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July 2007 Conference on Capital and Poverty

Informal Agricultural Work, Habitus and Practices in an Indian Context

Abstract

This paper examines recent employment practices among 39 families of Rayalaseema area of Andhra Pradesh. A social class analysis offers a starting point for the study of employment contracts. Employment practices are diverse, but the habitus of the employers and employees sometimes clashes with their practices. Resolving this paradox requires recognising that action is not deterministically caused; there is a structure-agency dynamic. The transformational model of social action (see Kalpagam or Bhaskar) offers a broad framework for studying variations in real practices. Five persons' case studies are offered. We utilise evidence that is available for re-analysis in our q-squared database (see <http://www.q-squared.ca/> for a general introduction; and www.ruralvisits.org for full details, music and photos, and some findings). Practices of manipulation, threat/reward, and secret power are used to empower different types of agents. By adding a structural analysis of dominant patterns, we find that particular divergences from predicted behaviours are very telling. Both semi-structured and structured interviews were used to learn about the situation.

In this context the Employment Guarantee Scheme has created extra local paid work. It pays equal wages for men and women. The strategic and middle-term effects of the scheme are hard to predict. Because of the emergent effects of EGS, new labour market patterns are to be expected in this area. The area already has a history of high women's labour-force involvement, and women are also strongly encouraged to engage in cow-owning using local micro-finance. Therefore further innovations in labour relations of the rural capitalism are to be expected.

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to J. Rangaswamy, Vincent Ortet, D. Aktawala, and K. Tejokiran for their help in producing the data set from which this paper is being written. We take responsibility for the ideas and interpretations carried herein though.

JEL Keywords

B5, O17, O12, O53

In this paper we have used pseudonyms. The NVIVO dataset is being put in the public domain as part of the ESRC Qualidata archive. Please contact us if you want to see the anonymised dataset.

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What is referred to as 'gender analysis' tends to be limited to a deconstruction of what men and women do in society, rather than a more sophisticated exploration of the axes of inequality and exclusion, including such factors as class, caste, age, education, ownership of resources, and, significantly, individual agency and the willingness (or otherwise) to conform. Overemphasis on women distorts the social and political realities facing men and women alike as they struggle, often together, to maintain their livelihoods and secure a future for their children.

Green, 2002: 63.

Any examination of female laborers forces the investigator to take into account the wider political, social and economic implications of economic development.

Mencher, 1988: 199.

The choices of the habitus . . . are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint. . . *Intimidation*, a symbolic violence . . . can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus [*sic*]) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it.

Bourdieu, 1991: 51.

. . . in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have. . . an 'invisible' power.

Thompson, 1991: 23, introducing Bourdieu's book *Language and Symbolic Power*.

The freedom of Indian rural workers and farmers is constrained by a number of factors including climate, property institutions, and certain people's limited assets. But is Bourdieu right to suspect that powerful forces exert invisible power over poor people? Can this analysis be transposed to a rural Indian context? This paper takes up this challenge in a small and exploratory way.

A respectful and useful way of doing research about the rural workers involves recognising their own ideals and evaluations as well as studying their decisions and the strategies they use in daily life – as Green suggests above. We aim here to describe several case studies of labourers' decision-making; a web-site based on our research study also promotes wide dissemination of an understanding of the situation (www.ruralvisits.org). The decisions the farmers and workers make under tough conditions deserve our appreciation as well as critical analysis. They are both individual decisions and structurally influenced decisions, as Mencher hints in her quote above. Indeed, by exploring the reasons for particular decisions, a rural sociologist can contribute to public understanding of the causes of social change. In the last section of the paper we apply what we have learned to the policy area of Rural Employment Guarantee System. (EGS) By doing so we show great practical relevance for our transdisciplinary approach to workers' strategies.

The theory that we've been developing is crafted in an original way using building blocks from three areas of social theory – summarised in sections 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 respectively concerning transformation, practices, and habitus (see also Olsen, *AJSS*, 2007 forthcoming). However, the result is not just a sociological theory. Instead it is a pluralist, transdisciplinary, and transposable approach to working out why things evolve the way they do. The learning that results from empirical studies of this kind is directly applicable in policy contexts. For example, a policy practitioner may decide to advocate a particular vision such as equal wages by gender, or social microcredit. Or they may focus on loosening a specific constraint to help poor people, or may publicise and protect a morally valued institutional innovation such as women renting land in. An example of the latter is found in Agarwal (2002 Seeds, 2003). Some writings by Agarwal – a feminist economist – illustrate the potential for social economics which we are pursuing here. Thus the value of this paper is not just that it offers

five microcase studies, but that it offers a methodology for rural studies that can effectively contribute to rural development. This is part of a larger project on pluralism across disciplines, which is described in earlier papers (Olsen, 2006, 2007).

1. Rationale, Aims, and Background

In India a shrinking but still substantial number of rural people rent land (Olsen, 2006). As tenants, their families divide their time between unpaid domestic work, tenancy work, other informal sector work and paid work. Young people also have to decide whether to stay in formal education or to exit schooling in order to work more hours. Poverty influences many of these people, although not all tenants are poor. Approximately 15% of rural people are in tenant households, and 8% of the land is rented at any one time (1999 national data). A recent policy shift establishes Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes for 200 districts (later to be rolled out to all rural districts), but this change has not taken into account alternative forms of employment including tenancy as a potential source of income for poor people. Arguments among specialists (e.g. Agarwal, 2003; Jackson, 2003) suggest that women may be a target group deserving to be encouraged to grow crops on rented land, and this debate will be competing with the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme discussions over the next 5 years in India. Other countries with large rural sectors will be watching to see which policy (labour guarantee, or encouragement to increase access to land) is more effective in the Indian test case.

Decisions made by tenants are bound to reflect a mixture of background factors. A realist model of the causal factors would note the contextual factors, major mechanisms (including

choices) and the outcomes that result. This project is not about choosing to rent land, but rather about a variety of other choices that arise in the context of doing farming on the land.

Theoretical models of decision-making for such people are of three main types. In economics the models tend to portray ideal-typical households with idealized people in them, and then to fit survey data to these models (Besley, 1995). The new home economics is a typical approach used in economics (Skoufias, 1995). New institutionalism is a variant of neoclassical theorizing which recognize some details of the context within which the choice of contracts takes place (Genicot, 2002). In political economy the models are more class-based and broad-brush, and tend to assume that the people of one social class act in ways consistent with the motives and interests of that class (Bhaduri, 1973, 1983). In political economy models one recognizes primarily the structural constraints that exist for people in the poorer social classes. Already we can see in the economic literature a diversity ranging from the methodological individualist to the collectivist. A third set of models promoted by some feminists see the household's outcomes as a result of interpersonal bargaining (Agarwal, 2003).

These models are not meant to be mutually exclusive, since they may all really apply in a given situation. In the present research however a more retroductive question is being asked: what are the mental models that people use when they actually make decisions? How do these cognitive or habitual approaches vary from person to person; are there patterns or types or styles? Do people's practices reflect their *habitus* and practical habits, as Bourdieu would suggest (Bourdieu, 1999; Bourdieu and Nice apply this framework to poverty in France), or is there a point where conscious diversion from habit takes over? These sorts of retroductive questions were asked by Margaret Archer in a qualitative realist study of 20 British

respondents (2003; see also Archer, 2000). Is there any cross-cultural transposability for the Transformative Model of Social Action that Archer and Bhaskar have promoted? (see Bhaskar, PON, 1989, and sections extracted in Archer, et al., eds., 1998). In India, the tenant often combines working on rented land with several other occupations, mostly informal but also including paid casual labour or formal salaried employment. So this paper looks at the labouring decisions of tenants – including those who would like to be tenants, and those who used to be tenants – in a village setting.

1.1 Practical Plan of the Interviews

By looking at the work outcomes and asking ‘why and how do these outcomes emerge’, we want to look into the processes that lead to the work outcomes. Retroduction is used to ask ‘why and how have these observed data come about’ (Danermark, 2001; Olsen, 2004). Retroducing from the secondary data will require qualitative data, and a small scope is planned for this initial foray. 39 interviews covering a range of types of people, often in the same household (see methods below) were planned, conducted in Telugu, transcribed into Telugu and English, and analysed in detail. Using translators and sub-contractors with substantial research experience in Telugu language, we arranged for each interviewer to explore these sorts of questions:

Were there any doubts about decisions that were made about the renting of land?

How and when was the crop choice made last time, for putting crops on the tenanted land?

Basically why do you rent land? (or why do you not want to, if you have doubts about renting it?)

In your household do you have discussions about who goes out to work and when? Describe these

Is anyone doing regular unpaid work for the landlord, and please describe the situation.

Why do they do this work?

Think of a situation when someone wanted to do kuulie [casual paid] work, and there was a disagreement about it. Tell me about that.

Think of a situation where it is routine to do kuulie work. Tell us who decides about that.

Describe an argument someone had about the payment for either kuulie work, or the land rental share or 'gutta' rate.

Why? Why? Who? Where? How was it resolved?

Describe another please.

The interview was planned to end with the following questions, which were asked of all respondents and draw out aspects of household strategy beyond the tenancy itself:

What is the most outstanding legal case you can think of? -- especially in your family if any. Was there ever a threat of a legal case in your family? Who promoted the idea of a legal case, and what happened? What did wife/husband/parents think of the idea. Discuss.

When did your family last have a quarrel. What was it about. Tell us who took what position.

When did you decide to have a child in this family leave school [the most recent departure from school – it could be respondent her/himself]. Who took what position in making this decision? Was there any disagreement, and who said what?

Describe the view of the child about leaving school at that age. (What age? To do what? Is the child available to comment?) Do your children work? Why? Why not? Doing what? Explain the pros and cons of having them do specific kinds of work.

End.

Thus through semi-structured interviews in Telugu, carried out by a team described in detail below, we hoped to explore the rationales for various past decisions.

I will spell out in more detail our expectations and research question, which were grounded in some questions of social theory as applied to rural south India.

1.2 Applying a Transformational Model of Social Action

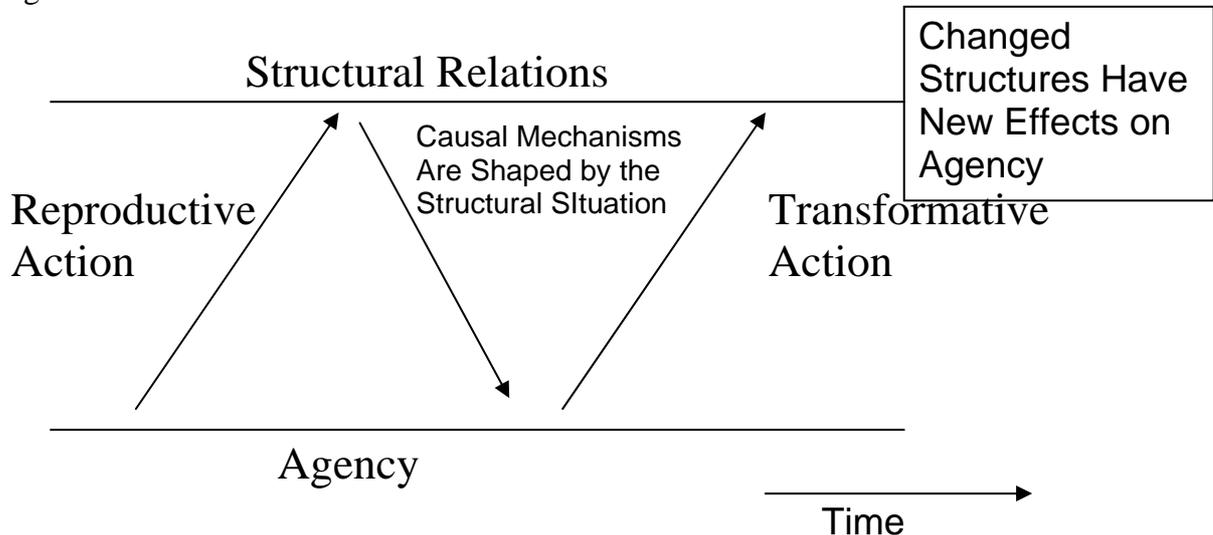
The interview material was meant to be used in the context of a transformational structure-agency model. In social theory structures are looked at as being 'more than the sum of their

parts', i.e. holistically. Some theorists also think structures have causal powers, although this point is best expressed more carefully. For instance, social norms cause people to tend to conform in the context of structures in which the norms are enforced (Elder-Vass, various). To look at structures and structural change a pair of questionnaires were used (dated 1995 and 2006). Central structures in the villages include caste, class, religious groupings and the gender order. However in the Transformational Model of Social Action (TMSA) (Figure 1), agents are not seen as simply driven by either habits or conformity with social norms. If they were, people would be 'dupes', unthinking. Instead, we see agency as the potential to act in a variety of ways, and the capacity to choose how to act. Agency occurs within given historical circumstances, so 'time' appears as a unique horizontal dimension in Figure 1. But agency is real and agents do make choices. The discussion about this has included questions about structural constraints, addressing the difference between action and agency, and attempting to understand morphogenetic agency (see Archer, 2003, for a review). Kalpagam (1994) illustrates the TMSA from a Marxist viewpoint for an Indian policy perspective. Kalpagam's work is consistent with the optimistic focus on agency found in Kabeer and other Gender and Development authors (Kabeer, 1995). Thus, we have the question: what changes society? Who does it? Who are the agents? And we, as researchers, are unwilling to invoke an atomistic conception of merely 'people' as agents. Agents include other actors such as married couples, NGOs, and panchayats.

In the TMSA approach, the capacity of an agent to act is partly constrained by structures, but the interaction takes place in an open-systems context. The system is organically changed. The TMSA offers some grounding assumptions – a depth ontology – for social research. There are still aspects of TMSA which need to be explored however. Alternatives to the TMSA include social constructivism, grounded theory as offering a factual mode of discovery,

and the epistemology of social power. Readers will want to consider whether these are more, or less, convincing than the realist story that is developed herewith.

Figure 1: Transformational Model of Social Action



Source: Adapted from Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 1998 (orig 1979), also found extracted in Archer, et al., eds., 1998: 217; Archer's modified version is in Archer, ed. 1998: 373. The original reads 'Society' at top. See also Kalpagam, 1994.

1.3 Theory of Practices

Besides the TMSA we also rest some of our interpretation on a theory of practices that is found in Bourdieu (1990), Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2001). The ontological content of the theory of practices is a focus on their social nature. In the work of Bourdieu, practices emerged as an important locus of attention as he was battling against excessive individualism. In later work by Reckwitz (2002), the concept of a practice is unpicked and shown to have several dimensions. These are summarized by Warde (2005) as expertise, value and status. That is, each social practice reflect specific knowledge and the people who engage in the practice develop expertise; good performance of the practice is valued and this is an intrinsic value, whether or not the practice is appreciated by others; and finally some practices have high social status. The important thing about this debate is to recognize that an individual cannot reverse the high or low social status attached to a practice. The reality of the social

causes it to resist our resistance. Olsen argues, however, that a distinction needs to be made between the meaning of a practice in general as a social norm and the meaning of a practice when it is used as part of a strategy for social change. As part of a strategy, a single practice could have a different meaning from its normal/normative meaning. An example to illustrate this comes in the history of tenancy where it is widely recognized that sharecropping takes a similar form in different countries and regions, but that its meaning is negotiated between two parties who differ from place to place in their intentions. Robertson (1987) compares sharecropping in six countries and overtime in order to show that this social practice takes on many complex and varied meanings in different contexts. In recent years, the close theorizing about practices has drawn attention to the need for a depth ontology. We are now exploring the interactions between the person, the family, and the social practices. Our findings resist broad generalizations about sharecropping. The concept of practices is still useful however.

1.4 Theory of Habitus – and a Research Question

Finally, as a building block of theory we are also using Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, a socialized subjectivity upon which everyone draws when deciding how to act. According to Bourdieu, one draws upon the existing social practices and meanings as norms which are known to all even if this is done tacitly. A cognitive recognition of the detail is not necessary. The meaning of the word habitus is not only that we draw upon social norms, but that we embody these norms in daily habits and thus an individual carries with them the dominant social practices. In this way, Bourdieu was actively opposing the rational choice approach to interpreting human action. He opposed it as subjectivist and cognitivist, and by comparison Bourdieu is a realist and a sociologist. However, he may have gone too far by generalizing

about social norms as if they all enforce the power of dominant groups. Let us look for a moment at Bourdieu's presentation of his position.

The choices of the habitus . . . are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint. The propensity to reduce the search for causes to a search for responsibilities [i.e. reasons of actors] makes it impossible to see that *intimidation*, a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies no *act of intimidation*) can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus [*sic*]) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it. It is already partly true to say that the cause of the timidity lies in the relation between the situation or the intimidating person (who may deny any intimidating intention) and the person intimidated, or rather, between the social conditions of production of each of them. And little by little, one has to take account thereby of the whole social structure.

Bourdieu, 1991: 51.

On the one hand, we wish to approve of Bourdieu's focus on the implicit, shared, hidden nature of the social norms which underpin most practices. Consciousness as a realm of cognitive acts and feelings is not necessary for action to be underpinned by prior practices. Thus, we can react quickly in appropriate ways when hit or insulted. In the extract above, Bourdieu uses the phrase "in his habitus" which seems to imply that each individual has a

different habitus depending on the intersection of the social structures and context in which he or she lives. Perhaps Bourdieu means that each individual is unique but still socialised.

On the other hand, we might question the concept of a personalised habitus because if we can identify a social location we should be able to understand the social norms which are dominant for people in that location. The norms are not personal at all. Thus we might have the habitus of a worker without land who has very little social capital and cannot speak English. For example, we would expect them to dress in typical ways and to work without shoes in the rice fields. Our concept of what is typical might match what is socially acceptable. Bourdieu focuses on the dominant class behaviours and the matching conformist behaviours of working class and petty bourgeois people in his research. The habitus that he describes for the intimidated person is broadly that of a worker with very few assets who perhaps is socially excluded. Bourdieu conducted a close analysis of the imposition of the dominant language as a form of symbolic violence against such people. He found that intimidation was deeply rooted in the nuances and connotations implied by language in use. In the Indian villages similar practices create a superiority for those who can speak English or Hindi. Furthermore, in Telugu there are two variations of the language across the whole state: a popular version which is considered crude (*prakruti*), and a formal version which is taught in schools and used in prose and fiction (*vikruti*). Many villagers cannot speak in the formal version. Thus Bourdieu's theory is consistent with a huge range of dominating behaviours of the elite classes and castes.

Thompson summarises the situation at a theoretical level

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In taking for granted certain aspects of established hierarchies even when overtly rejecting dominant modes of speech, individuals from lower-class backgrounds betray the fact that they share, to some extent, a system of evaluation which works against them. This is an example of a general phenomenon with which Bourdieu is concerned throughout his writings, and which he describes as 'symbolic power' (or, in some cases, as 'symbolic violence'). . . . to refer not so much to a specific type of power, but rather to an aspect of most forms of power as they are routinely deployed in daily life. For in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form. . .

Thompson, 1991: 23.

A problem with this interpretation is that we risk attributing either power or intimidation to all behaviours. It is difficult to recognize social struggle and the norms for practicing resistance in the village if we assume that all behaviours contribute to the power of the elites. We will use the case study material to explore ways in which resistance occurs and whether it is associated with the dominant habitus or with something else.

The specific research question that arises, in connection with the village tenants and other workers who wish to be tenants, *is whether they can deviate from the social norms of tenancy and agricultural labour; can they influence the social norms or create their own, for instance?* We had originally spelt out this research question in terms of choice vs. constraint (the usual division between schools in economics being neoclassical economists who interpret

everything as optimal choices, versus the Indian structuralist Marxists who interpret most outcomes broadly as increasing the power of elite social classes and thus reflecting the constraints on workers' power). In between choice and constraint, we felt, there is a range of behaviour in which people choose to challenge their constraints. We have tried to open up an exploration here of *how* they do that. This turns out to be a rich terrain for research although there is also considerable evidence in our case studies that Bourdieu was also right about the dominant habitus being a known set of social norms which construct what is considered to be good or acceptable behaviours.

The rest of the paper engages in the presentation and analysis of case study data that illustrates our exploration of this research question.

2 Methodology, Data, and Methods

The methodology used here was described in an earlier paper (Olsen, 2006) as realist and methodological pluralist. In practice that means a commitment to qualitative research along with examining secondary data and using questionnaires to examine structural patterns. Method is thus the integrated mixed methods approach advocated in development studies under the rubric of Q-Squared (see <http://www.q-squared.ca/> for a general introduction; and www.ruralvisits.org for full details, music and photos). The research design is spelt out in more detail in our website.

The village venue is two contiguous villages of Ramasamudram Taluk of Chittoor District, southern Andhra Pradesh, India. These villages were surveyed in 1994/5 by Uma Rani and Wendy Olsen. They have over 500 households each, of which 60 each were selected for the

1994/5 DFID funded research. At that time, Uma Rani conducted nearly all the questionnaire-based interviews. Then Wendy Olsen conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with women in Telugu. From the 120 households sampled in 1994, there were at that time 35 tenant households. Of these, about half also held some land of their own. Many were poor, although not as poor as some of the landless non-tenant families.

39 interviews were conducted of which 32 were with people who had been in the previous survey. The interviews have been translated, typed, then anonymised and are being deposited into the ESRC QualiData Archive. Verbal consent has been obtained for this use of the data, and for writing up the results by quoting respondents using pseudonyms. The qualitative data are linked by ID number to existing survey data from 1994/5 (ESRC Study Number 3927).

The table below indicates the selection of interview respondents from among the people who were in the original 1994 and 2006 surveys. Based on ensuring contrasts between land holding / landless, high and low caste, and roughly equal representation of the two villages, we started with a plan of respondents shown in table 1. However, as usual in qualitative research some expansion took place so that we could interview interesting people and compensate for the difficulties we had in reaching some of the original chosen respondents. The interview sample is not a random sample but it does contain people from many levels of the social hierarchy. Further details are given in appendix 1. A social mobility analysis is available online (www.ruralvisits.org) showing that there has been little mobility for most families since 1994 and the mobility tends to be downward.

Table 1: Caste, Land Ownership, Land Rental and Gender of the Initial Respondents Selected

	YETAVAKILI	MINIKI	
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	Men	Women	Men	Women	Total
1. Own land, no rent-in/-out	BC, OC,	OC, OC	OC, OC	SC, SC	8
2. Own land, lease-in	OC, SC	OC, SC, SC	SC	BC, OC	8
3. Own land, lease-out	SC	OC, OC	OC, OC	OC	6
4. No land, no tenancy	SC	M, SC,	SC	SC, SC	5
5.No land, lease-in	OC	OC, BC	BC		4
Total: 32	7	11	7	7	32

* M = muslim. OC – Other castes. SC – Scheduled castes, ie dalit people. BC – People of the so-called “Backward” castes.

A final point about methodology is that we explicitly try to take into account of the explanatory claims of all five main schools which have written about agricultural labour and tenancy. These schools include neoclassical economic, new institutionalist economics, Marxism, feminism in the form of our Gender and Development school, and finally a formalized version of political economy associated with K. Basu. Details of the comparison and critique of the schools are provided separately.

3. Findings

The case studies that follow in the subsections 3.1 to 3.3 arise from close study at the two end-points of the twelve-year period 1994-2006, and are rooted in the mixed-methods data that can be re-examined using the Qualidata Archive of the UK ESRC. In each case, the methodology used is grounded theory with an additional critique of the social relations that structure ongoing interactions and institutions. This critique arises in critical realism, as well as in critical social science, and raises some serious epistemological problems (i.e. one might ask us, ‘How do you *know* that this is the right critique to raise?’ The validity of our ongoing

critique might thus be questioned as soon as we depart from a mere description or repetition of what we were told was happening.

Our guide in these instances has been to try to understand the social relations not only from inside, as in grounded theory, but also from outside in the way that a structuralist can see patterns overall which are not necessarily either visible or easy to know from within a social system. We'll explain as we go along that it is difficult to raise a social critique from within a social system; this difficulty which is due to 'deep constraints' was explained by Bourdieu, who warns that people will claim to be autonomous even when they are participating in their own intimidation. Such ambiguities arise even in the first case study.

The case studies are listed below in brief:

3.1 studies the deep constraints experienced by poor worker families, specifically referring to Gopal and Girija, who in spite of a hugely pauperised background does keep trying to obtain some land. We notice that *honour* is very important to these village proletarians.

3.2 studies the capacity of Sita and her husband to threaten and negotiate with the employers of daily casual wage labour. Sita and her husband achieve both dignity and honour in an ongoing dialectic of bargaining, negotiation, compromise and symbolic ritual worship.

3.3 focuses on raising cows as an activity currently growing among *women*, which illustrates the secret sources of power that women have. By getting a cow – which Mangamma and Sita along with many many other women have done in recent years – the female gendered people are able to attack two deep constraints at once: their class situation and their lack of autonomy within the household. 3.3 is a focus on patriarchy and its opponents whose strategies are very canny. Rathamma's case study is used to illustrate. In our study villages we noticed a cow oversupply crisis arising from the aspiration paradox that Bourdieu describes so well in *Social Structures of the Economy* (2005). Let us begin our journey of transposable understandings.

3.1 *The Inherent Limitations (Constraints) Structured by the Class Structure*

The workers without land gave us numerous examples of people being forced by circumstances to join in work in ways that they felt were very poorly paid, or even unpaid.

Workers were also made to work when they do not want to work. These behaviours are

outcomes that result from the deep structuring of their lives through class relations and specifically their lack of other assets besides their bodies. We argue that the landless workers *tend to be limited* in their capacity to object to low pay; this deep constraint is caused by their economic poverty and social exclusion.¹ Our first case study illustrates this dilemma using evidence from a couple who wish to be tenants, but are not currently renting in land.

Case 1: Landless Workers Gopal and Girija and Their Two Children. They live in Yetavaakili, the more commercialised village, in the Indira colony (i.e. a dalit hamlet). Their caste is dalit and the male and female adults' ages are 45 and 38. They have a house built of stone for which they got both family and government financial support about 10 years ago. (They no longer needed their thatch hut then.) This married couple rented land for 20 years until up to six years ago. However they do not own land, and at this time their labouring includes about 20 days a month of casual daily paid wage labouring (*kuulie* work) for Gopal, cow-watching every day for Girija, and rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (locally called “drought works”) on a sporadic basis for the older boy child, age 18.

This couple live in a stone house and Gopal and Girija sat together telling the interviewer, Aktawalla, about their background. Her husband's father, she said, was a bonded labourer or permanent servant for a landlord family. Gopal and Girija describe how they try to resist the undesired control over their behaviour that is exerted by the landlords. In their talk, which is illustrated below, they refer to the landlord as their employer because in fact they do both

¹ Note that this is a tendency, not a deterministically operating causal mechanism. We can see evidence of the constraint being quite strong, durable and having powerful effects, but there are also countervailing mechanisms as we shall see in 3.2 and 3.3. In this paper ‘mechanism’ and ‘tendency’ are used almost interchangeably. A mechanism is the thing that tends to cause some outcome, and a tendency is the property of an object that makes it tend to be observed having that outcome. Thus a mechanism might be a social object such as a puja ritual, whereas a tendency is more a property of the religious person who observes the rite. These are ways of describing causality in a scientific realist way. The only difference vis a vis common sense speech is that (in the realist framework of assumptions) causes do not always produce their effects.

daily waged labour and sharecropping with that family. Thus the employer class is both managing tenants and also managing directly employed labour. This situation is usual in the area, hence the confusion at times between referring to a landlord (*bhuuswami*) and an employer (a word that has many translations in Telugu) or landowner or peasant (*ryot*). Gopal and Girija did not mention the rate of wages paid by employers today as being too low, but they do say that the terms and conditions faced by the permanent servants of the previous generation were just unacceptable. Dan Neff's notes following the interview stated that when they rented land, "the landlord provides the land, the water and they share the yield half/half, but the owner decides what to cultivate. They do unpaid labour for the landowner like washing clothes, feeding water to his crops or collecting firewood." In other words, Dan noticed, Girija was expected to do unpaid labour of various kinds, just as described in Tamil Nadu cases by Ramachandran (1990).

Let us examine their discussion in some detail:

Interview extract 1	CASE 1	Commentary
<p>A: Six years back you rented in land you know; did you do any free work for the landlord?</p> <p>Gopal: Yes I did . If we do that type of free work they will rent us their land.</p> <p>A : What type of work please do explain?</p> <p>Gopal: Visiting paddy fields, going to sugar cane fields at the time of sugar cane crushing while preparing <i>jaggery</i> [boiled sugar]. Doing work in the landlord farm, etc.</p> <p>Girija: That means sweeping their houses, washing dishes, and washing clothes. If we do all these type of work they will rent in land; otherwise they say that they will rent in land to some other person.</p> <p>Gopal: We have to do these type of bonded labour otherwise they will rent in land to others. Under these circumstances we will stop and attend to other <i>kuulie</i> work.</p> <p>A: That means if you do not do such free work</p>	<p>Sometimes the types of work being described as unpaid labour of a permanent servant are listed in a stylised way, as here. The man describes the male-stereotyped tasks; the woman describes the female-stereotyped tasks. Here, these are not tasks they are currently doing for their landlord, but which they did regularly up to 6 years ago.</p> <p>The phrase bonded labour has crept into the translation, but was expressed as '<i>works</i>' in Telugu. (<i>panulu</i>)</p> <p>'Stop and ..' refers to refusing to work for</p>	

<p>for them, they will rent land to others?</p> <p>Girija: Yes, they rent land to others for the next crop.</p> <p>Gopal: There are others who are doing free work for them at their houses.</p> <p>Girija: We feel that it is below our dignity to do such work for them but there are others who are ready to do such work so the land lord says that he will rent land to other person next time by denying us.</p> <p>A: You do cultivation in his land, the harvest is very good, you both got good profits. If you deny to do the work free of cost at his house, what is his response?</p> <p>Girija: That means.....? </p> <p>A: Does he rent land to other person?</p> <p>Girija: Oh, yes he will rent to an other person.</p> <p>A: Even though you did best cultivation and brought good harvest still you have to do free work at his house? Am I correct?</p> <p>Girija: However hard we work in the land but we have to attend the work at his work entrusted to us. If he says <i>hai</i> go to Punganur and bring mutton ,we have to bring mutton for him .If he says to wash the clothes we have to wash, if he says to sweep the house we have to do. If we do all types of these works we are very good to them; if we disobey then they will think of changing their tenant.</p> <p>A: Did you do such type of work?</p> <p>Girija: Yes. My mother-in-law did such type of work because she was patient with them. But how can we do now?</p> <p>A: That is correct. Circumstances are different from the past to the present.</p> <p>Gopal: Why should we go and do bonded labour?...</p> <p>Girija: Our ancestors did cultivation [implying peasant work as tenant i.e. <i>ryot</i>] for twenty years. Their [the landlord's] son was so rash and rude. Our people had to do what he says otherwise he comes in front of the plough while ploughing and asked them to get out immediately from their land. Under such circumstance they had to leave the land on the spot and return homes.</p>	<p>that landlord at all.</p> <p>It appears that the landlord has decided to punish the worker household for refusing to do the unpaid work during the years when they are not renting the land.</p> <p>Gopal and Girija contrast themselves with the norm where landless workers do the unpaid work in order to get into a position to rent land.</p> <p>'Denying us' is a verb reflecting the power of landlords to choose their tenants from among all the landless and small-plot-owning workers.</p> <p>The interviewer, a local 20 year old student whose home is in a village about 8 miles away, is surprised and wants to reconfirm the punishment threat has taken place.</p> <p>'<i>hai</i>' is a rude call to come over.</p> <p>Punganur is a town 5 miles away. Getting a bus there is troublesome. Thus getting meat is an unpaid work task.</p> <p>The interviewer's rather vague question 'did you' obtains a general answer 'yes' but then a qualifier indicating that Girija thinks her generation should refuse the unpaid work that the elder women did.</p> <p>We now arrive at an anecdote about another reason why this family is no longer renting from their main landlord. But Girija's language is interesting: she describes their work as tenants in the past as <i>cultivation</i> (<i>sedyam</i>, implying <i>ryot</i> status, a higher social class than worker) rather than <i>panulu</i> (designated work tasks).</p>
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<p>Gopal: We had a quarrel with them for two or three times and that resulted one year that we stopped cultivation and came back. Then his father came and said that we should cultivate without taking his son's words into consideration after that we did his land for two more years. Because of some differences we finally stopped renting his land.</p>	<p>The landlord's son's behaviour toward workers was rude. The landlord tried to maintain control of the relationship and keep good relations with the tenant family in spite of the son.</p> <p>There were multiple reasons for giving up renting land. Lack of irrigation water is mentioned repeatedly (elsewhere in the interview) as an important reason.</p>
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Source: Aktawalla interview, 2007,

The situation where Gopal is called for *kuulie* work and **has to go** to do it was also described in detail by Dacorta and Venkateswarlu (1999) as first-call work. Dacorta and Venkateswarlu studied villages in the same area about 20 km from Yetavaakili, where due to higher levels of irrigation there were sometimes strong overlapping demands for workers' time. Landlords cleverly used socialised feelings of obligation to entrap certain workers into long-term first-call relationships. See also Olsen (1996) for background, where the argument that this involves subtle manipulation is presented. The landlord has first-call on the worker's time if and only if the worker family is bonded in some way to that landlord. The obligation here is not only to go to work for this landlord, but to do so in preference to another employer, or to town work or visiting the market or doing construction work. Thus for Gopal and Girija, their son is the one who engages in "drought works"; the husband will be busy giving service to the employer.

Interview Extract 2	CASE 1	Commentary
<p>A: Now some tenants are renting in land or they also doing free work for the land lord?</p> <p>Girija: Yes , Some tenants who wish do the work. The landlord says to the tenant that there is a log there and break it into pieces. Other work which is entrusted by the landlord have to be done, why because they(landlords) are have's and we(tenants) are have not's.</p> <p>A: That means these type of free works should be compulsorily done by you otherwise do you face any problems?</p>	<p>(Later in the same interview with Aktawalla) The interviewer's question is general.</p> <p>Breaking up logs is rather rare, due to the local deforestation, so this example is an iconic symbol for the landlord's position in a wet place that has trees growing. We can imagine the landlord <i>pointing and telling, not doing</i> the work. Direct supervision takes place.</p> <p>Girija classifies the workers and landlords as haves and have-nots.</p>	

<p>Girija: Yes We have to do, otherwise some problems may come.</p> <p>Now also we have to go for casual paid work (<i>kuulie</i>) for them; if we do not go for them , they will not allow us to get green grass for our cattle from their fields.</p>	<p>Girija identifies with the feeling of having to do the unpaid work tasks, contradicting her earlier point that she would no longer do them for the particular landlord RR. Girija may be (and probably is) doing these work tasks for other employers at this time.</p> <p>The meaning of the words in bold is precisely that Girija says she is forced to accept the <i>kuulie</i> work. Her phrase 'we have to go' implies that her husband has to accept work which is degrading or undesirable so that she, the cow-watcher, can go to get sweet green shoots of grass for the cow in these fields.</p>
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Source: Aktawalla interview, 2007.

In interpreting these extracts several themes arise which we are placing in a dualistic Figure to start our analysis.

Table 2: A Few Components of Workers' Discourse

<p>Threatens Punishes Grazing rights now contested Rewards to the loyal and docile</p>	<p>Demand Expect normal behaviour Usual Dominate and control wet lands</p>
<p>Anger Resistance Unwillingness Avoid a particular rude employer</p>	<p>Resigned to accept the need to do <i>kuulie</i> Habit of doing the unpaid work tasks (<i>panulu</i> at the landlord's house or fields) Gender division of work is normal for the working-class couple</p>

In this Figure, selected verbs, nouns, and implied meanings of the Extracts are summarised. It is easy enough to see that the employer class usual behaviours are summarised in row 1, and the worker class behaviours in row 2. However there is a subtle distinction between the usual norms shown in column 2 versus the events and contestations that are shown in column 1. A few events such as threats and punishments are used to reinforce conformity with the norms of the landlords. These events may not be very frequent, but they are remembered. Both threat and resistance have occurred. In this couple, it is usual to admit during an interview that one both resists and conforms. The evidence is consistent with structural social relations in which the worker class is expected to be docile but is not always acting docile. In Bourdieuvian terms the habitus of social expectations for carrying out the work practices is described mainly in column 2, and includes both landlord and worker behaving 'normally' to

coordinate the work. One could even list specific Telugu phrases for the normal conduct of the work, both in the previous and current generation (but there is not enough space here for the whole exercise); in brief, *kuulie* work is considered inferior to tenancy by workers, but the landlord forces people to do both *kuulie* work and other unpaid tasks in exchange for allowing them to rent some land. The word *panulu*, ‘works’, normalises the absence of payment since it is used both for one’s own household tasks (such as cooking *panulu*) and for doing these in an employer’s house. The gender division of labour is embedded completely into the normal expectations for doing both paid and unpaid work, in so far as the respondents listed specific tasks here.

But in reality, the scene is very complex and we have a variety of instances here (even for this very poor family) where people are resisting employer expectations. The landlord-worker pair are not always getting on well, and both sides get surprises; both do ‘deviance’ from normal expectations. Thus in Column 1 we have a sort of ‘habitus for resistance and struggle’. Girija in particular has told us about ways of struggling for a better working life.

We chose to present Gopal and Girija’s family as Case 1 knowing that the norms and resistance behaviours described here are actually rather wide-spread, particularly among the people who do work (or have worked) as tenants. We have a tangential hypothesis that the landless workers who are *never* tenants are less able to resist the employers’ demands, but this will require further research. (Typically a worker who is *never* a tenant might do construction or transport labouring or work in domestic service. Their employment relationships might be predominantly with non-local employers. A few of these came into our sampling strategy but most of our respondents either did, had done, or wanted to do tenancy.) For the moment let us

consider a tenant family as Case 2 to see even stronger resistance and how it is grounded in a wider range of family economic resources.

3.2 *The Capacity to Threaten Employers*

The purpose of presenting Case 2 is to illustrate a couple who weakly resist the employers' demands, mainly by avoiding unreasonable demands and forming judgements that are negative about badly behaved employers. This couple have norms about landlord behaviour which they try to enforce through a strategy of exit, not voice. They appear to have little loyalty to their landlord.

CASE 2: The Landless Workers Mangamma and Keshava. They live with their son, daughter in law, and one granddaughter aged 5 years. They are of Boya caste (a so-called 'backward' caste) and are living in the Indira Colony (i.e. a dalit hamlet) of Yetavaakili.

Introduction to Case 2: Mangamma's main work is own-cultivation, i.e. farming in the land they rent in. The daughter-in-law takes care of the house while Mangamma works in the fields. Her husband works in tenancy cultivation, too, but additionally works as a cow-trader on markets. The son works as a *kuulie* and farming in the rented land. They rent in 3 ½ acres of land from RR from Yetavakili. They usually plant 1 ½ acres of sugarcane and if there is water additionally ½ - 1 acre of paddy. Further they plant tomato, sunflower or chillies on 1 more acre. RR has 6 acres of wetland and 1 acre of Mango garden. The landlord has three sons, one in a private job in Bangalore, 1 who is a government teacher (as his wife also is) and one who works in the telephone department of government. RR is old and does not do farming on his own anymore. He only supervises² the tenants and his mango garden. He rents out land to two more persons. He and his brother have a borewell each, and these are the only water sources for all three tenants. The borewell is approx. 600ft deep. Yetavaakili is not their (father's) native place (it is Axxxpuram near to town R³) but they have been living here for approx. 25 years. It is Mangamma's

² The field notes originally read 'takes care of the tenants'. In Telugu this makes sense, because to supervise is spoken of as to over-see (*cheeyinchukovadam*, or *cheeyistaaru*, to give for doing, or *cheeyadam chuusuko*, see it done), and to take care of someone (as a parent would take care of a child) is also to see-over them (*chuusokovadam*). But in English the connotations of taking-care of the tenant are not the ones meant by the farmer's supervision of them.

³ Here and elsewhere some anonymization has taken place.

native place. They have rented the land for the last 20 years from RR. Before that they have rented land from a different person. In their father's period they have rented-in less land, now they rent in more. The house they are living in was constructed under a government scheme in 1995, costing 40.000 Rs in total for a three room layout comprising two buildings. The family owns a bullock cart and they use their two cows to do ploughing and carting with it. The cows give milk, too. Their two cows have two calves. They bought them 3 years ago for 17.000 Rs from their own money. They change their cows every two to three years. From the money they get selling the old cows, they buy new ones. They used to keep two goats.

(Source: field notes by Dan Neff, 2006)

With these background details in mind, we will look at an extract from the interview at which both Mangamma and her husband Keshava were present.

Interview Extract 3	CASE 2	Commentary
<p>JR: Is anyone doing regular unpaid work for the landlord? Please describe the situation. Mangamma: Yes some times we both my husband and myself work for the landlord. JR: Please say clearly what type of work do you do? Mangamma: Bringing grass for their cow, watering the animal, watching their fields, watering their gardens. After the harvest we take the fodder. But the landlord ask us to provide fodder to his only cow then we oblige and give fodder to his cow .We are tenant farmers for him for the last thirty years. We do not do other house work at his house. Some times if son goes to his house his wife asks him to cut coconuts from the tree and he obliges. We do not clean his house and wash dishes. JR: Why do they do this work? Mangamma: Out of obligation and some kind of fear we accept the work and sometimes they give us money and the same money we use it for household purpose. JR: You said some times you do work for him out of fear. Please explain what kind of fear do you have? Mangamma: If we refuse to do work he may not give out his land for koruku for us. We are doing cultivation in his land and sharing half and half harvest. So we do the work. JR: Does anyone do irregular work just on festival days or otherwise for the landlord? Mangamma: Yes our son and husband and other family members do certain small work for them at festival times. JR: Which landlord and why? Mangamma: The present landlord . JR: Do you also do this for other employers? Why does? Why?</p>	<p>The respondent knows which landlord JR is referring to.</p> <p>Mangamma is easily able to list the unpaid work tasks that she does.</p> <p>Providing fodder to a cow is very time consuming. One generally takes the cow out for long grazing walks on common land or fields. Very little fodder can be cut, since arable land is usually sown to either monocropped rice, groundnut, or mixed dryland crops. Thus she is referring to the division of the rice stalks at harvest time, which is a grey area of the sharecropping arrangement.</p> <p>The mention of fear and obligation creates an ambience of knowing that Mangamma's family is intimidated by their landlord.</p> <p>The same threat of punishment by withdrawing the offer of land for rental is named by Mangamma as in Case 1; she says that she complies with various requests for unpaid labour under this threat.</p> <p>Her menfolk also do unpaid labour at odd times.</p> <p>There are limits to the number of different employers for whom one can do unpaid</p>	

Mangamma: I we have leisure we do for others for payment only.	labour. However if cash is offered, Mangamma will try to find time to work for others.
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Source: J. Rangaswamy interview, 2006

Interview Extract 4	CASE 2	Commentary
<p>JR Think of a situation when someone wanted to do <i>kuulie</i> (causal paid) work and there was a disagreement about it. Tell me about that.</p> <p>Mangamma: We both think and take a decision. If two persons invite us for <i>kuulie</i> work. We accept the invitation of the person who came first.</p> <p>JR: Think of a situation where it is routine to do <i>kuulie</i> work. Tell us who decides about that?</p> <p>Mangamma: We both decide. If we want to take rest, I convey the idea to my husband and he respects my opinion and does not compel me to go for <i>kuulie</i> work. Yes some times we do not go to work for a person who ill treats us. We go to <i>kuulie</i> for the person who invited us first. After finishing their work then we consider the work of the second person.</p> <p>JR:-Please explain clearly.</p> <p>R:- I go for <i>kuulie</i> to a particular person. That landlady never allows us to take rest even for ten minutes. She calls us for work at 8.30am. Actually we [normally] go for <i>kuulie</i> work at 9.00am. She even does not put sufficient curry in our lunch. We keep all these things in mind and if the same person calls for work next time We do not say NO directly. We simply say that we have another work to attend to. So we do not come. On that day we go and fetch fodder for our cattle. If they are generous and kind towards us we shall go and do <i>kuulie</i> work for them whole heartedly. Some times the person does not allow us even to chew leaves and bettlenuts. On that situation we simply say to them that we have work to attend to.</p> <p>Mangamma: Sometimes two persons invite us for <i>kuulie</i> work [for the same day]. Generally Rs.30 is paid for women <i>kuulie</i>. But as there is dire necessity for the second person he offers Rs. 40 and invites me for <i>kuulie</i> work. If I have affection for the first person I bluntly refuse the second person's Rs.40 and go for first person for Rs. 30. After completing the first person's work then I go for the second person</p>	<p>Mangamma is invited to consider a hypothetical situation of taking on some paid <i>kuulie</i> work.</p> <p>She characterizes the couple as a jointly deciding unit.</p> <p>Mangamma tries to suggest that she does as much <i>kuulie</i> work as possible, taking the offers up consecutively. This makes it seem impersonal choice.</p> <p>Please note that village women usually work as <i>kuulies</i> from 10am-4pm, so even stating that 9 am is the usual female start time is rather an unusual statement.</p> <p>Now she thinks of a very demanding employer (the woman of the employing household, specifically) and points out that she, Mangamma, can politely refuse work for such a person if they are too demanding.</p> <p>Specifically she 'does not say NO directly'. This is conflict-avoiding behaviour.</p> <p>The ideal employer is generous and kind, she says, and allows breaks for snacks and rest.</p> <p>Mangamma states that she can avoid giving reasons for refusal, or can just refuse by saying that she is busy with other paid work.</p> <p>This comparison of wage payments shows the women earning just 30 Rs. (half-a-dollar)-a-day, but carefully deciding whether to help out someone who can't or won't pay the higher wage of 40 Rs. But instead is offering a lower wage of 35 Rupees.</p>	

<p>for Rs.40 <i>kuulie</i>. Because the first person might have helped us in need financially so even if they give Rs. 30 we go for <i>kuulie</i> for them.</p> <p>JR:- Do you have any argument about <i>kuulie</i> money?</p> <p>Keshava: Generally at the week end they give our payment. Some times they do not give on the exact date. Then will adjust and cooperate. Even at times the landlord leaves us one or bags of paddy.</p>	<p>The tied transactions mentioned by Basu apply here (Olsen, 1996); the potential offer of future credit from the employer is always in the mind of the asset-less workers.</p> <p>The couple are concerned about the timing of cash payment. (They really need to be paid on the day that work is done.) But they gain honour from being lenient toward the <i>employer</i>, an amazing turnaround of power relations. Their reward, he says, is a harvest time gift of raw rice.</p>
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Source: J. Rangaswamy interview, 2006.

From this interview we learn that Mangamma tries to manipulate some employers, and the employers also try to manipulate her into accepting erratic wage payments. A weakness of the interview evidence is that it is not always clear which employer (or the landlord RR) Mangamma is referring to. But one reason is that she is afraid to admit to making trouble in public. Mangamma's resistance is muted, silent, perhaps sometimes sullen. She often conforms with others' expectations of her. But in the village, in other families, sometimes there are overt conflicts and some of them revolve directly around wages and employment conditions. Case 3 illustrates how a strongly activist couple have not only negotiated wages upward themselves but have also influenced others to complain about oppression related to caste and poverty.

CASE 3: The Workers With Land, Sita and Chandran. This is a dalit caste family living in Miniki, the less commercialized of the two villages. Chandran, age 44, has been the postmaster of Miniki since 1981 and he married Sita in 1989. (Sita is 42.) They have two children, a girl age 14 and a boy age 18. Their assets include a one-room house built of concrete (which also acts as the post office), two young cows, seven mango trees, 2 acres of land (90% of which is dry), and a television. Chandran is a social activist and he was the mandal president from 1987-2000 of the Rural Development Educational Society. The photo

of Ambedkar (a leader of struggles against oppression of *dalit* people) hangs in the office side of the house. The photo is about 18” by 12” in dimensions, while the room is about 10 feet by 6 feet. The kitchen/living area with TV, blocked off by a desk and a curtain, is of the same size again, and cooking is mainly done just outside under a thatched eave 2.5 feet by 8 feet in size. Here a smoky wood or dung fire is used to cook once a day most days. With electricity in the office they do not use a kerosene lantern very often.

The story of this couple is interesting because for many years they have engaged in two struggles at once. Firstly they fought a court battle in order to gain ownership of some land that they had been ‘assigned’ ’50 years ago’ by the government. To have land ‘assigned’ is to be given the right to cultivate (but not sell) that land. Therefore they thought they had the right to keep using the land, but around 1997 another farmer – a *munsif* or officer - started using that land. His access had been mediated by a local village officer who Chandran suggests used cheating methods to allow this opportunity. Then the authorities gave a sale deed to a third party in the town of Punganur, and this document was registered formally as a deed of ownership. Since 1997, Chandran and Sita had not able to use that plot, but they won case by taking it to the highest court in the state, the High Court. Their claim is that they should continue to have the right to use the assigned land. The 2 acres mentioned in introducing their case are that plot of land.

Secondly, Chandran and Sita have led negotiations and struggles over the level of wages in the villages as part of the Ambedkar Society activities. Even back in 1994 a youth branch of Ambedkar society existed in Miniki. This was an unusual thing, and it was at that time almost the only civil society organisation in that village. (There were also a small number of women’s groups at that time. But then and now Yetavaakili has had a much more active, busy and well-populated set of NGO-sponsored groups than Miniki.) In 2006/7 Chandran’s

work in Miniki goes under the name of the Rural Education Society, a local NGO closely associated with the main Ambedkar society based in Punganur. The aim of Ambedkar societies (which are political) and rural education society (which is registered as an NGO hence not as political) is the upliftment of *dalit* people through their own struggle. Through long informal chats we have learned about these struggles that took place as far back as 20 years ago and then sporadically up to the present. Resistance is organized both at the workers' level (in discussions among workers, where the wage demands are considered, terms are discussed, group contracting vs. piece work is discussed, and higher wage demands are encouraged) and also at the time of dealing with employers. In these villages group contract piecework is often undertaken for weeding and harvesting work. Weeding is mainly done by a group of women, and harvesting by a mixed sex group. Chandran and Sita have both been involved in leading group contracts trying to push up the net price of labour. Rates much higher than 30-40 Rs. per day can be found in contracting at harvest time because of the delicate fresh crops – groundnut, tomato, paddy, or sugar - needing to be collected before any deterioration of quality occurs. The demand for labour peaks twice a year, in Dec./Jan. and in April, when higher wage rates can be observed. These wage demands are always contested by employers however.

The extract we are showing below from the interview with Sita and Chandran occurs very late in the interview, when Sita is asked about when/how she decided the level of education that is appropriate for her son. Chandran points out that the boy, D, is age 18 and still studying, but not in the main educational channel; instead he has moved into a scientific technical school. Since the young boy is there, JR turns to him to find out his view.

Interview Extract 5	CASE 3	Commentary
Chandran: The boy also respected the decision		The man, Chandran, controls the conversation

<p>of his parents and wanted to stop traditional education and do technical course. JR: What is your name? Chandran: D (anonymised). JR: Did you decide to stop traditional course when your parents asked you to stop. D: Yes. When the condition of the family was not good I decided to act according to the parents' decision. If circumstances cooperate, I thought of studying. JR: Now you changed your mind and wanted to continue Junior Intermediate. D: Yes. Now I want to study. JR: If you had stopped your education and gone to work what problems you might have faced? Explain. D: If I had gone for work I might not have been paid properly according to my labour. My labour might have exploited. I was underpaid as there was experience. I might have faced ragging at the work place.</p>	<p>when the boy's education is being discussed.</p> <p>[Implicit here is that the cost of a traditional course is high and the admissions procedures often require a particularly costly bribe.]</p> <p>The boy is in fact just visiting, because he normally lives at a student hostel 20 miles away.</p> <p>The boy has clearly heard either family or acquaintances discussing the wage question, and here brings up three issues - whether pay corresponds to hours worked; exploitation; and being degraded at work - suggesting he would also struggle against employers' interests if he were doing <i>kuulie</i> work.</p>
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Source: J. Rangaswamy interview, 2006.

The boy's deviation away from wage struggle toward gaining a high education is an avoidance of direct conflict which tends to "contribute to the – entirely official – survival of the rule" that employers can keep putting downward pressure on village wages (Bourdieu, OTP, pg 40). Chandran and D take over from Sita to describe the boy's trajectory toward higher education, a move which Bourdieu might describe as a "struggle to accumulate symbolic capital in the form of collectively recognized *credit*" (ibid., pg 41).⁴ In Bourdieu's view, we may find exceptions, but the exceptions support the general norm – which he describes as the habitus of the class relations in this area. Bourdieu would say that the employers try to get workers to do more hours for less money and to add unpaid work to their paid work, and that any exceptions as seen here are merely deviations which help us, as outsiders, to see how the general run of class practices is managed. Thus for example the right of the employer to make or withdraw the wage offer is never questioned. The absence

⁴ In Bourdieu's view it would not be accidental that the men take over at this point because, he says (with respect to the Kabylia of Algeria) the women cannot have power in officialised practices; only the men can. However it might be a coincidence or might be due to the woman having some distraction at this point in the interview.

of this young boy from the local labour market helps (in the short run) to keep the family out of arguments about what his wage should be. With a high school education he will not want to work for the wages of around Rs. 60 to Rs. 80 per day that adult men often earn in this area. Therefore his struggles over his own earnings, if any, are likely to take place later on in other places such as nearby towns or government.

We have used this case study to illustrate the possibility of struggle over wage levels in the village itself. Three comments follow from the analysis in 3.2. Firstly that Sita is using a series of specific strategies to improve her daily earnings level (not all the evidence can be fit into this paper), and these do tend to raise her wages. Thus she has some causal efficacy in achieving the outcome that they jointly (as a couple) have been aiming at, which is to increase self-respect and the social acceptability of dalit people demanding a decent daily wage. Secondly this case illustrates the concept, promoted by Olsen in a separate paper (forthcoming in AJSS, see Olsen, 2007), of the ‘agent’ of the negotiations being the couple whilst the worker is of course still the individual. The couple here have a shared vision and are village leaders aiming at (and thus to some extent achieving) the dignity of self-respect of working people. They normally discuss between themselves as a couple how to handle each difficult event, each decision, in the court case process and in the local activism process. In the interview, they said that when things get difficult they sit down together in the evening to work out their strategy for the coming period. They used periods of quiet deliberation to develop an agreed strategy. The boy’s education, and that of the younger daughter age 14, are strategies that evolved out of these discussions.

Thus the ‘agent’ has a ‘vision’ of a future in which the youths are no longer agricultural labourers. The couple think this is an appropriate vision. This model of agents deliberating

about their visions was the reconceptualisation of rational choice that I offered in the *AJSS* paper. This common situation is part of the causal mechanism which makes high school and higher education very popular among the villagers. No doubt Sita and Chandran have paid a lot of school fees and hostel charges to make their overall (second-order) strategy work so far. Their supply of labour is affected by their willingness to cover these costs on behalf of their children. Thus their first-order village labouring decisions are integrated with their second-order education strategy. They are a very discussive couple who present themselves to others as ethical and cautious and wise. In this context it is important to mention that they are daily worshipping in the mornings.

In-house worship among dalit people usually takes a primarily Hindu form.⁵ Many dalit people in both Miniki and Yetavaakili have taken up the practice of doing *puja* at home in the morning after their bath when there is time. I have recently seen working class women doing this as late as 10.30 in the morning, and they are proud of their ritual objects. (In 1994 I was not made aware of as much regular worship in the home. At that time it appeared that regular in-home worship was mainly done by muslim and high-caste women.) Like others of the farming classes, the workers also take pride if they can arrange a pilgrimage (*yatra*) to visit a big temple like Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala about 3 hours away by bus. Another popular, related activity is watching the epic dramas on television. In Sita's house on a Sunday afternoon, neighbours crowd around to watch the Mahabharata on their Black and White TV. In this epic, male gods make war and argue, and both male and female gods are portrayed by glamorously dressed actors/actresses. However in Sita and Chandran's life the role of Ambedkar Society is likely to have made them skeptical of the Hindu belief system,

⁵ There are exceptions. 1) some dalit people have converted to Christianity, and will worship using a Bible at home as well as visiting Church. There were no Christians in this sample. 2) some dalit people long ago converted to Islam, and the Muslim modes of worship are very different because they reject the worshipping of idols or physical symbols of god. 3) some dalits believe in animism as well as hindu gods 4) some dalit people have converted to Buddhism.

and Ambedkar himself is famous for converting from Hinduism to Buddhism. His reason for doing so is that the Hindu belief system, which includes notions of karma (impact of one event on future events), dharma (right action), reincarnation, the rights of priests, and caste rituals, is responsible en masse for the oppression of the dalit peoples. He would object even to calling the dalit people's lineages as *castes (jati)*, but in these villages we know exactly who is Mala and who is Madiga, the two main castes of dalits. Each caste has its own temples and rituals, and Sita and Chandran appear to be participating in worship in this traditional Hindu way. Daily they read in Telugu from books that are part of the corpus used to support educated worship; their home rituals do not stress making visible marks to show evidence of having worshipped (e.g. forehead ash for man, red dot for woman) but instead are a highly educated form of quiet contemplation. I was reluctant to intrude upon this scene but everyone was aware that the curtain dividing the office into two parts was intended to separate the praying person from the visitors to the post office.

This public act of private worship fits Bourdieu's cultural capital concept very nicely. In the context of struggling and resisting, this couple also pray and emulate what high caste Hindus do. They do not fit the stereotype of a modern atheistic or Marxist activist. I suspect they are deliberately fitting religious worship into their overall strategy because it brings them prestige, shows off their literacy and education, helps them feel wiser and more calm, gives strength to them in debates among Hindu dalit people, and throws the upper caste Hindu visitors to the post office into a confusion of values. On the one hand if they observe Hindu rituals then any dalit's touch would be considered to be polluting for the visitor. (This value is still present *socially as a norm* with regard to household water management, but not with regard to entering the local tank, to which anyone can go to water cows even including dalit people.) If the visitor is more relaxed then they have an opportunity to display their egalitarianism by

entering the post office and perhaps taking a drink of water there. Yet when doing so, they are at the same time aware that they are visiting spiritual, worshipping people; that Sita and Chandran are devout in some share-able sense. For Hindus who believe in reincarnation and the cycle of rebirth, which improve one's karma *if one does good acts*, the visit to the post office may be invested with rich meanings: either polluting meanings, or improving meanings, depending upon one's private thoughts and subjective habits.

In this context it is hard to accept at face value Bourdieu's notion of the habitus as a socially-predominant set of subjective values which are present even when one is observing an exception to them. In the Indian village context, the raging debate over dalit oppression has created a split of the habitus. Some people may simply avoid the post office but others will be forced to indicate which side of the line they are on: enter or don't enter; avoidance will be interpreted as traditionality; take water or don't take water if offered; refusal will be taken as offence to dalits. It appears that under Bourdieu's theory of the habitus the *traditional pollution ideas* would be the dominant subjective attitude of a high caste person. But 30% of the population would be degrading themselves if they accepted this idea, and they know it! Furthermore many caste Hindus would also think it degrading to act as if (or to think that) pollution occurred when coming into contact with dalit people. Therefore there are at least two positions which both have strong norms attached. Perhaps the conflict is a new *habitus* clashing with the old *habitus*. This amends Bourdieu's theory to allow for the competing social norms of the dominant and the resistant groups. The norms of the dominant group are followed by its members, as well as by those who (a) identify with their oppressors or (b) don't care and follow the social norm without direct involvement. In any case the religious worship of Sita and Chandran indicates that this old debate in the field of religion is still a

lively one and that they can combine high cultural capital from the field of spirituality with social capital in the activism field and their very limited economic capital in the farming field.

Worship of the Hindu type, with small candles and oil lights, waved around a visual icon that reminds one of the (ever-)presence of god and god's many forms, is also 'officialised' in this rural south Indian setting. (This term appears in several of Bourdieu's writings. It refers to legitimation through modernisation which depersonalises ritual powers.) The worship and books used in the home are affected by the worship and books used in the Tirumala temple and in all other temples. Temples are found in all nearby towns as well as on Yatras (pilgrimages). The temple worship appears very ancient and fixed, but in fact has been changed continually, deliberately, officially, in modernized ways, by the priests and temple committees who manage the temple activities. The Tirumala temple for example has an immense budget for cutting off people's hair and then processing both the hair and the newly bald worshippers, as well as arranging the accommodation and food of all the temple visitors from day to day. These are highly commercialized, modernized activities and are officialised in just Bourdieu's sense. So an individual reading a Hindu-oriented holy book in a small home in Miniki is playing a role in spreading this officialised discourse of worship. They don't control the discourse, they partake in it.

Chandran's worship activities help to strengthen the couple's hand in their negotiations with officials and employers in the village and the nearby town. Let us now turn to a specific set of practices that help the women of the village to gain power relative to their traditional inferior social status: cow-buying.

3.3 The Secret Power of Those Raising Cows

A cow has a symbolic significance in villages that have a Hindu culture. Even in the north of Andhra Pradesh, e.g. Mahbuubnagar District, where the Zamindari rule preceded independence and the Muslim law dominated the region's governance for many decades, the cow is still a revered object. In Chittoor District the cow is decorated every year at a special festival during which all work is stopped and everyone – Hindus and the 7 to 15% Muslim minority alike – join together in a procession taking the cows to the water for rituals. The cow is sacred to caste Hindus, its meat never to be eaten, its milk revered and its calf worshipped. The serving of sweetened, boiled colostrum curds (the first milk produced for the calf) to friends and family is a highly prestigious and revered act of sharing a special product/taste. Thus cows are a source of prestige and a form of cultural capital. (Among the dalit people, the eating of cow meat does occasionally happen, because when a cow dies no one is willing to waste meat among the poor people. In the same district, I once joined in a dalit Hindu marriage ceremony at which beef pulao was served to each and everyone. But eating cow meat is widely thought to be a degrading practice, and no restaurants in the area sell cow meat.)

In this context, the self-help groups that have evolved over a 25 year period have promoted women buying milk cows using a loan that is guaranteed by the peer group who are SHG members. For background see Edward and Olsen (2006). In Chittoor District cow-buying is particularly prominent. On the eastern side where more rain falls, it is possible to feed cows or buffaloes plenty of fodder, but on the western side where rain is scarce, the semi-arid villages are still buying cows but are experiencing seasonal shortages of fodder. Sometimes tractor loads or truckloads of fodder are moved from Bangalore or Tirupati to Punganur to feed a rich employer's buffaloes. However fodder is not (yet) grown as a monocrop in the villages of western Chittoor District.

The sale of milk from the cow occurs in the months following calf's birth. For many months the pedigree, Holstein, or other specialized milch cow will produce plenty of milk to sell as well as enough for the calf. The calf becomes a potential gift for others, it is sale-able (especially if female), and it is an asset that produces a long-term return on holding the adult cow additional to the milk revenues. Most women in our sample had bought a cow using the SHG money. One describes the debt as follows – Rs. 10,000 for a cow, savings Rs 50 a month required before and after taking the lona, repayments at Rs. 500 a month for twenty months plus enough time to pay the interest, interest rate set at 1% per month by the group itself. The bank provides the loan to the SHG, whose attendance records and minutes are important in establishing its official(-ised) existence. The SHG must be part of a larger grouping such as DWACRA, the government programme for Developing Women and Children in Rural Areas, or a particular bank such as State Bank of India or a new MACS society grouping at the state level (Edward and Olsen, 2006, describes these options). Because of the mushrooming of self-help groups, there are lots of new groups as well as old ones. Each has been created through either grass-roots initiation, NGO activity at the Taluk or District level, and/or state-level promotion of Velugu – an umbrella organization that is absorbing the DWACRA groups in recent years with World Bank funding – a fact of which the villagers are as yet unaware. One NGO very active in Yetavaakili village is the Gram Vikas Samstha, based in Madanapalle and Punganur, which has some local funds and some funds from German sources. GVS has trained many local women in how to run a SHG or a women's group, how to do tailoring or political activism, and how to keep accounts. In other districts such as Kurnool and Cuddapah, buying a cow does not figure as prominently in the SHG activities. For a variety of reasons, other initiatives such as women's leadership skills, women in small business, and women in grain trading/storage have been promoted there

alongside the cow-buying possibility. In Anantapur District, which lies between Cuddapah and Kurnool Dts., initiatives for women to do vegetable growing or monocropping have been going on; but women's SHGs doing arable land investments were unknown in both Miniki and Yetavaakili villages during 2006-7. We also enquired at the Taluk level and found that the SHGs basically promoted women doing cow or micro-enterprise but not cropping in this particular area. The MACS central organization in Mahbuubnagar District, far to the north nearer to Hyderabad, also informed us that they do not have women doing arable land production using SHG loans. However in Kurnool women have tried doing group seed-production on a contract basis for large seed companies. This particular initiative was a successful trial activity with external support (source: personal communication, Davuluri Venkateswarlu, Lingampally, Hyderabad, 2007).

The effects of having a cow are three-fold. Firstly let us re-examine the debt; it is a burden but the capacity to borrow on this scale is also an asset. It is a form of **social capital**. Women were very proud of their debts; they felt individually responsible for the repayments; they did not think Rs. 500 a month was unduly high. **Secondly cows require time and attention;** they are hand-raised and hand-fed or grazed. Many women spend all day every day with their cows, and a few arrange for their children or occasionally menfolk to do this cow-watching work. Keep in mind that the Rs. 500 a month can't be paid using women's wages of Rs. 35 a day unless she works a lot of days (15+ out of the month) as a *kuulie*. If she works as a *kuulie* in that way, then she needs someone else to watch the cow. A cow requires 3 waterings a day, totaling about 50 litres, to thrive and give milk. If the cow is made to plough or draw a cart, it may need more water and will also require food supplements (e.g. table scraps and rice water). The cow also needs to graze for most of the day. They are kept in stalls at night near the house. The dung is a useful byproduct. Girls and boys can watch cows, but in that case they

can't go to school. One person can only watch 2-3 cows at a time because they must be on a rope most of the day. Cows must be closely watched to avoid them eating crops, devouring rope or string, and eating grass at the right places. Obviously all the places near the village or hamlets are more heavily grazed than further away; but uphill there is no grass cover at all – just boulders – so the flat common lands near rivers are especially prized for grazing. These river bottoms are far from villages because when rain comes the rivers widen out over their flood plain. A typical walk to graze a cow near a stream might be 1-2 km. To get to a tank is again 1-2 km. Cows are generally allowed to drink pumped well water, but either that must be a public well with a pump, or else manually pumped, or else the pump is powered by the landowner's cable and you must get permission to use this water and to bring the cow onto that land. If the well is a public well with a pump, it will tend to get heavy use from villagers both for drinking water and for clothes washing and general household use. Therefore the cows should not stay nearby for long, and should not damage the soil nearby with their hooves. You can't just tie up a cow for drinking at a public well. You have to manage each drink in appropriate ways.

Thus cow-watching is a time- and attention-consuming activity that takes 8 to 12 hours a day. *% of our sample of interviewees had more than one cow, Y* had one cow, and z* had none. Only one household had buffaloes (a much larger milk-producing animal) in the sample of interviewees.

In this context we make our third point, that **cows are form of cultural capital**. The symbolic significance of owning the cow and selling milk is an important part of the rationale for buying the cow in the first place. As Bourdieu would say, the value of the asset goes far beyond its market price-estimate because of the honour and esteem that owning it brings to

the family. Is this honour specific to the woman? No; the couple and indeed the whole family benefit from it. Often, children happily rush over to clean the cow stall in the morning, taking the night's proceeds to be dried as precious fuel for next month's fire. Sweeping of cow stalls is done almost entirely by girls, who then take part in the pleasure of having produced the milk and thus contributed to the provisioning of the house. Many of the landless workers were too poor ever to drink the milk they produce. It is all sent straight to the central transport point for sale onward to urban areas. The money is more valued than the milk. But the cow itself is a valued asset and we have not heard (in the 2007 interviews) of anyone selling a cow unless they are simultaneously keeping the calf that it produced.

Cows are bought in an urban market, and Punganur town is a main place where one can buy them. Future research can follow the footsteps of the man and woman of couples at the time of buying a cow, to see whether it is the woman or the man who actually chooses the cow. I expect most women delegate this work to a male relative, since visiting a cow market is likely to be thought unacceptable for women, and negotiating the price impossible. But we have not researched this area yet.

Two interesting implications follow from the cow-buying fashion. One is that an **aspiration paradox** results for some poor families. Bourdieu (in one study that is specifically of house buyers in contemporary urban France, 2005) described this paradox as being specific to the petit bourgeois class. This petit bourgeoisie, he said, was a layer of the working class in which women aspire to become housewives but find they must get and keep their paid jobs; men try to do white collar work but often end up doing the job of salesman or otherwise on the very lowest run of the professionals. Bourdieu describes the agony of these house buyers signing a credit agreement that is more than they can afford to pay, getting a house that is still smaller

than what they wanted, and eventually realizing they have overcommitted themselves financially in order to live in a 'good' house in a 'desirable' neighbourhood. The respondents in his study often did not read or closely study the financial agreement that they signed. They didn't realize the future commitments they were making. The paradox is being unhappy with the outcome when you have voluntarily, happily, willingly joined into the house-buying arrangement. Calling it an aspiration paradox helps me to transpose this hypothesis to the rural Indian context. Here the aspirations to own a cow, to earn money, to avoid *kuulie* work, and to be an independent decision maker are all wrapped up in a tacit practice of buying a cow with support from the women's group! On my visits in 1994-1995-1996 only the middle farmer women could afford to own and manage cows; these prestigious women would show off their cow proudly (as the working class women do today) to visitors, insist on photographs, share tasty milky tea made with their cow's milk (showing that they were *not selling all the milk each day*), and have home made yogurt with meals. Table * shows the 1994 breakdown of cow-owning among the land-size groups of farmers, specifically indicating that cow-owning is much more common among the small and middle farmers than among the other groups.

Table * Cows by Farm Size, 1994

The working class women who own cows now do not eat yogurt except for very special occasions. They hardly ever even eat meat, perhaps chicken or mutton once a week in the harvest season only. So the women are risking falling into this paradox of desire and debt. See Appendix 2 for a description of the paradox that they might not care because owning a cow is, in itself, a good act that creates a context for good action caring and looking after the cow. The Appendix illustrates that a woman's caring about the cow can be seen in both Buddhist and Hindu terms as a valued act in itself. Provisioning the family through the milk revenues, too, is seen as a good (higher status) practice compared with women doing *kuulie* work. The

wages being so low for women as *kuulies* in the area, there is a tendency for men to be doing the *kuulie* work or tenancy and, if necessary, contributing from these earnings to the repayment for the cow. The aspiration paradox is a hypothesis that needs further research. We did not (in these interviews) ask people whether they felt worried about the cow debts – we have noticed that the burden of repayments is a large chunk of the monthly income of the household however.

Secondly, we notice that buying the cow is an empowering act in other ways. Owning a cow moves the household up the scale of social classes because a cow is a productive asset (unlike a house which is mainly a consumption good).⁶ We have represented this in Figure * and in Appendix 1, showing that many of those with cows are otherwise landless.

In this context let's remember that in Case 1, Girija's main activity each day is cow-watching. Her husband does *kuulie* wage work. In Case 2, too, Mangamma and her husband keep two cows and they change them every couple of years. In Case 3, Sita and Chandran have two cows; they describe these as young in the December interview but one of them was giving milk in January and was thus a mother cow having had its first calf that winter. One might argue that in all three cases the cow (as a productive asset) increased the bargaining power of the household vis a vis the *kuulie* wage labour market. It also increases the woman's personal bargaining power vis a vis others, because she has revenue sometimes from the cow, and because she has an activity that can cause her to refuse to do work for others if she wishes. (If

⁶ There are exceptions to this general scheme. The home is used for the shelling of groundnuts, storage of seed, and many other productive activities. We have decided not to include home ownership as a source of economic distinction in the sphere of commercial production, however, because all the families had 'space' to do these food transformation activities. In other words no distinction is found between a modern concrete home's 'space' and the traditional hut's 'space' to do work. Most work is done out in the open air, anyway, under a simple thatch cover, because of the heat and the usefulness of the sun for drying the food products. People enjoy socialising while doing the work, as well. The western, economic, dualistic division of productive work from reproductive work and from leisure is an artificial distinction that we don't cling to very strongly.

she wishes to do *kuulie* work or tenancy farming, she has to arrange someone else such as a child to watch the cow. She could easily, for instance, do *kuulie* on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday when the child is not at school.)

An empowering act is defined as one which causes an increase in the capacity to achieve autonomy or good outcomes. For women, increased autonomy is in itself considered to be a form of empowerment (see Sathar and Jejeebhoy, 2001, for details*), and cow management is a practice of this kind. Another form of empowerment is getting new assets that will enable productive and flourishing lives; here the cow is empowering for the whole household that shares resources. Finally, there is the further benefit that the cow increases a woman's bargaining power in the labour market. Let us look at the case of Rathnamma to illustrate these three forms of empowerment.

Case 4: The Landless Workers Kamala and Ramayya, Who Are Poor and Socially Excluded. They obtained a cow only through her family's intervention.

These two dalit workers have one 17 year old son and one 12 year old daughter. Their case illustrates the problem that when you are socially excluded you cannot easily take up the offer of a house loan that government makes to dalit people. Their loan was blocked and then lost. They used private money from other family members to build a house in their own desired design, a round stone house. However they could not complete the house and the foundation up to about 3' high sits tragically solid and not very useful, awaiting further investment. The woman of the house struggles with the alcoholism of some male family members. It is a tragic story but there is not space to tell it all here. To give one example from our field notes:

She goes for kuulie work approx. 8-9 days a month for 35 Rs a day. The husband works around 20 days for approx. 50 to 150 Rs depending on the work. The son and the father sometimes work for free for some landowner from whom they get their drinking water. If they don't work for him they might not get any water. (Daniel Neff field notes)

Furthermore when negotiating to rent land they are in a weak position:

When they used to rent in land, five years ago, the agreement was the following: The landowner decided what to plant – and sometimes he would tell them to plant vegetables which need a lot of investment and therefore the risk of loss is higher. That's one of the reasons they stopped renting in. While they were doing tenancy they did exchange labour, but not anymore. (Daniel Neff field notes)

However Kamala has a cow now and her family help her, avoiding the abuses of the alcoholic husband. For example they bought her a t.v. but it is kept out of her hut at present. It will be kept in her stone house once the house is completed.

Case 5: A Farmer Uma Devi Who Is Ambivalent About Farming, Manages Cows, and Manages a Self-Help Group. Uma Devi's social class is 'farmer' (*ryot*); their caste is Reddy; she works on the farm but does not usually or normally do kuulie work. She and her husband say they do not like farming, but she likes cow-watching and does lots of farming work herself. Her age is 36 and her husband's age is 50. They have two children, a boy age 17 and a girl age 15. They have 3 acres of land of which 0.5 acres have been rented out for

the last ten years to another family. The remaining 2.5 acres of wetland they farm themselves. Uma Devi now manages two cows bought with money borrowed in her own name.

They are used to renting out land, and Uma Devi is herself used to hiring *kuulies* to assist with some work on her own irrigated land. Uma Devi keeps cows herself, manages a self-help group, and occasionally does *kuulie* work. She regularly does the domestic work and the farming work. The couple has a long-term strategy of enabling their children to get well educated. They are of Reddy caste and Uma Devi calls herself a housewife although she does so much of farming work. She expressed strong dislike of the idea of having her daughter or her son do casual waged agricultural labour.

In regard to children's education, Uma Devi said that 'we never stopped our children's education. We do not have any right to stop their education and spoil their future. . . ' . . . 'Fools only stop their children's education. Nowadays everybody wants to educate their children. It is a good sign. . . Even our children do not stop their education. Present generation is very fast. They want to study MCA [Master in Computer Applications], MBA [Master of Business Administration], B. Tech and M. Tech. Nobody likes to watch cattle these days.' But of course she likes watching the cattle herself!

In other words Uma Devi accepts that her children will not follow her in cattle watching. Nor is she thinking that they will be doing agricultural work. She doesn't even want to own more land, a surprising answer that was recorded on a Likert Scale ('dislike' to own more land).

Consistent with their class status, which is higher than worker or worker-farmer in social status, Uma Devi and her husband are educating their children to leave agriculture. Their

strategy for themselves is different from what they envision for their children. They did not discuss the girl's future explicitly, but dowry is normally paid by such families (Ref* Bedi et al., paper on dowry in *WD*). The girls then become 'housewives', as Uma Devi said that she is. For such a girl, the dowry implies that her education has a different meaning from the boy's education. The same strategy in name (educating the child beyond high school) has the meaning, for a girl, of helping to obtain a good marriage partner and start up with a well-educated young couple who can manage well in a modern economy. Thus for the farming class in both these two generations, a woman who is a 'housewife' may still be busy doing both paid and unpaid work. This mixture might be called the 'busy housewife' and is not like the image we get from novels of a closeted urban or suburban housewife whose has leisure time every day (R.K. Narayan, 1991; Buchchibabu, 1995). The typical upper income *urban* housewife is restricted from going out, has servants to do some household work, and is responsible for managing particular choices such as what to have for dinner, how much the children eat, and when children study or sleep. This form of housewife strategy is really only consistent with a male-breadwinner household or a joint household with high unearned income such as rents. Uma Devi, by contrast, is economically active and it would be wrong to classify her as inactive. She is a typical female farmer. Uma Devi has high physical mobility and a lot of autonomy.

Uma Devi commented on the decisions they make about taking a day of rest from field work. She said that she simply would suggest to the husband that he do some particular work, and that she'd take rest. He would accept it. "We take collective decisions". "We both take a decision. According to priority we go for work." Regarding crop choice, "We take decision combined".

- Interestingly Uma Devi is a prospective reverse sharecropper. But she would prefer to rent out the land rather than rent in more land. They are not doing so at present but are interested in doing this. In my view Uma Devi was a very autonomous woman who did social service because it is rewarding collective activity for her. Her involvement in the women's microcredit group was not just for her own sake but also a form of social involvement for mutual benefit. Her sense of agency had expanded to include what 'we', the group, were doing. She was also able to assert her needs to her husband, with whom she felt she could deliberate about how to spend each day (whether working or resting was one of the issues she mentioned was discussed between them). But Uma Devi's capacity to engage with her husband and in the self-help group was conditioned by the fact that she has high social prestige deriving in part from owning cows and even more so from her household owning land as *ryots*. As peasants with dignity, who engage other labourers rather than working as a *kuulie*, Uma Devi feels empowered and is not intimidated easily.

There were other cases where the behaviour of peasants with land was kind and generous, just as some workers were. An unusually kind landlord aged 49, whom everyone affectionately called Elder Brother ("Anna") (even in public), he has one daughter, one son and his wife in the home whose occupation was given to us as 'housewife'. Anna was extremely polite and reasonable when discussing tenancy or *kuulie* work with labourers. He was much more available for chats than most landlords; he was an interested and committed farmer in his own right; and he visited his fields regularly even when they were under tenancy to others. His reputation had grown so much that we were encouraged to put him into our sample, and indeed we found him calm and kind. Such examples of kindness do not put Bourdieu's theory of the habitus into doubt, however. As a higher social class person, Elder Brother or Uma

Devi can afford to appear kind and generous. Their household is still engaged in the practices which lead to inequality in the village. These include going away for expensive holidays, engaging expensive priests for rituals, paying for astrology, and paying higher dowries than workers. Thus the structural basis for their ‘goodness’ is the same structural basis that enables them to hire workers in the first place. The habitus of being a good landlord is not very different (in its effects) than the habitus of being an exploitative, absentee, or argumentative landlord. However we should not downplay or deride the importance of the acts of kindness that Elder Brother (“anna”) and Uma Devi and others carry out. They are appreciated and can be very meaningful in the village.

The case studies have shown a variety of behaviours of workers and tenant farmers. We chose five cases that ranged from landless poor to a landlord. The workers’ cases illustrated conformity with social norms as well as resistance and conflict-avoidance strategies. The workers also appeared to contradict themselves sometimes because they had intermittently resisted but also returned to a position of having to accept unpaid work, unwanted work, and work at low pay or on terms that they did not like. They particularly resented feeling insecurity of land tenure and were interested in manipulating the landlord’s opinion of them so that the landlord would continue to offer them land for rent. Finally, the women’s self-help group movement (as well as some other forms of resistance) illustrated collective action which created fresh opportunities for empowerment without directly confronting the issue of contract negotiations face to face with employers. The situations uncovered make us feel that the concept of ‘the habitus’ or ‘a person’s habitus’ in Bourdieu need some clarification. In the south Indian village context one might begin by arguing that old traditions have a habitus of their own, cutting across several fields. Meanwhile new traditions have their own habitus, too, which draws upon the old one but also upon western habits of voicing complaints (e.g.

bringing a court case) and upon new initiatives that were started by NGOs such as the Ambedkar society.

A glance at one policy initiative, the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, helps us to see all these dynamics rolled into a series of incidents during 2006.

4.1 The Rural EGS

In the context of the contested work arrangements, the Employment Guarantee Scheme was a bold announcement on the part of the Government of India in 2006. In 200 districts, soon to be rolled out to the rest of the country, the GOI introduced a system of works without intermediaries. Workers themselves were to propose the works that they thought worth doing, during a season when they were un- or underemployed. The EGS 2006 has already been described in detail, showing that local variations in the scheme strongly influence the effectiveness as a poverty reduction tool (Satara, 2007). The political scene, caste conflict, and local social capital are all influential factors. During our fieldwork phase in 2006 the village of Yetavaakili was the site of some works. A group of workers organised a scheme, the government officials sanctioned it, and the tank was de-silted and deepened in parts. For example, in digging out each channel within the tank area, workers were to be paid by the cubic meter of deepening that was done. These channels were not so much for water to run as simply to increase the tank carrying capacity – i.e. desilting. However when the payments were made, workers complained that their time input had been underestimated. An argument about this went on for some time, and workers visited the officials in the town of Punganur to complain. After much deliberation and numerous public arguments, a final inspection was made by an officer different from the one that had made the original time records. The work exceeded what was recorded; the original officer seemed to have been trying to cream off a

percentage from the works budget; and the new officer paid the workers what they thought they were due. A number of witnesses and observers were brought into this dispute but it did not reach the courts. Both men and women were involved in the works and they told their individual stories to Daniel Neff and the others on our team, in the field. It appeared that the works wages promised far exceeded the usual agricultural wages women were normally paid. It was highly symbolic that women could earn this kind of money for the tank works. The concept that they could struggle alongside men, and find the officer corrupt, and win a case through personal representations was encouraging to the women. Then the works ended and the workers were left with the rest of the hot summer to get through. Under government policy, each family can only do 100 days of work on EGS, earning 6000 Rs., and then their allocation is used up. Less work than this had been done, because many people offered to join in the working gang. Interestingly people call these 'drought works' implying that tank desilting is a task to be done due to (or during) drought. But the phrase drought works also implies a famine situation and harks back to times, in the 1920s, 1950s and at other dates, when government has created food for work opportunities due to the shortage of food and work during drought. The works themselves are quite hard to plan, propose, get approved and conduct. No one is allowed to earn the wage or commission of an intermediary. In this situation the EGS has been intermittent and merely a novelty of the local labour market so far.

5 *Conclusions*

In this paper we have used a realist theoretical framework to set up, conduct and analyse 39 interviews in two south Indian villages. The research question was whether tenants from the worker class could do morphogenetic action. Their agency, we found, was indeed sometimes used to try to change the relationships they have with employers, and hence to have some effects on the social structure. We showed in detail that the workers' discourse showed not only social norms for the 'usual' oppression and exploitation of workers by landlords, but also

some alternative forms of agency that differed from the rules of the habitus. We question whether the Bourdieuvian concept of habitus is too monolithic. Instead in south India there is a more plural habitus, with 'doxa' (social rules) differing depending on whether one is placed as a conforming worker, resistant worker, conflict-avoiding worker, or a creative and collaborative agent working in larger collective groupings. Buying a cow turned out to be not only an accumulation of cultural capital but also a way to avoid the labour-market conflict with employers – i.e. to give a secret power to refuse *kuulie* work. In other ways we detailed the kinds of resistant habitus that has become established as part of daily struggles over livelihoods in these two villages. One village has more NGOs, more social capital in civil society, and more creative innovation; the other is less commercialised and has more overt conflict. These local differences are not trivial and support the arguments of Das (2000; 2001) that locality matters.

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Appendix 1: Details of the Case Study Households and the Sample

Case Study No. and HID No.	Caste	Class	Class 1994 and ID in 1994	Land, cows and t.v.
1 hh 31				No land, 2 cows, no t.v.
2 hh 28				No land, 2 cows, no t.v.
3 hh 7	Mala		Hh 154	2 acres land, 2 cows, t.v.
4 hh 27	Mala			
5	Uma Devi			

List of the household caste and the household head's age in 1994, for each of the two villages:

Yetavaakili			Miniki		
Age	Sex	Sub-Caste	Age	Sex	Sub-Caste
37	M	Komti			Kapu
		Kapu	35	M	Reddy
45	M	Reddy			Kapu
		Kapu	57	M	Reddy
35	M	Reddy			Kapu
		Kapu	25	M	Reddy
34	M	Reddy			Kapu
54	M	Baliya	40	M	Reddy
28	M	Kapu			Kapu
		Kapu	20	F	Reddy
20	M	Reddy			Kapu
55		Reddy	50	M	Reddy
72	M	Baliya			Kapu
		Kapu	38	M	Reddy
43	F	Reddy			Kapu
		Kapu	40	M	Reddy
47	M	Reddy			Kapu
25	M	Reddy	56	M	Reddy
36	M				Kapu
64	M	Reddy	40	M	Reddy
50	M	Reddy			Kapu
50	M	Vysya	32	M	Reddy
33	M	Baliya			Kapu
30	M	Boya	32	M	Reddy
50	M	Mangala			Kapu
23	M	Kusaba	27	M	Reddy
32	M	Jungamma			Kapu
45	M	Kusaba	48	M	Reddy
45	M	Chakali			Kapu
40	M	Mangla	30	M	Reddy
40	M	Boya			Kapu
30 or			52	M	Reddy
36	F	Boya			Kapu
46	M	Gandla	23	M	Reddy
40	M	Gandla			Kapu
40	M	Gandla	20	M	Reddy
32	M				Kapu
			30	M	Reddy
					Kapu
			45	M	Reddy
			45	M	Kapu

23	M	Mala			Reddy
67	M	Mala			Kapu
60	M	Mala		20	F Reddy
55	M	Mala		32	M Kuraba
50	M	Mala		20	M Kuraba
35	M	Mala		31	M Kuraba
60	M	Mala		40	M Kuraba
35	M	Mala		40	M Kuraba
63	M	Mala			
35	M	Mala		50	M Vaddena
62	M	Mala		55	M Kuraba
50	M	Mala		45	M Vaddesa
38	M	Muslim		18	F Jangamma
26	M	Muslim		37	M Vaddesa
35	F	Muslim		28	M Vaddesa
25	M	Muslim		26	M Kurava
27	M	Muslim		55	M Kurava
		Kapu		55	M Harijan
32	M	Reddy		43	M Mala
24	M	Baliya		45	M Mala
20	M			45	M Mala
24	M	Reddy		45	M Mala
18	F	Baliya		35	M Mala
40	M	Boya		45	F Mala
32	M	Mala		70	M Mala
				50	M Mala
				60	M Mala
				30	F Mala
				32	M Mala
				22	M Mala
				33	M Mala
				38	F Muslim
				37	M Mala
				55	M Vyiya
				45	F Boya
				21	F Vaddela

Source: 1994-5 ESRC Data Archive data set study number 3927.

Appendix 2: Extract from a fictional work

This extract indicates the overlap of buddhist and hindu ideas in the common Telugu discourse about religious beliefs. First you will see the Hindu ideas, then the Buddhist ideas. The author is contrasting both with the western view of the individualised soul.

<p>Extract:</p>	<p>Commentary: Introduction - the narrator is a man who has known the woman Kumudam for many years, and he needs to collect some rents from her. This conversation occurs at her home, which his family rents to her and her family, in the period of beautiful sunset light during which they have a quiet conversation. Afterward he leaves without asking for the rent. By not offering the rent, and not drawing the conversation to a prosaic money topic, she indicates that she knows he gained more from the conversation than can be expressed in money.</p>
<p>For not taunting me and upbraiding me because I had no job, but appreciating me, I rather respected Kumudam. 'Women in the western countries don't, like ours do, sell themselves to their husbands for a living,' I said. . . 'We cannot avoid being slaves to someone in this world, it seems to me. Isn't even God Himself becoming a slave to devotees?' [said Kumudam.] 'I don't see why I should respect and serve this society which has not given me a job so far.' 'You will be happy only if you don't have a job. But what is this crazy idea, why should anyone give you a job? You are born to perform something great, you told me sometime back. I would believe so. Do that. Daring and doing what one likes alone is best. I cannot tolerate slavery.' 'Without enslavement how can one achieve love?' ...</p>	<p>He expresses a need for respect from her. Since he is of the rent-receiving landlord class, this is surprising. He wants her approval. So he surprises her by objecting to the dowry system.</p> <p>She objects that women are in any case enslaved to those they care for.</p> <p>The translator has followed the Christian convention of capitalising the God words. There are no capitals in Telugu.</p> <p>Kumudam questions western values.</p> <p>Kumudam presents the <i>karma</i> idea that your soul's past offers opportunities for good actions in the present and future.</p> <p>She encourages him to act well. This is a Hindu idea.</p>
<p>'If one has no connection with the world, why achieve great things?</p>	<p>The dualism offered by the narrator is western. The author knows that he is presenting Hinduism with its western, dualistic, rational critics.</p> <p>A non-dualistic Buddhist will tend to think that one can 'strive' without 'desiring' - all at the <i>same time</i>, because <i>desire</i> and <i>satisfaction</i> are not polar opposites but rather can co-exist simultaneously. For a post-scriptural interpretation arguing that seven different religious traditions all reached a similar conclusion, see Bhaskar, 2001.</p>
<p>'Because through achievement men obtain</p>	

<p>liberation from enslavement; if we desire something and ask the world, it won't give it. If we don't desire anything, and from a distance do whatever we can, then the world will fall at our feet.'</p>	<p>Kumudam is now presenting the Buddhist view. Action aimed at desire fulfilment is hopeless, they/we claim. The desires create anxiety and unhappiness. The ultimate achievement is to give up desire; here Buddhist meditation and Hindu worship of the higher levels come together. (* refer to online sources)</p>
<p>That Kumudam would crave so much for liberty I had never imagined. Husband, children, family, job—even love—all these are forms of slavery, she said.</p>	<p>The author presents the narrator's western interpretation of the Buddhist thoughts. Actually this is a misinterpretation of what Kumudam meant. The author uses irony to implicitly contrast the westernised Indian man with the traditional, devout, distanced, calm woman.</p>
	<p>Throughout the short story's text, the woman is presented as a gardener; she is wet, rich, fertile and full of potentiality which is represented by seed metaphors. The author suggests that she is happy and free of unsatisfied needs, while the westernised man is very unhappy throughout his de-natured life.</p>

Source: Buchchibabu, 1995: 221-222.

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