh? If labour power has been exploited and subjects have been left in poverty, then who is accountable for this systematic and intimidating theft of material security? The funeralsque is also a moment of theft as testaments can be manipulated, forged, claims constructed, and those with cunning, force and capacity for violence can appropriate the wealth of the cremated subject. Toulson (2013: 163) outlines the contradictory processes of the funeralsque – “for only those who are prepared to assist the dead by taking on their pollution are qualified to inherit ... thus sometimes scuffles break out at the casket, as relatives battle to be closest to the corpse, to demonstrate that they are the most loyal (161)”. But even more than the immediate family and loyal relatives, it is crematorium workers who are assisting the dead by taking on their pollution – “and yet, while the worker fulfills his part of the bargain – he takes on the pollution of the dead – he knows that there will be no reciprocity ... he will receive no inheritance, he will garner no blessings, his brief kinship is denied” (Toulson, 2013: 165). The bodies of workers are thus consumed by an everyday funeralsque, as states and corporations align to appropriate value from them through the cunning attributes of international business; and this is only enforced by the police of local states which utilize their violent capacities in the aid of international capital (Kraemer, Whiteman and Banerjee, 2013).

Thus, the police and local states may not provide security and justice to riot victims (Kumar, 2007), but they will provide security to international business. When Rajesh is pushed to the crematorium, there is no escape from his traditional kinship based livelihoods in the crematorium. The state has begun the privatisation of the crematorium as the municipal corporation no longer employs janitors directly, but only employs them through a contractor. The contractor pays an abysmal wage of Rs. 1500 to Rajesh, and the doors of obtaining employment with the municipal corporation are closed, as there is a freeze on new recruitment. Rajesh's brother is lucky to have found a job on compassionate grounds with the municipal corporation after his father's death.

Thus, a job has been inherited, and the element of the funeralsque is again evident as it is death which has led to the transference of the job as an asset. In constituting the worker as having luck, there is no difference between the state and the mehndi company owner. Luck also informs the funeralsque as the timing and structuring of death influences the fortune of those who participate in the politics that follows death. The politics that follows death is one of "unquestioning allegiance ... if an emperor or head of state is oppressive or ignores the welfare of his people, he is said to have lost the "mandate from heaven", and a rebellion is acceptable. But a parent who is oppressive must still be revered" (Carpenter, 1996: 504). For the worker, the advance of neoliberal capital also means the demise of economic securities emerging from kinship networks, and international business can undo the security of social relations in violent ways as conflicts ensue to appropriate important natural resources (Ayres, 2012). With the advance of contractualisation of work and privatisation, Amar Kaka's ability to obtain jobs for those in need within his kinship network, is also going to diminish.

International business structures inequality and exclusion by introducing an interesting play on luck in the funeralsque. International business is importantly present during the restructuring of state and acceptance of neoliberal structural adjustment programs (Peet, 2003). This is the structuring of the funeral of the welfare provisions of the state (Stiglitz, 2003), and the introduction of marketisation of life. In these market forms of life, luck takes the form of risk, and the distribution and management of risk becomes important to generate superior returns on investment and overcome avoidable damages (Kaplan and Mikes, 2012). Thus, the locally situated mehndi company or the job in the municipal corporation is not risky enough, and therefore cannot make claims to international aspirations like the cola corporation which has mastered the craft of integrating risks of supply chains, market demand and consumer taste. While locally situated, luck networks of labour process are also exploitative, they differ in logic from the risk networks of international business in terms of the operationalisation of the funeralsque.

While luck implies that fortunes can rise and fall, and that after the staging of the funeral, some subjects can become lucky in obtaining a higher share of the social produce than was expected, risk implies that there can be no arbitrary accidents in the redistribution of wealth after a funeral, and even risks which are external to an entity and beyond its control can be simulated using techniques such as war gaming and scenario analysis (Kaplan and Mikes, 2012). No one can get lucky. There can only be errors of calculation, and models need to be rebuilt based on the appropriate empirical analysis of earlier miscalculations, as open and explicit discussions can lead to more effective strategy formulations (Kaplan and Mikes, 2012). Thus, while luck informs

the employment of Rahim's son by the mehndi company, risk informs the employment of Rajesh by the cola corporation. For most transnational corporations, employees are constituted as risks, and thus a great deal of attention is paid to the study of deviance and other withdrawal behaviours (Liu and Ding, 2012).

In this analysis, alienation is not an outcome of the contradictions of social relations of production (Marx, 1844), but a risk of employees not being productive enough inside corporations. Therefore, organisations need to be renewed and low performing or less emotionally intelligent employees who are not able to cope with their own exploitation (see Jordan, Ashkanasy and Hartel, 2002), need to be weeded out. Organisational renewal is closely associated with the hygiene metaphor where the weak need to be weeded out (Stokes and Gabriel, 2010). Modernity is thus complicit with the ancient and the barbaric, as race, caste and other ethnic inequalities are precisely premised around the illusions of the hygiene metaphor (Bauman, 1989).

What happens to the injustices perpetrated by a chieftain in his fiefdom after he is cremated? The spectacle of the funeral acts to undo the injustices that the chieftain has perpetrated during his life, and the vicarious amusement that is incorporated into the enacted bereavement of the funeral (Sanders, 2009) funnels several contradictions. The spectacle of the funeral is the apology for all the wrongs the chieftain has committed, by dying, the oppressor has liberated himself from the violence he perpetrated, and the amusement involved in the spectacular funeral of the oppressor "has little lasting social value or depth but serves as a diversion or a source of fleeting entertainment" (Sanders, 2009: 449). The funeral demands the normal act of mourning, and it is bad manners to rejoice at the death of the oppressor, and in the transformation of the funeral into the "festivalized culture" (Wynn, 2005: 402) of the spectacle, all memory of oppression is cajoled into the realm of amnesia. The oppressed are forced to participate in the apology of the funeralesque, and the body of the oppressor as a possible site of scorn, resentment and reparation of injustices is no longer available to the oppressed, and thus "funeral work ... grapples with the very thing ... we want most to deny, ignore, or overcome" (Sanders, 2009: 451).

Ironically, the funeral demands that the oppressed must themselves be apologetic for the death of the oppressor and join in mourning his death, and celebrating his life, and thus the funeralesque works against the need to point out the anti-human cruelty of the oppressor, and thereby dethrone regimes of oppression (Egya, 2011). The coalition of right wing cultural-nationalism/communalism with international business is evident in the enthusiasm with which business groups heralded the coronation of Narendra Modi as the prime minister of the country ('CEO confidence survey', 2013). This coronation is likely to be the funeral of social democracy in India, as neoliberal economic policies have been posed against several progressive schemes such as the national rural employment guarantee scheme and food security legislations (Bhalla, 2013). Things are unlikely to turn better for the workers in the crematorium. A strong Dalit and labour movement is awaited. Till then, the funeralesque marches on. The subversions of the funeralesque are still attempted by the politics of care embodied by workers like Rahim and Parvati. Such a politics of care has the potential to create collective resources and dialogue among the oppressed which can fuel resistance and change.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that the experience of workers on the margins of international business embodies the politics of the funerals. Drawing from the narratives of crematorium workers in India, we indicate how employment contracts structure precariousness for workers who help in sustaining the infrastructure of globalising cities. The narratives are staged within a broader right wing political capture of the state through a process of riots and violence against religious minorities. We argue that it is useful to pay attention to the political context of organisations as workers' experiences are structured through the construction of the organisations in broader political spaces. The violence inflicted against Muslims in Gujarat consolidated the power of the state enabling its neoliberal turn, as protests and opposition were minimised to a great extent.

Contractualisation of work and privatisation of the state in globalising cities creates insecurities for workers, as they are unable to contest employment contracts which pay abysmally low wages. The contractualisation of work is also enabled by reproducing Dalits within segregated Dalit spaces. For instance, social exclusion experienced by Dalit crematorium workers in our study meant that spaces outside the Dalit territory of the organisation became hostile sites, with the possibility of insult, humiliation or violence always being present. We argue that hostility, discrimination and violence based on identity projects such as caste are a mechanism for generating oppressed labouring subjects for neoliberal projects.

Funerals are also sites where territorial fiefdoms are renegotiated and hierarchies are normalised. By drawing on the material inequalities faced by workers in our study, such as lack of access to housing and a great sense of vulnerability, we argue that contractualisation of work embodies networks of value extraction. Value is extracted from marginal subjects such as crematorium workers and this value is then re-distributed as profits for corporations and infrastructure developed by the state for elites in globalising cities. Managerial control over the labour process of contract workers is increased to a great extent. At the same time, in the absence of collectivist discourses of struggle, protest and social change, workers internalise discourses of entrepreneurship and career mobility.

Funerals are sites where social networks are consolidated and exclusions are made explicit. Funerals are sites where political alliances are forged, business opportunities explored, and communicative spaces opened. International business, states and local polices forge alliances with each other as the wealth generated through the labour power of workers is usurped and redistributed. The structuring of deaths of minorities through riots also becomes the mechanism through which tyrants rise, demonstrating the violent capacities of the state and its subsequent usefulness for international business. At the same time, Dalit subjects like crematorium workers were systematically excluded from asserting a share in the value generated by them.

We also argue that modernity may not inexorably lead to elimination of oppressive Dalit identities. Modernity and liberal discourses of international business suggest that caste is not a reality that matters any longer, and all that matters is merit and competence. But the Dalit subject is assumed to be incompetent even before she is given an opportunity to demonstrate her skill, and thus the equality proposed by liberal-modernity is experienced as the violence of everyday

exclusion. However, funerals can also be sites of subversive mourning where resistance and solidarity are enacted. Funerals can also become a site where workers refuse to be normalised by discourses of capital, and engage with each other in a sense of care and justice, subverting discourses of individualism, competition and velocity. Several crematorium workers in our study demonstrated the ability to render solidarity to each other amidst deep traumas of individualisation enforced from marginalising frames of caste, religion and gender, thus keeping alive the possibility of resistance and subversion.

## Notes

1. In India, mandatory affirmative action quotas provided to Dalits are known as reservations. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are historically discriminated populations in India. In order to promote employment among these communities, 15% of the jobs in government organisations, and others funded by the government are reserved for applicants belonging to Scheduled Castes and 7.5% are reserved for applicants from Scheduled Tribes.
2. Rahim is referring to the riots that took place in Gujarat in 2002, in which several Muslims were killed following the burning of a train coach carrying Hindu passengers affiliated to right wing cultural-political organisations.
3. During the time of fieldwork in 2010, the exchange rate was forty five Indian rupees for one US dollar. In 2014, the exchange rate was approximately 60 Indian rupees for one US dollar.
4. A MLA or a Member of the Legislative Assembly is an elected legislator representing his/her constituency in state legislatures.
5. Under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, organised sector workers in India enjoy reasonable job security. In establishments employing more than 100 workers, prior approval of the government is required for retrenching even a single worker. Consequently, both public and private sector organisations use persuasion and coercive tactics asking employees to accept voluntary retirement schemes against some lump-sum payments.
6. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 prohibits use of derogatory language, abuse, violence and intimidation of members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While the Act envisages stringent investigative and punitive measures, conviction rates continue to remain very low. Despite dismal conviction records, a strand of discourse has argued that the Act is often misused leading to difficulties in disciplining Dalit employees in public sector organisations.
7. Kaka means paternal uncle in Gujarati and Hindi.
8. Mehndi is a paste made from traditional ingredients, used for making tattoo like designs on the palm and hands.
9. Goa is a popular tourist destination on the western coast of India.

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