

Labour Activism and Women in the Unorganised Sector: Garment Export Industry in Bangalore

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# Labour Activism and Women in the Unorganised Sector

## Garment Export Industry in Bangalore

*Wages and working conditions in Bangalore's rapidly expanding garments export sector, employing a large number of women, remain completely unregulated. Governments and mainstream trade unions have been largely indifferent to this sector.*

*A number of NGOs and new trade unions have now stepped into this vacuum.*

*Their framework of activism focuses on developmentalism of a certain kind – credit associations, slum or neighbourhood development, internationalising the issue of workers' rights – rather than on confrontational struggles over wages and working conditions. This genre of activism is based on a broad understanding of the informal sector, where a large number are self-employed, as one in which the employer-employee or capital-labour relationship is opaque, if not absent. However, this understanding and activism may indeed be limited in a context where capital is internationalised and labour is recast, into contractual, casualised, and in this case, feminised, workforce.*

SUPRIYA ROYCHOWDHURY

### I Introduction

The impact of marketisation reforms on the labour market in terms of informalisation of the workforce has been well documented. Informalisation is frequently seen as a double edged sword: in the informal sector, workers lack both the legal entitlement to fair wages and other benefits, and at the same time in a labour surplus context, lacking security of employment and a basis for unionisation, the workforce is increasingly disempowered. Casualisation of women's employment has received particular attention. It is generally acknowledged that globalisation has opened some new avenues of employment for women, such as in export zones. But low wages, insecurities and complete lack of organisational strength have characterised the quality of employment.

In the recent past, there have been several efforts to 'organise the unorganised'. The decline of the organised sector and the weakening of the trade union movement has provided the backdrop in which new unions have emerged to organise the informal sector. To an extent, the perceived limitations of the traditional trade unions – such as over politicisation – have shaped the politics and discourse of the unorganised sector. Thus a studied distance from political parties characterise the activities of new unions, (for example, the National Centre for Labour, SEWA). Secondly, this new activism is frequently expressed around issues that are not marked by the sharp edges of the capital-labour conflict. Thus for example, beyond employment and wages, the emphasis of the new activism is on a range of issues, like housing, health, education, street lighting, water, sanitation, and so on.

One significant feature of this activism, then, is that the community, rather than class, has become the protagonist and

the potential recipient of welfare. Also, of course, in the context of casualisation, where employment is scattered, decentred and frequently self-generated, it is the state, rather than private capital that becomes the sole target of welfare activism. The shift in labour activism from a class-based discourse is thus the result of many factors.

This shift is perhaps most clearly highlighted in the issues and activism around women's work. Here the most prominent initiatives have been around themes such as self-help groups, credit, entrepreneurship and so on. By and large the underlined emphasis has been on enlarging the scope of benefits, working both on state agencies and on the idea of self-generated initiative, thrift, credit worthiness, developing entrepreneurial abilities, and so on. There is a pronounced absence of a conceptualisation of conflict-based struggle, in terms of clearly defined protagonists and antagonists.

And yet, it needs to be underlined that the critical issues of women's deprivation revolve around questions such as unequal wages, lack of maternity related benefits, discrimination in the workplace, lack of child care facilities. While there are ILO guidelines as well as national legislation on equal pay for comparable work, these remain unimplemented in many sectors where women are employed in large numbers, for example, plantations, construction, and increasingly in the new export-oriented zones such as the ready-made garment industry. Historically, trade unions, whether of the left or of other parties, have been singularly unable or disinclined to address these issues, or to promote women as leaders within their organisations, as a basis for a more focused drive on these issues. This is not only because numerically women have had low representation within unions, but also importantly because trade union leaders, functioning within patriarchy dominated paradigms, have not viewed women in terms of equal partners or in terms of their particular needs. This

failure of the trade union movement as far as the rights of women workers are concerned is well documented [Menon 1992].

This paper examines the shift from traditional unions to a new genre of activism and the implications thereof for women workers. Does the new activism perceive itself as addressing the issues left unaddressed by the traditional trade unions? To what extent does the new activism – centred on self-help groups, credit and so on – address the core issues of women's deprivation? What indeed are the fundamental dynamics underlying women's deprivation in the context of marketisation? What are the effects of the union-political party distancing in the new era?

In order to address these questions, the paper will look at women employed in the garment manufacturing industry in Bangalore, and at an activist group engaged in articulating the interests of these women. Following this introduction, Section II will provide a brief overview of the garment industry in Bangalore; Section III presents a brief history of unionisation in this sector in Bangalore; in Section IV we discuss the emergence and genesis of CIVIDEP, a group of activists engaged in working for women workers of about 15 garment factories in the Mysore Road area of Bangalore; Section V, focuses on women workers in a particular unit, Vidya Creations, in order to highlight CIVIDEP's beliefs, philosophy and activities; Section VI examines CIVIDEP's beliefs in the context of the concept of international labour rights; Section VII provides a conclusion looking at the dilemmas that beset worker-related activism in the current era.

## II

### Women and the Garment Industry in Bangalore

India's ready-made garment industry contributes around 16 per cent to total export earnings and is the largest foreign exchange earner in the country. Most of the growth in the industry occurred from the decade of the 1980s onwards, the growth chart being something like from \$2 million in 1960-61 to \$696 million in 1980-81, and then sharply to \$2,236 million in 1990-91, and to \$4,765 million in 1999-2000. As is well known the driving force behind the globalisation of the garment industry is indeed the vast disparity in wage levels. In the starkest terms, whereas the hourly wage of a British worker is about Rs 420, a garment worker earns about Rs 8 an hour [Roopa 2003].

Next to the beedi industry, the garment industry employs the largest number of women in Karnataka. The distinctive feature of the garment industry here is that it is relatively well organised in factory-based production. In Delhi and Mumbai, the two other large centres of garment manufacture, production is predominantly home-based and piece-rated. Officially there are 788 garment-manufacturing units in Karnataka, of which 729 are in Bangalore. The total number of workers statewide is 1,53,978 out of which 1,46,835 are located in Bangalore units. The number of women workers in the industry statewide is 1,10,019, out of which 1,03,039 are in Bangalore [Roopa 2003].

The exploitative nature of the employment of women in the garment industry is well documented, and needs no elaboration here. Briefly, the large majority of women, whether they are working as skilled tailors or as unskilled helpers, do not get even what is the legally stipulated minimum wage. They are frequently required to work overtime, but since this is set against production targets, workers are not paid for overtime work. Insecurity of work is one of the most widely reported problems, as employers frequently terminate a woman's service just

before completion of five years in order to avoid payment of gratuity. Harsh production targets, sexual and verbal abuse, lack of maternity and other leave, lack of accident insurance, absence of toilet and creche facilities, are some of the commonly stated and widely known features of female employment in garment manufacture. This misery underpins the production of high fashion garments sold in chic stores in the first world and worn by middle and upper class women who pay for a single dress a price that exceeds several times the monthly income of a woman who produces it.

## III

### Background of Unionisation

Given the abject conditions of employment and wages, it is indeed puzzling that unionisation has been almost non-existent in this sector. Bangalore has a long tradition of trade union activism, with several national level trade union leaders, belonging to the different federations, based in the city. Both in the public and private sectors, workers are given to unionisation, collective bargaining, and so on. Most garment factories employ more than 100 workers, thus in principle falling within the framework of the Factories Act and the Industrial Disputes Act. Thus one would expect not only a far more stringent application of minimum wage and other regulations in this sector, but also unionised activities to ensure worker interests.

The predominantly feminine profile of the workforce has indeed worked against unionisation, but the lack of unionism in this sector, also reflects that mainstream trade unions in the city have shown a certain marked apathy towards this relatively new and predominantly female-oriented sector. Given the high export earning capacity of the sector – which is underwritten, unfortunately by its low wage cost – state incentive to implement labour regulations in this sector have been low. This unfortunate alignment of forces underlies the misery of labour in this sector.

In Bangalore, in the 1960s and 1970s the industry was concentrated in the Lalbagh area, (a crowded commercial-industrial neighbourhood) in the proximity of other industrial establishments, and with a predominantly male worker profile. This structure possibly had a potential for unionisation. Following the industry's shift into a predominantly export-oriented zone, and the entry of a larger number of enterprises, it became much more decentred geographically. The industry is now spread over three areas in the city: Boomsandra, Peeniya and Mysore Road. Both Boomsandra and Mysore Road are close to outlying rural areas, attracting a large number of rural women to these units. The physical spread of the industry as also the presence of a large number of rural women are both factors that underpin the weak unionisation in the industry. The nature of the industry, which requires low capital investment in physical infrastructure has also worked against unionisation. Individual companies have adopted the strategy of spreading out units to outlying areas. Thus for example, Gokuldas Images is one of the largest garment-manufacturing units in the country. In Bangalore the company has no less than 45 units, spread over many parts of the city.

In the mid 1980s, management-worker problems erupted in a particular unit of Gokuldas Images located in Magadi Road. The workers became unionised and affiliated to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. During this time, however, the company decided to shift location of this unit to Hebbal, a neighbourhood at a distance of several kilometres from the original location. Many employees

were unable to work in the new location and so dropped out. This broke the basis of the emerging unionism in the unit. Subsequently, the unit was sold, although it remained within the owner's family. Under the new management, a large number of the older workers were retrenched, and some compensation was given to them. Thereafter the company decided to close down this particular unit, and at that time workers were given no compensation. Some of the women workers went to court. The case, which came up in 1987, dragged on till 2003, when the final verdict went against the workers.

In the case of Samrat Asoke garment manufacturing unit, CITU was involved in organising a strike in 1996. The strike, however, led to the closure of the company. Approximately 10,000 workers lost their jobs. This was the last time that the CITU was seriously involved in organising garment workers. But the closure leading to loss of jobs demoralised the workforce greatly and destroyed the tentative steps that had been taken towards unionisation. Workers are not only sceptical about strikes but are suspicious of anyone who they see as attempting to organise them into unions.

#### IV CIVIDEP: Genesis and Emergence

It is in the context of this apparent distance between the trade union movement on the one hand, and garment sector workers on the other, that one needs to view the alternate kinds of activism which have begun to emerge in this sector. This section discusses an organisation called Civil Initiatives for Development (CIVIDEP), which came into existence in the year 2000 as a registered society under the Societies Registration Act. CIVIDEP is concerned solely with women workers in the garment industry in Bangalore. CIVIDEP is, on the face of it, an NGO. And yet, the fact that an organisation solely concerned with workers interests describes itself as an NGO rather than as a trade union highlights certain significant features of this industry, as also of the political space of activism in the current context.

A former left activist leads CIVIDEP, a group of over dozen full-time members, and several part-time consultants.<sup>1</sup> His shift from political party to NGO was underlined both by a general disillusionment with party politics and with the left movement in particular. As part of the anti-emergency movement, he had associated with a large number of pro-democracy forces, particularly the Janata Dal. Subsequently, the splitting of the Janata Dal into many factions, and party crossing by many important Janata Dal politicians left a sense of disillusionment. The left parties, on the other hand, had hardened into highly bureaucratic organisations, with little space for new thinking and unable to attract youth. More specifically, left organisations such as the CITU had developed expertise in particular areas of activism, such as public sector companies. But PSU-related issues were now only marginal to the issues that face industrial labour. The pronounced thrust in industry towards shrinking the organised sector of the workforce and the completely unregulated and unprotected character of the unorganised sector had created a need for trade unions with a new social base. This need was largely unmet within the traditional trade union movement. Unionists disenchanting with the scope and methods of the traditional trade unions moved towards the informal sector.

Two other members of this organisation are former garment industry workers, who had a long history of attempting to organise

workers in unions, and who ultimately lost their jobs. They bring to the organisation their long experience in the industry, but also the lessons that they have learnt of the possible inappropriateness of trade union activity in this sector.

It was to fill the vacuum created by the inactivity of mainstream trade unions in the informal sector that organisations such as CIVIDEP came into existence. But a singular ambivalence marks their self-definition, as they see themselves operating at different times at different levels. Currently the principal *modus operandi* is what is described as the 'campaign mode', where the main focus is on bringing to the notice of the state and of civil society the plight of women garment workers. But the group hopes that in the future it may be possible to shift to the 'union mode' – that is collective bargaining, negotiation and pressurising the management.

A close look would reveal, however, that to the extent that CIVIDEP has been able to capture the workers' imagination, it is as a non trade union outfit. The reluctance of workers to have anything to do with a trade union has already been discussed above. CIVIDEP activists stressed that wage bargaining at the firm level is completely out of bounds for them because they never present themselves as union leaders to the firm management. Thus as far as wages are concerned, their efforts are confined to lobbying with the government to raise the minimum wage in this sector.

It appeared that the central philosophy of the group was to create a sense of organisation and unity amongst the women, without placing them in a conflictual mode with management. This organisational framework and the sense of unity created, could, in the future, be used for shifting the women to a union mode of activism. Until such time, it appears that the activities of the group are directed towards micro activities which can to an extent address the workers' problems of economic insecurity and at the same time to create a sense of solidarity whereby they can resist the everyday degradations that appear to be part and parcel of their workday/lives.

CIVIDEP's activities are confined to 15 factories in the Mysore Road area. The women workers in these factories are organised into small solidarity groups, largely on the basis of the localities in which they live. The main activity of these is to act as self-help groups (SHGs) for the organisation of microcredit. Thus each member of the group contributes Rs 100 at the start of each month, and members can take small credit amounts from what is collected. The purposes for borrowing are usually festivals, school admissions for children, and so on.

The other part of CIVIDEP's activities is to organise training camps in order to raise awareness of issues which affect women workers. These camps are held in local school auditoriums, and are typically addressed by labour activists, labour advocates, occasionally officers from the labour commissioner's office. Camps attract up to 500 participants. The camps are designed to inform the workers of labour laws and their rights, so that they learn to have an awareness of their situation.

#### V CIVIDEP and Vidya Creations

It was at a camp organised by CIVIDEP that set off a chain of events in Vidya Creations in the Mysore Road area. Workers in this unit, numbering about 600, worked under a particularly harsh production manager. Their workday easily extended to

7.30 or 8 pm every day, and they were not paid overtime. Working against heavy targets, they also had to contend with lack of toilet facilities, no maternity or other leave, and a harsh regimen where late comers were sent back or fined heavily. Many of the women also suffered sexual harassment by the production manager, many were grossly underpaid, and so on.

An awareness camp and pamphlets distributed by CIVIDEP brought a few workers in touch with CIVIDEP's activists. They recounted their plight in the factory, and particularly the inhuman methods of the production manager. CIVIDEP organised a visit to the unit by state level members of the National Commission for Women and the assistant labour commissioner. This visit led to the removal of the production manager and the appointment in his place of a more humane manager. Thus the intervention of the NCW highlighted to the owners not only the misbehavior of the production manager, but also the fact that the system of oppression within the factory was no longer as opaque as it had been before and that they could, in fact, be subject to public scrutiny.

In an interview conducted with around 30 women belonging to this particular factory, it appeared that the intervention by the NCW, through the mediation of CIVIDEP, is looked upon as a watershed in the occupational lives of these women. After the visit of the NCW, their toilet facilities improved, they were being paid for overtime work, their working hours were typically limited to eight, it was easier to get leave, and so on. For each of these questions, the before and after conditions of the NCW visit was systematically highlighted.

For CIVIDEP this case has been a vindication of their strategy, which is that instead of adopting a confrontational posture vis-a-vis management, it is better to adopt a variety of other indirect means, such as highlighting the women's sufferings in the public eye, and particularly to draw the attention of concerned agencies. Thus recently, CIVIDEP has taken to writing to the labour commissioner's office, attempting to elicit its support in certain extreme cases of exploitation in particular units.

This particular incident also highlights, however, the limits of this kind of activism. In an industry whose geographical spread is considerable, and in which quick locational shifts are more than possible, the vigilance of women's commissions and labour officials can at best be extremely limited. This kind of intervention is also highly contingent on the particular inclinations of individuals who happen to be involved in any given situation, their sympathies, their relative incorruptibility and so on. It is therefore fairly clear that this methodology of activism can be effective only in the preliminary stages of struggle and in extreme cases of abuse, but can hardly be an overall strategy of change.

In interviews with the women workers, it was found that most of the women were receiving monthly wages in the range of Rs 1,900-2,100. This corresponds to the minimum wage in this sector, fixed by the Karnataka government at Rs 72 per day. The women spoke strongly of the inadequacy of the wage and their need for a higher minimum. On the questions of wages, however, the plight of workers in this sector is up against a variety of odds. In fact, in Karnataka, the minimum wage for garment workers was raised to Rs 78 in 2001. The Karnataka chapter of the Cloth Manufacturers' Association of India took up the matter with the high court, and the court subsequently reduced the minimum wage by Rs 6.30.

How do the women perceive activism, their future, their children's future? Many of the women head households, having

been abandoned by their husbands. Most were married to men working in the unorganised sector, in work even more insecure and irregular than the work of the women themselves. The men in these households were frequently employed as skilled or semi-skilled labour in the small-scale industry sector. But given the rapid decline of the SSI sector in Karnataka in the last decade, many factories were closed<sup>2</sup> and the men rendered jobless. Almost every one of the women said that they worked in 'garment', (the local word for the industry), only because they had no option. The only possible option would be to work as domestic help. In terms of status, this was considered worse than garments, [Bannerjee 1991] but, many women, unable to bear the physical strain of working in a garment factory, leave and take up part-time domestic jobs. Thus garments and domestic jobs are the two options available to these women, with not much to choose between the two.

Each of the women described the pressure of work as unbearable. They said that they would be willing to settle for even less pay if the production target was lowered. For each, it seemed, the dream job was one in a government, where they would be able to work with 'free minds'. Thus the pressure of work combined with the harshness of the supervisors was what constituted their major source of anguish. Many said that their jobs in other units had been terminated for the smallest of mistakes. Permanent job was another dream. Each of the women said that they did not know what a trade union meant, either the English word or its Kannada equivalent. They had not even a vague concept of what a trade union might be. They knew about CIVIDEP for its positive intervention in bringing in the NCW, and they were comfortable discussing their individual problems with CIVIDEP activists. There was, however, in the discussions, no sense of a collective goal-seeking with regard to the problems which they had stated.

## VI Workers' Rights beyond the Nation

The current position of CIVIDEP is that factory-based action on the question of wages would not be a strategically appropriate choice of action. In their perception, the industry is essentially part of a long supply chain, and the freedom of manufacturers is to that extent extremely limited. There are, in fact more than a hundred operations between the designer and the final consumer. In this chain, only 15 are in the hands of the manufacturer. Any serious agitation for a rise in wages would lead manufacturers to shift their operations to other localities, beyond the reach of unionists. Essentially, in a production system of this kind, the most powerful voice is that of the retailer's. The state's control over the retailer is all but non-existent. At the same time, the state is highly appreciative of the industry's foreign exchange earning capacity. Therefore, the state's incentive to prod the industry to pay higher wages to a palpably powerless class of women workers, is understandably low. It is in this sense that CIVIDEP has all but ruled out the question of pressurising firms to come up with higher pay packets.

An important direction of CIVIDEP's current thinking, thus, is that for serious changes to come about, retailers abroad, manufacturers and the state must work together. Activists stressed that the buyer's pressure has so far been perceived to be most effective in ensuring minimum wages. Thus the fairly large number of units in Bangalore which supply to Nike, Gap and

Wal-Mart, are subject to regular checks by the local agents of these companies. It is in these units that the minimum wage is being paid, while it is being clearly flouted by other units. But whether it is the payment of the existing minimum wage, or its substantial revision upwards, what is important is to enlist the support of the retailer in order to create the necessary pressure upon government and local agencies for a higher wage structure and its effective implementation.

Thus the vision here is that of the creation of an international opinion forum. Thereby consumers as well as producers abroad – who are the major beneficiaries of the low wages paid in this industry – can be persuaded to extend their support and sympathies towards the workers for better wages and working conditions. This, it is assumed, will provide the necessary teeth for the implementation of these measures. In other words, given the nature of the supply chain in this industry which places the greatest leverage in the hands of retailers located abroad, the push for improvement in employment conditions must come from this external source, rather than from domestic sources.

In this vision, there is an indication of what the future of labour rights activism might look like in an increasingly globalised context. Thus what is envisaged is that an internationally created and monitored set of rights might emerge in this sector, and the fear of losing the orders of retailers abroad will force domestic producers to guarantee certain rights to their workforce. This is being attempted in the sphere of child labour in particular industries, where products must be marked as not having been produced by child labour in order to be fit for exports.

## VII Conclusion

This then is an activism that has defined itself predominantly outside the factory. Its organisational strategy aims at awareness raising, group solidarity and building of credit groups. The targets of lobbying or pressure are the government, state and national level women's activist groups, international retailers and consumers. It should be noted that worker-related activism which adopts a non-conflictual mode and is developed outside the factory is an emerging phenomenon that has been studied before. Kalpagam's (1994 published) study of the discourse and practice of informal sector politics noted that for both SEWA (Ahmedabad) and the WWF (Madras) the fundamental philosophy was a distancing from political parties, a developmental approach (that is, thrift, entrepreneurship, credit) rather than a confrontational approach, belief in a mutual self-help approach, and using credit as an entry point for mobilisation. In the author's own research on the Karnataka Koligeri Nivasa Sangathana (KKNS) in Karnataka, I have pointed out that the KKNS, while working with the unorganised sector (construction workers, marble workers), has turned towards organising the poor within their residential localities. Thus slum-based welfare groups have come up under the leadership of the KKNS which work to solve a range of problems, such as street lighting, better roads, water, electricity, schools and so on. The thrust then is to lobby with the state for improvement in living conditions rather than to struggle with employers for better wages [RoyChowdhury:2003].

This activist thrust is particularly noticeable in the case of women workers. One important reason for this has of course been that a large number of women in the unorganised sector

are self-employed, and as such the exploiter-exploited relationship is not readily visible. This understanding of the informal sector as one in which the employer-employee, or capital-labour relationship is opaque, if not absent, is widely shared. It has underlined, on the one hand, trade union indifference to the informal sector. On the other hand this understanding has to an extent justified the use of developmental activism rather than confrontational struggles.

The self-employed, of course, remain an important part of the informal economy. It needs to be said, however, that in the changing context of the economy, the capital-labour relationship is not found exclusively within the classically defined formal sector, that is, in large scale factories where a large number of male workers work in assembly line operations, and are given to unionisation. The predominant thrust in a globalising economy has in fact been to recast this workforce, both within and outside the factory, as, irregular, underwritten by temporary contracts rather than permanent employment, putting out systems, outsourcing, ancillarisation, and so on. The use of a large number of women workers in the garment industry is only an expression of these tendencies. Thus instead of using highly paid, unionised, possibly male workers in the first world, capital has relocated part of its activities such that it may use underpaid, non-unionised, female workers in the third world. The capital-labour relationship, and the highly exploitative edge to it, is fairly clear in these contexts and is not opaque.

In the present context, the questions that face activists are perhaps different from those that faced SEWA in the 1980s when it was formed primarily as a trade union for self-employed women. The question, clearly, is whether a developmental ideology – around self-help, credit, entrepreneurship and so on – should exclude a focus on what constitutes the core of exploitation in this context, i.e., the extraction of surplus value from a disempowered populace, in this case doubly disempowered, by class and gender. Should the 'class' dimension of the context be relocated to the background, focusing attention on immediate needs of credit, housing, schooling and so on.

The philosophy of organisations such as CIVIDEP is possibly more complex than what is highlighted by this either/or dilemma of developmentalism versus confrontational struggle. Thus the main thrust appears to be to build solidarity amongst completely powerless women, to bring to them a sense of economic security and self-sufficiency by promoting credit societies, and perhaps to use this organisational framework in the future as a tool of collective action.

On the other hand, what is absent here really is a clear conceptualisation of the contenders in the conflict. Thus the focus on the retailer, and on the consumer as possible targets of campaigning and awareness raising, and the hope that pressures from these sources may indeed provide the cutting edge to changing the conditions of employment in this sector, has a unreal note in it. In a sense also, this strategy clearly belongs to the broad pattern adopted by mainstream trade unions, where the effort is to improve the conditions of workers within the framework of capitalism without challenging its basic premises. This trade union philosophy has indeed worked effectively in order to gain for workers in the west not only decent levels of wage but also a wide range of welfaristic measures that ensure them decent and secure standards of living.

But this strategy worked in a context where capital was clearly seen as an opponent from which concessions had to be

wrenched, and where the support of rapidly democratising states and social democratic parties could be enlisted in this battle. In the current context, where capital is located beyond national boundaries, and therefore far more inaccessible, where states are powerless against internationalised capital, the battlelines have changed irrevocably. The focus on influencing the opinion of retailers and consumers may therefore mean little in a context where the debate on international labour standards remains unresolved, where the impact of international organisations such as the ILO in implementing labour rights is arguably inadequate [Brown 2001], and where the broader ideological environment now clearly prioritises profits over welfare. In such a context, there may in fact be no alternative to waging micro battles in order to raise wages and working conditions at the factory level, and at the same time to pressurise the state to turn away from economic policies that pitch international capital against domestic workers. [27]

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### Notes

[An earlier version of this paper was presented at National Seminar on Globalisation and Women's Work, March 25-26, 2004, V V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida. The author is grateful to participants of the seminar for their comments and suggestions.]

1 This paragraph draws on two interviews with Gopinath, founder-director of CIVIDEP, Bangalore, in February 2004.

2 A study of the small-scale industries sector in Bangalore division highlights the rapid rate of erosion of the SSI sector. Between 1993-94 and 1998-99, 3,339 units received a new capital investment subsidy. Out of these, only 66 per cent were working in 2001 and 33 per cent had closed down. Within Bangalore Urban district, which received 36 per cent share of the total subsidy, 82.46 per cent of units had closed down [K Gayathri: 2002].

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1819 L St., N.W., Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Selected applicants will be notified before November 30, 2005. Fieldwork should be completed prior to residence at the East-West Center Washington in Fall 2006.

For more information visit our website:  
[www.eastwestcenterwashington.org](http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org)  
or email: [Washington@eastwestcenter.org](mailto:Washington@eastwestcenter.org)