

'Differences in Workers' Narratives of Contention in Two Central Indian Towns ' by Manjusha Nair, International Labor and Working Class History

In this article, Dr Nair (Sociology) shows how the politics of informal workers in India has changed after the introduction of neoliberal reforms in 1991.

Contract work in India, though legally regulated by a 1970 Act, is widespread and mostly unrecognized. With the implementation of neoliberal policies in India since the 1990s, contract work has become the norm. There are now few spaces in which contract workers can get redress through the legal system. Using oral history narratives of contract workers' participation in a labor movement, this article shows how narratives of contention differ in the rendering of agency, success, and future, between one group of contract workers employed in the 1970s in a state-owned mine and another employed in the 1990s in an industrial area owned by private and foreign capital. The evidence for the article is ethnographic, collected in Chhattisgarh region in central India. This article suggests that these workers' narratives show the transformation in practices of citizenship, resistance, and militancy in India over time. Such differences are essential in understanding phenomena like the resurgence of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh.

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