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## **Making a Living in Urban India: A Photo Essay**

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*A photo essay on the struggles of Indians in cities and towns for existence and dignity as they negotiate their lives every day.*

The accelerated insertion of India into the structures of global neoliberal capitalism and the lack of a substantive redistribution of resources together fuel the increasing informalization and precarity of work and employment. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the slums and homelessness that were previously associated mainly with the large metropolitan centres of India are now a pervasive and permanent feature of the smaller cities and towns too. Uprooted from the rural areas, those who flock to the urban locales hope to eke out a living of sorts and survive against all odds in the precarious informal sectors.





The aftermath of the sudden announcement of the Covid lockdown in 2020 with its four-hour deadline to pack up and leave for where they came from, provided searing, horrific visual reminders of the millions who, who had somehow come to terms with precarity, suddenly and not for the first time, had their worlds turned upside down (Tarangini and Nitya, 2020; Patel, 2020; Baxi, 2020; Roy, Subramanian and Vandewalle, 2020; Kapoor, 2020).





Although the images here (shot during 2008-2016) are from the pre-Covid period, they represent attempts to document the ongoing struggles of Indians for existence and dignity as they, as active agents, negotiate their lives, and livelihoods within the very real constraints of the structures, ideologies and cultures of global and glocal neoliberal capitalism.





The woman who, with other family members, walks a few kilometres a day to buy dried fruits and nuts that she later sells on the pavement. The exhausted rickshaw puller who takes a break to catch up on sleep in the searing heat. The woman selling flowers, just outside her dwelling, for the local temple. The father and son selling meals to those eking out a living on the streets. The young girl who performs – as part of a troupe - acrobatic tricks in a park etc.



More details could of course be provided to narrativize and contextualize each image. However, narratives – and indeed images too – even while illuminating the contexts, can also oversimplify the complexities of the multifaceted modes of existence and survival strategies of real human agents in an everchanging world. And as the great photographer/sociologist of labour Lewis Hine quipped, “if I could tell the story in words, I wouldn’t need to lug around a camera”.





As Fanon (1963:98) put it, “The fundamental duel which seemed to be that between colonialism and anti-colonialism, and indeed between capitalism and socialism, is already losing some of its importance. What counts today, the question which is looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity must reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it.”

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#### **Footnotes:**

**1** For the uninitiated, 22 Indian languages are officially recognised and listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. These 22 languages—along with English—have statutory recognition at the national level, with Hindi and English qualifying as associate official [not national] languages.

**1** Evidence of which can be found in the work of the Asia Safe Abortion Partnership, the CommonHealth network, Population Council, and several other SRHR NGOs and researchers.

**1** India, whose claims to build out some of the remaining coal consumption might be considered better than many other countries, however, is repeatedly taking up the position of global villain in this context. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58982445> and <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/india-proposes-new-wording-phasing-coal-down-not-out-2021-11-13/>

**2** A wide range of commentators beyond fossil fuel lobbies hold that some Carbon Dioxide removal will be necessary – given the technological possibilities, however, the best approach is to restrict this to the few areas where CO<sub>2</sub> emissions truly hard to mitigate – the manufacture of cement, plastics, air-travel and emissions related to nitrogenous GHGs emitted for agricultural fertilizers. In these sectors, the argument goes, Carbon Dioxide Removal ought to go hand in hand with efforts to minimize GHG emissions through other mechanisms – managing demand, best practices. In one expert calculation the total extent of emissions from these areas 1.5-3.1 Gt of CO<sub>2</sub>eq. <https://cdrprimer.org/read/chapter-1>

**3** It's telling that, in the scientific literature some models assume as much as 29 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>eq per year will be mitigated through CCS (cited in <https://cdrprimer.org/read/chapter-1>). WG3R anticipates a rate somewhere in the realm of 5.75 GtCO<sub>2</sub>eq. (TS 5.7).



**1** However, the change in the new ICLS concept of employment to include only work that is done for pay or profit creates a discontinuity between it and the SNA. The SNA is currently undergoing revision and it may well result in alignment with the new standard of employment.

**2** The ILO is now testing how to implement the criteria that household production should mainly be for sale to be considered as employment. One doubts that time use surveys can tell us much about this.

**1** A brief mention of such schools and ashrams is to be found in P. C. Ray Chaudhuri's 1955 account, *Gandhiji's First Struggle in India*. The provincial government of Bihar, in 1949 established a chain of basic schools, *Buniyadi Vidyalaya*, which was to actualise the goals set in the *Wardha Scheme of 1937*. The schools still exist across Bihar, but they have hardly ever showed any commitment towards their goals and objectives. This aspect still has to be studied in detail. The Urdu memoir, *Aashram*, by Shakeelur Rahman (1931-2016) tells us about the competitive communalisation and growth of Muslim separatist forces in Motihari in the late colonial era. [https://www.academia.edu/20096763/Aashram\\_of\\_a\\_Lifetime\\_The\\_Hindu\\_On\\_Shakeelur\\_Rehman\\_s\\_Urdu\\_Autobiography](https://www.academia.edu/20096763/Aashram_of_a_Lifetime_The_Hindu_On_Shakeelur_Rehman_s_Urdu_Autobiography)

**1** The lithotomy position is one in which a woman in labour lies on her back with her legs up, supported by straps or stirrups. Although nurses and doctors often find the lithotomy or supine (on one's back) positions convenient when attending births, research suggests that pushing in the upright position is more effective, especially for first-time mothers (Kilpatrick and Garrison 2012).

**2** In 2017, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India, launched the Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative (LaQshya). One of the main stated aims of the LaQshya guideline is to enhance the satisfaction of beneficiaries by ensuring "Respectful Maternity Care" (RMC) at public health facilities.

**1** I shall refer to what I am writing a review article of as *The Book*, in the sequel (mostly).

**2** As Anwar shaikh is about to retire after almost half-a-century of teaching and guidance of students, at the Graduate school of NSSR, the authorities have named him the University in Exile Professor. It must be remembered that NSSR was founded as refuge for those who were fleeing Nazi persecution as a University for Exiles; so, it is a prestigious named Chair.

**3** Simon's straddles economics and management, just as Debreu does economics and (classical) mathematics; Sraffa does as Debreu, but his formalisations and proofs are in terms of constructive mathematics.

**4** None, except Sraffa (op.cit.) are mentioned in the copious reference list in *The Book*; Shaikh's book, in considering imaginatively, a view of the development of capitalist dynamics based on a critical interpretation of classical economics, is closest theoretically to the 'classics' by Robinson and Sraffa – both of which are theoretical with arithmetical examples. Shaikh augments his theoretical and arithmetic arguments with statistical estimations of observable phenomena; it is, therefore, a fact based theory, rather than the other way about – and, in this sense, a refreshing 'classic' (like Taylor's).

**5** I was privileged to receive, from Joan Robinson or Richard Goodwin (unfortunately, I don't remember exactly, except that it was in Cambridge, in 1974) the manuscript version of Shaikh, 1974. But I must confess that my reading of it was based on an insufficient knowledge of capital theory at that time.

**6** Shaikh mentions, in passing, that Pareto is a 'compatriot' of Piketty! Is it because of the Pareto distribution (of property income) 'noted for France in 1897' (p. 757); for Pareto was neither Piketty's countryman nor was he employed in France – but he was born in Paris (which Piketty was not)!

**7** Kitchin, Juglar – not by name – Kondratieff (long waves) are referred to as inventory, (conventional) business and price cycles.

**8** Harrod never got the proper title of the GT, even in the reprint of the trade cycle book – let alone in the 1936 original! He was woefully ignorant of Poincaré, Birkhoff (the elder and, therefore, of ergodic vs. deterministic dynamical systems) and even le Corbeiller's article in volume 1 of the *Econometrica*, although he was a Fellow of the Econometric Society from 1951. Shaikh's knowledge of ergodicity is due to Davidson (p. 446), whose view of the foundations of probability, on which he superimposes his incorrect vision of ergodicity, is fallacious.

**9** Footnote 10 on p. 351, is illuminating as the source of Shaikh's view of Austrian theory of competition, but I could not find any theory of market process or markets, defined with possibilities of statistical estimation and tests of observable facts.

**10** In addition, it is a ‘long-term’ model – but it can be adjusted to fit ‘short-term’ variables, as well – and the Say’s Law assumption can also be relaxed.

**11** The ‘later’ Weyl – but he was a successor of Hilbert, in Göttingen (before the evils of Nazism caught up with him and he moved to the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton) and wrote a celebrated memoir of Hilbert on his death. The ‘earlier’ Weyl was an uncompromising follower of Brouwer!

**12** My pantheon of eminent mathematical economists consists of Richard Goodwin, Herbert Simon, John Hicks, John McCall, Robert Clower, Hukukane Nikaido, Duncan Foley and Ali Khan. I class Piero Sraffa as an eminent philosopher-economist. Those who have influenced me though not to the point of emulation are (chronologically) Björn Thalberg, Geoff Harcourt, Guglielmo Chiodi, Tony Lawson, Stefano Zambelli, Wynne Godley, Shu-Heng Chen, Francesco Luna, Jayati Ghosh, Ragupathy Venkatachalam and Lance Taylor.

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