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### CLAIMING ENTITLEMENTS IN ‘NEO-LIBERAL’ INDIA Mumbai’s Ex-millworkers’ Political Mobilisation on the Rehabilitation Question

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*The last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the decline and eventual closure of large scale industries in Indian cities such as Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Kolkata and Kanpur. The closure of large scale industries not only resulted in the dispersal of once organised workforce into the informal sector but also had negative implications for the politics of labour which saw a major decline since the 1970s, and more particularly since the 1980s. Given the closure of large scale industries and the subsequent retrenchment of the workforce what is happening to the politics of the labour that was organised through the trade unions. This question is addressed in this paper by examining the political mobilisation of Mumbai’ ex-millworkers on the rehabilitation question.*

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## 1. Introduction

The last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the decline and eventual closure of large scale industries in Indian cities such as Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Kolkata and Kanpur. These industrial centres were historically known of large scale industrial and political actions that were organised by trade union which at times took a militant form (Breman 2004; Joshi 2003; Gooptu 2007; Chandavarkar 1998). The closure of large scale industries not only resulted in the dispersal of once organised workforce into the informal sector but also had negative implications for the politics of labour which saw a major decline since the 1970s, and more particularly since the 1980s. In Mumbai, the textile mill workers, known for being the vanguard of labour movement in the country, went on an eighteen month long strike in 1982-83 which was put down by the mill owners in connivance with the state, and the officially recognised union, the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS)<sup>2</sup>. The failure of the strike crucially led to the reversal of the entitlements that the mill workers had obtained through various struggles. Given that the textile mills have closed down what is happening to the politics of the labour that was organised through the trade unions. This paper addresses this question by examining the political mobilisation of Mumbai's ex-millworkers on the rehabilitation question<sup>3</sup> such as housing and alternative employment.

Studies on Ahmedabad and Kanpur have shown that the closure of textile mills and the retrenchment that followed have resulted in the disappearance of spaces for 'social cohesion' (Breman 2004: 290), and 'alternative notions of community and identity' (Joshi 2003: 174). In her study on the Kanpur textile industry, Joshi (2003: 320) has noted that for the ex-millworkers the 'stories about struggles in the past seem unreal and distant'. In such circumstances, Breman (2004) and Joshi (2003) have argued that the retrenched workforce sought refuge in communal formations, which subsequently led to their participation in the communal pogroms against Muslims. Contrary to this view is the one that Gooptu (2007) documents among the ex-millworkers of the Kolkata jute industry. Like both the studies mentioned above, Gooptu also notes a sense of 'fear and loss of power and capacity' (ibid: 1927) among the ex-millworkers. However, despite ex-millworkers' disillusionment that has generated cynicism towards politics whereby the arena of 'democratic institutional politics [is] merely seen as a source of patronage and benefits' (ibid: 1927), this has not resulted in the 'crystallisation of communal identities' (ibid: 1923). Like Gooptu (2007), I also do not see a trend among Mumbai's ex-millworkers embracing communal or nativist politics. However, unlike Gooptu (2007) I do not see among the ex-millworkers a sense of hopelessness with the democratic politics. In contrast, Mumbai's ex-millworkers have re-organised politically since 2006 to claim their entitlements in the form of housing and alternative employment.

Interestingly, the political mobilisation of Mumbai's ex-millworkers on the rehabilitation question is taking place in the context of India's adoption of the 'neo-liberal' model of development whereby the state has adopted an aggressively market friendly approach. Following Brenner and Theodore (Brenner and Theodore 2002 : 352), I understand neo-liberalism as a process that espouses the creation of 'free' 'markets liberated from state interference'. In practice, however, this has often 'entailed a dramatic intensification of

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<sup>2</sup> National Mill Workers' Federation.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the ex-millworkers with whom my doctoral thesis is focused upon, a substantial number of mill workers also lost their jobs due to the liquidation of few textile mills, such as the Bradbury Mills, in the early 1980s. These workers are still waiting for their dues to be cleared. This is also an important issue as far rehabilitation of Mumbai's ex-millworkers is concerned (Interview with Kishore Deshpande, January 2011). However, it is beyond the scope of my doctoral thesis to investigate this section of ex-millworkers.

coercive, disciplinary form of state intervention in order to impose market rules'. In accepting this definition I make a minor but important modification by arguing that while the Indian state is actively creating conditions for the implementation of neoliberal policies it does not always intervene with a coercive apparatus. In many cases the Indian state pretends to be benign mainly due to the compulsions of electoral politics. However, once this pressure is not that significant it pursues such policies that are required for the implementation of neoliberal model of development.

Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to address the following questions. How are the unions raising demands for rehabilitation? How is the Indian state managing the question of ex-millworkers' rehabilitation? How are the mill owners/developers responding to ex-millworkers' rehabilitation demands? Given the large number of ex-millworkers (and their dependants) involved in the political mobilization, is trade union politics and its relation to party politics playing any role in shaping the rehabilitation question? Broadly speaking, in what ways is the pro-investor and pro-growth state affecting ex-millworkers' rehabilitation is the main question addressed in this paper. To answer these questions, this paper relies on the data collected during my doctoral fieldwork in August 2008 until August 2009, December 2010 until January 2011, and recent fieldtrip from August 2013 until September 2013. The data includes interviews with ex-millworkers, trade union leaders, political activists, and non-participant observations of the various union meetings, and rallies. Besides, the minutes of the Monitoring Committee, that was set up by the Government of Maharashtra to 'monitor the sale and development' of the cotton textile mill lands, will also be used.

In the following section, I begin by examining how land use legislations ushered in by the state expedited the process of the closure of textile mills. Once the closure of mills was apparent the state endorsed the business groups' 'vision' to transform Mumbai into a 'world class' city. I argue that the state and employer relations that have always been cordial have become even closer in the era of neo-liberal economic restructuring. Given the large number of ex-millworkers and its political nature the state was bound to face the question of rehabilitation. As such the state stipulated some provisions in terms of alternative employment and housing. I examine the issue of alternative employment and re-skilling in the third section. I argue that the employers' connivance with the state allows them to get away with the provisions of re-skilling and alternative employment. I also argue that employers' refusal to hire ex-millworker is due to the demands latter make in terms of proper conditions of work, and the possible fear of unionisation. For the employers providing proper conditions of work contradicts with the idea of 'self-regulated' markets, which the neo-liberal state in India has sought to offer them. Similarly, on the housing question, which I have discussed in the fourth section, the mill owners continue to remain indifferent and every attempt is made by them to delay the transfer of the share of land for ex-millworkers' housing. The state too remains reluctant in taking strong actions against the mill owners due their connivance.

The non-implementation of the provisions of housing and alternative employment has resulted in the revival of union activity and political mobilisation of ex-millworkers. The political mobilisation of ex-millworkers on the rehabilitation question, I argue, has led to a sense of entitlements among Mumbai's ex-millworkers. The ex-millworkers see the demand for housing and alternative employment as a rightful entitlement something which requires an active state intervention. I examine the various ways in which unions are pressurising the state and political parties. Finally, I conclude this paper by summarising the questions raised in this section.

## 2. From mill hands to mill lands: Towards a ‘world class’ Mumbai

In the post-independence period, Mumbai mill owners actively pursued the policy of rationalising the workforce. Given the size of the textile mill labour force and the compulsions of democratic politics it complicated the rationalisation process. Nonetheless, the mill owners did manage to reduce the workforce with the help of the officially recognised union, the RMMS. After the mill workers’ strike of 1982-83 mill workers were rationalised in a significant way, as nearly 100,000 were not taken back to work. It is also in the aftermath of 1982-83 strike that the land question comes in a major way as various attempts were made by the mill owners to link the revival and modernization of the textile mills with the mill land sale. By citing the ‘losses’ they incurred due to the strike, the mill owners demanded permission to sell the ‘surplus’ land for *revival* and *modernisation* of mills. First such submissions were made by the mill owners to the Manohar Kotwal Committee that was set up to investigate the implications of the 1982 strike on workers (Singh 1987: 538). The mill owners pleaded before the committee for the permission to sell the *surplus land* for making their mills viable and for paying workers dues (ibid: 538). The committee rejected the mill owners’ plea and, interestingly, suggested to the state to take over the textile mill land for workers housing.

Looking at the opposition to the mill land sale nine mill owners, citing their inability to handle the financial losses closed down mills in the late 1980s (Iswalkar 2009: 2-3; RoyChowdhury 1995: 241). It was the workers from these closed mills who began an agitation in the 1989 to re-open the mills (Iswalkar 2009: 4). This agitation was organised under the banner *Band Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti*, a joint forum that included workers from different political formations<sup>4</sup>. As elections to the parliamentary and assembly elections were to take place in 1989, electoral considerations stalled the mill land sale process. Datta Samant, the leader of the 1982-83 strike, who opposed the mill land sale, was elected to the parliament in 1984 from Girangaon (Marathi word meaning village of textile mills), the working class district of Mumbai<sup>5</sup>. As the opposition to the mill land sale was gaining momentum opposition parties, as well as from a few Congressmen, displayed strong resistance in the assembly session (RoyChowdhury 1995: 242). Therefore, the land sale issue was postponed till the Congress took over the power in 1990, and, Sharad Pawar, was sworn in as Chief Minister.

Once Congress (I) came to power, DCR (Development Control Regulations) 58, which allowed for the sale of surplus mill land, was introduced in 1991 (henceforth DCR 1991) under the pretext of re-starting the closed mills. The state further received legitimacy from the RMMS that held demonstrations in favour of the land sale. Across Mumbai walls were painted by the RMMS with the slogan *nako amhala jaminicha tukada, amhala hava aahe bhakaricha tukada* (we do not a share of land, we want a piece of bread).<sup>6</sup> For the first time, mill owners acquired the right to sell surplus portion of the mill land for the purpose of the *revival* or *modernization* of the textile mills. These regulations were introduced against the

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<sup>4</sup> Closed Mill Workers’ Action Committee. The forum included ‘Datta Iswalkar, a socialist from Modern Mills, Vithal Ghag from CPM working in Swan Mills, another staffer from Swan Mills called Pravin Ghag belonging to the Shiv Sena, Bal Nar, an RMMS member from Modern Mills, another old Congress mill leader from Shreeniwas Mills called Veramji, and a few more people’ (Adarkar 2004: 420). Later, when the mills were re-opened the organisation dropped the word *band* (closed) and is now one of the important organisations leading the ex- millworkers’ agitation on the rehabilitation question.

<sup>5</sup> Samant’s political party Kamgar Aghadi (Workers’ Front) also had three MLA’s representing different constituencies in Girangaon.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Narayan Ghagre , January 2012

backdrop of the liberalisation of the Indian economy, and the shift in the urban development since the late 1980s towards sustainable development (Kundu 2001)<sup>7</sup>.

It was DCR 1991 that introduced the one-third formula whereby the mill owners were allowed to use the surplus land for commercial purpose, provided they give one-third of the land to MHADA (Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority) for public housing and one-third to BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) for parks and public spaces. While the original purpose of the DCR 1991 was to *revive* and *modernize* the textile mills, this clause was misused and none of the textile mills who availed of the benefit from the changed clause did modernize their mills. In fact, a few mills violated the norms entirely. For instance, Phoenix Mills applied for construction of an entertainment centre for 'workers recreation' but instead constructed an expensive bowling alley (Krishnan 2000: 5; Singh 1987: 21). DCR 58 came under major criticisms for not regulating the developments on the 'surplus' mill land. As a result a further amendment was brought about in 2001 (henceforth DCR 2001).

The DCR 2001 allowed for the final closure of mills as well as the sale of mill land. Most importantly it allowed the mill owners to use the land for non-industrial purposes and sell the mill land in the booming real estate market. These developments also paralleled the saturation of land use in South Mumbai, city's business district, which required more space for expansion. As a result, there was an increasing demand for land in Girangaon. These factors too, contributed to the rapid transformation of Girangaon into a post-industrial landscape that is central to the transition of Mumbai into 'world class' city. These developments in Girangaon have also posed major challenges for ex-millworkers rehabilitation.

In the amended regulation there were clauses for the rehabilitation of textile workers in terms of housing and alternative employment. Additionally, DCR 2001 also made provision for setting up a Monitoring Committee under the 'chairmanship of a retired High Court judge', with the powers of a Civil Court, to regulate the sale and (re) development of lands of the cotton textile mills [DCR 58(9) (a)]. The Monitoring Committee was also assigned the task of monitoring 'the implementation of the provisions of ... housing, alternative employment and related training' for the ex-millworkers [DCR 58 (9) (c) (iv)]. The state thus connived with the designs of the mill owners who managed to secure the permission for the land sale. The state not only overlooked at the irregularities that took place under DCR 1991, but further amended the laws to facilitate closures. Once these changes were ushered in, the closure of the mills took place at a rapid rate between 2002 and 2006. Even the mills that were running in profit, such as the Century mills, decided to close down. These changes paved the way for Mumbai's transition to a post-industrial economy, and more importantly for attaining the 'world class' status.

## 2.1 "World Class" Mumbai

The changes brought in through DCR 58 in 2001 can be seen as a major breakthrough not merely for the textile mills but for the overall transformation of the Mumbai city. Once the

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<sup>7</sup> Since the late 1980s more emphasis has been laid on environmental issues and to make urban development sustainable. During the same time international agencies such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the United States Agency for International Development argued that the functioning of urban land market was hindered due to 'excessive administrative and legal controls' (Kundu 2001: xiv). This placed barriers upon 'the free flow of land from the "uneconomic" industries using obsolete technology to those using modern, efficient units and producing for international markets' (ibid: xiv). In our case this referred to the textile industry using obsolete technology and the restrictions on the land use to be used only for the industrial purposes.

mill owners sought the permission to close down the mills and use the land for non-industrial purposes, business groups lobbied with the state to re-design the metropolis into a ‘world class’ city. The Bombay First, a “citizen’s group” promoted by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry took the lead and came up with the report titled *Vision Mumbai: Transforming Mumbai into a World Class City* prepared by the McKinsey and Company (Iswalkar 2009: 116). This ‘vision’ document, to transform the Mumbai into a ‘world class’ city, received immediate endorsement from the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, who constituted a ‘Task Force’ to examine the recommendations<sup>8</sup>. The ‘Task Force’ came up with a report<sup>9</sup> that resonated closely with the Bombay First report.

For our concern the report prepared by the ‘Task Force’ is significant as it placed heavy emphasis on the creation of high-end services such as ‘finance, information technology and IT-enabled services, healthcare and media and entertainment’ (Maharashtra 2004 : 16). The report also suggested generating job opportunities to the ‘semi-skilled population’ in the ‘low-end, high-volume services like infrastructure development, construction, retail and hotels and tourism’ (ibid: 17). As for the manufacturing industries the state, following the Bombay First, suggested its relocation it to the ‘hinterland’, in the ‘Thane-Belapur industrial belt by offering State-sponsored, SEZ-like incentives, including “progressive” labour laws and captive power plants’ (ibid: 17). This indicates that the state remained indifferent on developing the manufacturing sector on the former mill lands. Besides, by now it is well-known that the Export Processing Zones to which the state is referring are the places where the employers have the right to hire and fire and workers have no social security benefits and have to work for long hours with less than minimal wages.

In neither of the reports, do we find a mention about the ex-millworkers and the creation of low skilled jobs, and their housing question. The kind of job opportunities the state intends to create in the Mumbai city does not connect to the DCR 58 amended in 2001 that talks about providing alternative employment to around 90,000 ex-millworkers. Having discussed the role of state in ushering amendments for the closure of mills I now move to examine the provision of alternative employment and housing laid out in DCR 2001.

### 3. Incorporating into the post-industrial economy

As the state allowed the mill owners to close down the mills the obvious question it was to face was to provide alternative employment or imparting new skills to the retrenched workforce. Given that it was not practical to accommodate the ex-millworkers in the service sector economy, as they lacked the required skills and knowledge, the state made dual provision for re-skilling, and alternative employment in DCR 2001:

If and when a cotton textile mill is shifted or the mill owner establishes a diversified industry, he shall offer on priority in the relocated mill or the diversified industry, as the case may be, *employment to the worker or at least one member of the family of the worker* in the employ of the mill on the 1st January 2000 who possesses the requisite qualifications or skills for the job [DCR 2001: 58(7)(b) emphasis mine]

<sup>8</sup> The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh as well endorsed the transformation of the city, and said the following ‘When we talk of a resurgent Asia, people think of the great changes that have come about in Shanghai. But we can transform Mumbai in the next five years in such a manner that people will forget about Shanghai and Mumbai will become a talking point’. From Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh’s statement. <http://www.visionmumbai.org/> Accessed on 11 January 2011.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘Task Force’ constituted by the Chief Minister came up with the following report *Transforming Mumbai into a World-Class City: First report of the Chief Minister’s Task Force* (Maharashtra 2004 ).

For the purpose of clause (b) above, the cotton textile mill owner shall *undertake and complete training* of candidates for employment before the recruitment of personnel and starting of the relocated mill or diversified industry takes place. [DCR 2001: 58(7)(c) emphasis mine]

Whilst the first provision indicates that it was limited to those ex-millworkers who were on job roll as on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000 it suggested two things: firstly, the mill owner or the developer was now to provide alternative employment. Secondly, they were also expected to provide training/re-skilling facilities for the ex-millworkers so that latter are incorporated into the new occupations in the service sector economy. This task was further complicated by the fact that the state through DCR 2001 had allowed the mill owners to use the mill land for non-industrial purposes such as residential complexes, shopping malls, and entertainment centres. Besides, the state's endorsement of the 'world class' city suggested that the manufacturing jobs would be created in the hinterland, far away from Girangaon. This meant that the employment generated on the mill lands would not only be different from industrial manufacturing work, and require different skills, but also it implied that not much employment would be generated for the ex-millworkers. The issue of re-skilling, therefore, holds a special importance to the ex-millworkers, as it would open up some employment opportunities in the service sector economy.

### 3.1 Re-Skilling

As noted previously DCR 58(7)(c) clearly states that the mill owners were expected to provide training/re-skilling to the ex-millworkers which would enable them to carry out their livelihood in the changed economic scenario. In practice, however, none of the private textile mills provided any kind of training/re-skilling to the ex-millworkers. Only those mills owned by the Centre Government's National Textile Corporation (NTC), about 25 textile units in Mumbai, outsourced this task to the MITCON Company for "skill up-gradation" of the ex-millworkers. Among NTC ex-millworkers, only the ones who were on roll as on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000 were eligible for this scheme (MITCON 2007-08: n.p.). It is important to note here that the scheme for re-training and re-skilling was not specifically designed for the ex-millworkers. Being an employee of the central government, NTC ex-millworkers were eligible for the 'counselling, retraining and redeployment' scheme adopted by the Central Government's Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises. This scheme was meant for the retrenched employees of the Public Sector Enterprises all over India. This is probably the reason why the mill workers from the textile mill owned by the Maharashtra state government did not benefit from such schemes.

The main objective of the 'counselling, retraining and redeployment' scheme was to provide the retrenched workforce an opportunity to enable them to adopt 'new avocations through self-employment'<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the primary motive of the scheme was to make ex-millworkers 'self-employed'. Although the scheme was implemented since 2001, very few ex-millworkers underwent any training. If one looks at the figures from the 8 NTC textile units, only 50 out of the 5603 ex-millworkers underwent the 40 day training between February and April 2004 (See Table 1.1)<sup>11</sup>. The NTC officials attributed this low participation of the ex-millworkers to the phenomenon of reverse migration.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://dpe.nic.in/newgl/glch1001.htm> Accessed on 10 December 2011

<sup>11</sup> The NTC owns 25 textile mills in Mumbai but for administrative reasons they are divided in South and North. The information in the Table 6.1 is quoted from the files from the South office. I did not manage to obtain the figures for the rest of the textile mills owned by the NTC in Mumbai.

Table 1.1 Number of NTC Ex-millworkers who opted for the training

| Sr. No | Name of the Mills | Total Employees gone under Modified VRS [MVRS] | Employees given (CRR) training | Employees who got self employment (*) |
|--------|-------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1      | Bharat            | 796  | -                              | -                                     |
| 2      | Digvijay          | 855  | -                              | -                                     |
| 3      | Jupiter           | 728  | -                              | -                                     |
| 4      | Mumbai            | 758  | -                              | -                                     |
| 5      | New Hind          | 847  | 50                             | -                                     |
| 6      | Elphinstone       | 694  | -                              | -                                     |
| 7      | Madhusudhan       | 504  | -                              | -                                     |
| 8      | Poddar Process    | 421  | -                              | -                                     |
|        | <b>Total</b>      | 5603   | 50                             |                                       |

(\*) Most of the employees those rationalised under MVRS [Modified Voluntary Retirement Scheme] have been settled at their native places where the agriculture is the main source of income. *Source*: National Textile Corporation ([SM] Ltd., Mumbai) letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 2004 on the “40-day training programme conducted between 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2004 and 15<sup>th</sup> April 2004”.

Although the NTC officials in Mumbai noted in 2004 that most ex-millworkers migrated back to their villages, the political mobilisation of ex-millworkers made them rethink about this assumption. In 2005 the Deputy Manager of the NTC (SM) reported to the New Delhi office that 744 ex-millworkers out of 7849 had undergone training<sup>12</sup>. In their 2007-08 report, the MITCON consultancy services states that 1114 NTC ex-millworkers took advantage of the retraining facilities. From 50 ex-millworkers the number rose to 1114 but considering that 25 textile units were owned by the NTC, which is nearly half of the textile mills in Girangaon, then the number is negligible. This suggests that the re-skilling initiative did not take into account or reached a vast majority of ex-millworkers. What happened to those ex-millworkers who underwent training? There is a need to examine the training offered by the MITCON Company and to see whether it helped ex-millworkers to opt for new occupations.

### 3.2 The MITCON Company

The MITCON agency was assigned the task of providing ‘vocational training’ to the ex-millworkers who had opted for MVRS (Modified Voluntary Retirement Scheme) or to one of their dependants. The scheme had three fold objectives:

- a) To impart Vocational **Training** to the VRS Optees or their dependants so as to enable them to get employed or wage employed or self-employed in the relocated mill or diversified industry in the mill land as well as in any other industry.
- b) To provide **Guidance** to VRS Optees and their dependants to choose right vocation.
- c) To create **Awareness** about the employment & self-employment opportunities available to the VRS Optees or their dependants (MITCON 2007-08; emphasis original).

<sup>12</sup> Fax dated 12.07.2005 from Mr. A.K. Vyas, Dy. Manager (I.R), NTC (SM) Ltd, Mumbai to Mr. H.C. Kalra, General Manger (Personnel), NTC Limited, New Delhi.



As one goes through the MITCON report, especially the ‘success’ stories, one can clearly see that only the second and third clause of ‘guidance’ and ‘awareness’ were implemented. This means that this attempt to ‘rehabilitate’ the ex-millworkers did not involve much substantive training/re-skilling that would enable them to obtain employment in the diversified economy. In almost all the cases reported under the “success stories”, the MITCON agency helped the ex-millworkers to: improve customer relations’ skills, boosted the ‘morale’ and confidence, and gave them more knowledge about various business opportunities. In terms of providing actual vocational training, however, none of it apparently was provided by the MITCON agency.

Those ex-millworkers, who figure in the MITCON “success stories”, were the ones who, in most cases, already knew the vocation, and the company merely ‘helped’ them to ‘convert these skills into a business’ (MITCON: 2007-08: n.p.). For instance, one Mr. Deshmukh knew ‘the skill of stitching and tailoring’ but, according to MITCON, ‘never knew how to convert these skills in[to] a business’. Only after the ‘training’ programme the ex-millworker’s morale was boosted and he was able to start his business. I have demonstrated elsewhere how a section of millworkers were engaged in ‘parallel work’ outside the textile mills (Mhaskar 2012). The ex-millworkers in the ‘success’ stories may well have been those who had carried out some parallel work, or would have anyway started the business without any training.

There is also one “success story” to whom the MITCON did not even provide any training. This is the case of Smita More, widow of an ex-millworker. The report mentions that the ex-millworker who underwent MITCON training, *but soon expired*, taught his ‘wife everything related to their small business and had boosted up her morale’ (MITCON 2007-08: n.p.). The business that Smita More was engaged in was catering service, which, according to MITCON, she had learned from her husband. As far as the catering business is concerned this is not new to women in Girangaon. This ‘business’ is popularly known as a *khanavali* whereby the women have historically provided meals to single male migrants. This suggests that in some cases the agency did not provide any relevant or needful training to the ex-millworkers, which would enable the ex-millworkers to get incorporated into the new economy. It is perhaps for this reason that not many ex-millworkers came forward to take the training or re-skilling.

Even the ones who went for the re-skilling sessions seem least interested to undergo any sort of training. A few ex-millworkers from the NTC, I spoke to, told me that they underwent such training because they received a stipend of Rs.4500. Also, this training/re-skilling initiative from the state came in very late. This training was conducted in 2006-07, which is nearly two years after the mills closed down, if we take 2004 as the date of closure. There were hardly any ex-millworkers who could afford to wait for such a long period to acquire new skills. Besides, these skills were also not immediately transferable into any kind of respectable job or self-employment. Even if one assumes that MITCON did train ex-millworkers with some new skills and entrepreneurial opportunities, it usually takes some time to establish in that small business.

In addition to the skills, there were other factors that decided whether the ex-millworkers could enter the service sector economy. For instance, one of the Muslim ex-millworkers I interviewed was unable to find a job, despite obtaining relevant skills, because of his religious identity. I have argued that the political patronage was crucial in deciding whether an ex-millworker opt for self-employed occupations (Mhaskar 2013). While the state did not monitor whether ex-millworkers received any training, even the ex-millworkers seems least

interested and therefore did not raise this issue in the Monitoring Committee. It was alternative employment that they emphasised.

### 3.3 Alternative Employment

Alternative employment is one of the central demands for the rehabilitation of the ex-millworkers. I will first examine the case of ex-millworkers who did not opt for VRS, and therefore expressed their willingness to work till the age of 63. After this I will look at the case of those ex-millworkers who opted for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. The Monitoring Committee meetings became a platform where the ex-millworkers raised the issue of alternative employment and also registered their grievances. The millowners, and later on the developers to whom the mill land was sold, remained indifferent to the issue of providing alternative employment. In the Monitoring Committee the issue of alternative employment was discussed with regard to the 58 textile mills. It is difficult to examine the case of each textile mill. I, therefore, take the case of Morarji Mills. Morarji Mill is a typical example of a privately owned mill, and the patterns are similar to other textile mills. Moreover, unlike other textile mills, I had obtained most of the previous minutes of Monitoring Committee meetings for the Morarji mills.

In the Monitoring Committee meetings, conducted for the Morarji Mills, the issue of alternative work first appeared for those mill workers who did not opt for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. For instance, when the Morarji mill management sent the ex-millworkers job offer letters in English, the latter demanded the same in Hindi (MCM 37: 2004)<sup>13</sup>. When the ex-millworkers received their new offer letters they complained to the Monitoring Committee chair ‘that the jobs offered are only labour intensive which are not appropriate to the skilled workers’ (MCM 40: 2004). As a result, the chairperson of the Monitoring Committee directed the company ‘to produce list of some skilled/semi—skilled jobs which can be offered to these workers’ (ibid). This is very significant, as the ex-millworkers, due to the lack of new skills, were not in a position to demand skilled work in the service sector economy. They had to accept whatever jobs were available for them.

When the management delayed job offers, the ex-millworkers requested the Monitoring Committee to issue “stop work” notice to halt the redevelopment work on the mill land. Through the “stop work” notice the ex-millworkers could bargain with the employers. This is in many ways similar to mill workers power to stop the mill production in order to bargain with the employers. It may appear that the management became weak in front of the Monitoring Committee, and had to accept the demands of the ex-millworkers. However, the mill owners found loopholes in the laws, and got away with the provisions. In brief, the Morarji management gave the workers, who did not opt for the voluntary retirement scheme, jobs in one of their factories. However, this factory was closed down a few months later and the ex-millworkers were forcibly retrenched but were given the dues, which the former accepted “under protest” (MCM 63: 2006). In this way, the mill owners got rid of those ex-millworkers who did not opt for the ‘voluntary’ retirement scheme.

Those who opted for the VRS were not given any alternative employment (MCM 74: 2007). While the Monitoring Committee became a place where the workers could register their complaints it had its limitations too. The committee met just once in a month. The mill management or the developers took the advantage of this arrangement and sent different

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<sup>13</sup> MCM is an abbreviation for ‘Monitoring Committee Minutes’, and this was 37<sup>th</sup> meeting held in the year 2004.

representatives for the meetings. The mill official appearing before the committee would take an excuse that he or she has little information and that he will convey management's response in the next meeting. This way the issue would be postponed for another month. The alternative employment provision, therefore, proved to be meaningless as the mill owners as well as the developers did not provide alternative employment or practical training to the ex-millworkers. In many cases, the mill owners had sold the land to the real estate developers. These new owners of the mill land refused to provide alternative employment to the ex-millworkers on the grounds that the DCR 2001 is not binding on them.

As political mobilisation began gaining momentum since 2006 state's attention was drawn to the problems with the provision of alternative employment. The ex-millworkers were successful in pressurising the Government of Maharashtra to add a new clause to the DCR 58 (7) (d). The clause dated 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2007 states:

[I]f and when a cotton textile mill is taken up for development/re-development for any industrial/commercial purpose, *the mill owner or the developer or the occupier of the premises* shall on priority provide employment to the worker or at least one member of the family of the worker in the employ of the mill on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000 who possesses the requisite qualifications or skills for the jobs (emphasis mine).

This was a major addition to the DCR 58 as far as the issue of alternative employment is concerned. Following this amendment, the Monitoring Committee became quite aggressive in its directions to the mill management and developers. In its 80<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2007 the Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee issued a strongly worded direction to the Morarji Mill management. It said:

[T]he mill is directed to start action for interviewing the applicants at the earliest without waiting for the minutes of the meeting. It is not concern of the Monitoring Committee whether the management does this without prejudice to their rights or otherwise, *the committee is interested only in results*. It is again reiterated that failure to follow the circular dated 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2007 both in letter and in spirit will certainly invite action as stated in the last minutes [which was issuance of stop work notice and non-issuance of occupation certificate] (Emphasis mine).

After such a strong direction from the Monitoring Committee, ex-millworkers gained confidence and about 240 ex-millworkers submitted their job applications to the mill management. Despite this enthusiastic response from the ex-millworkers, only 21 persons were employed, although they complained that more jobs were available. Those who received the jobs raised a variety of grievances before the Monitoring Committee. The ex-millworkers complained about the 'irregularities committed by the management' such as 'following high handed methods [causing] embarrassment to the workers as well as financial losses' (MCM 91: 2009). Other complains include non-compliance of satisfactory procedure in recruitment and not providing suitable employment to the ex-millworkers (MCM 92: 2009). Besides, the ex-millworkers also complained about low wages, and no clear-cut description of their position as to 'what exactly they are expected to do' (MCM 95: 2009). Through the Monitoring Committee the labour commissioner also got directly involved in the labour law violation cases. The Monitoring Committee, thus, became an important platform through which workers could raise concerns about their entitlement to have jobs and also demand proper conditions of work. I argue that employers refused to hire ex-millworkers, even where they could, because of latters demand for 'proper' working conditions and wages, which contradicted with their freedom to 'hire and fire' under the current neo-liberal dispensation. Besides, the fear of unionisation also dissuaded them from hiring the ex-millworkers.

Under the pressure of political mobilisation when the Monitoring Committee issued directions to the mill management and developers, the latter were left with little choice but to provide alternative employment. In such situations, the mill management and the developers employed various tactics so that the ex-millworkers would give up this claim. Ex-millworkers were assigned such tasks, which they consider humiliating. In most cases, ex-millworkers complained about being given *halaka* (lowly) work, and mistreated by the employers. For instance, one of the ex-millworkers, who appeared before the Monitoring Committee, complained that the employers told him to ‘sweep the floors’. He complained that the employers were not giving him ‘proper’ work and humiliated continuously at the workplace. Sweeping work in India continues to be associated with the members of the lower castes, particularly Dalits (ex-untouchables). It seems that the new employers were employing caste to get away with the provision of alternative employment.

While a section of ex-millworkers were arguing for a ‘proper job’, there were others who took up the work offered by the developers or the mill managements. In Hindustan Mills for instance, ex-millworkers were employed on the construction sites. However, one of the ex-millworkers who worked there told me that once the construction work was over there will be no jobs, as the employers will only be able to employ a security guard and a liftman. Therefore, even those mill owners or developers who offered jobs were not long term. There were other ways by which employers tried to pacify the workers’ resistance in the Monitoring Committee. During my fieldwork I saw officials from the textile mills or the developer’s office negotiating few odd jobs with the union leaders. At times these jobs were not offered on the mill land, as mentioned in the DCR 2001, but somewhere in the suburbs. Ex-millworkers who lived in proximity of the new work place also agreed, as it was more convenient to travel. In some cases the developers themselves took initiative in employing ex-millworkers who had knowledge about the mill property, and the various resources. However, such cases were rare and did not address the large amount of workforce that was affected by the textile mill closures.

Here one can safely say that the mill owners or the developers got away with the clause of providing alternative employment to the ex-millworkers. Whilst the state intervened after the political mobilisation of the ex-millworkers which resulted in the creation of created some scope for the employment, the employers flouted the provision by delaying in giving jobs or in some cases providing no jobs altogether. Even when they received strong directions from the monitoring committee the response remained indifferent. Even the little fraction of ex-millworkers that were employed were given humiliating treatment so that they give up their claim.

### **3.3.1 Employment Exchange for Ex-millworkers’ and their Children**

The above discussion suggests that ex-millworkers, whether they opted for VRS or not, did not generally obtain new skills, nor did a large number of them found alternative employment. Since the ex-millworkers lacked new skills it placed barriers in obtaining employment. The mill workers, therefore, demanded that their children be given employment and training. As we have seen previously, the employers did not provide sufficient information on job availability. The unions, therefore, demanded that a separate employment exchange for the ex-millworkers and their children be created.

The state, under the pressure of ex-millworkers’ mobilization created a separated cell within the employment exchange office. The idea was to ensure that as and when job opportunities

are available children would have information. By April 2010, about 16,512 ex-millworkers' children registered with the employment exchange. Of those registered, the Minister of State for Urban Development Bhaskar Jadhav reported in the assembly that only 264 were eligible for various jobs (*The Indian Express*, 22 April 2010)<sup>14</sup>. As the 2012 Mumbai Municipal elections were gaining momentum, the opposition parties raised questions in the assembly about the employment issue. In a response to the queries from the opposition, the Minister of State for Housing, Mr. Sachin Ahir (also RMMS President which is an officially recognised union), admitted that by August 2011 only 15-20 children were employed in the shopping malls that stood on the mill land (*Loksatta* 4 August 2011).

If the above discussion provides any indication, then it is less likely that the ex-millworkers or their children will be given employment. This is because it goes against the employers' freedom to hire and fire which the pro-business and pro-investor state has assured them. It may also be the case that of those registered very few were eligible. Although the state created institutions such as the employment exchange, it did not express its willingness in ensuring jobs for those who were eligible. Nonetheless, these little steps from the state enhanced the confidence of the ex-millworkers that if they continue to struggle they might achieve their demands, particularly the housing demand.

### 3.3.2 Alternative Employment: Non-State Initiatives

While the unions were pressuring the mill management and the developers for alternative employment, unions themselves took responsibility to train mill workers children to face the challenges of the new economy. Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS)<sup>15</sup> is one such union that has been taking various initiatives. For instance, they had organised career guidance workshops for the ex-millworkers' children. In these workshops they are introduced to various avenues of employment and self-employment. One of the important factors that Datta Iswalkar mentioned to me several times was the need to tell the youths to shed their hesitation to work in the shopping malls and BPOs (Business Processing Outsourcing). During my fieldtrip in December 2010 he informed me that from now on GKSS was planning to take up the cause of ex-millworkers children employment rather than the ex-millworkers' alternative employment<sup>16</sup>. However, the chances of ex-millworkers' children mobilisation are bleak, because, unlike their parents, the former do not derive their identity from any shop floor activity. Moreover, the kind of jobs they would get from such initiatives were anyway available to them.

## 4. Housing Question

While the issue of alternative employment is significant for the rehabilitation of the ex-millworkers, what has fuelled the present political mobilisation is the issue of housing. Even in the villages, where the workers have re-migrated in large numbers, the mobilization is quite significant. With regard to housing the DCR 58 states:

If and when the built up areas of a cotton textile mill occupied for *residential purposes* as on the 1st of January, 2000 developed or redeveloped, *it shall be obligatory on the part of the land owner* to provide to the occupants in lieu of each tenement covered by the development or redevelopment scheme, free of cost, an alternative tenement of the size of 225 sq. ft. carpet area; [DCR 2001: 58(7)(a) emphasis mine]

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear from the newspapers reports it not clear what were the criteria of eligibility.

<sup>15</sup> Mill Workers Struggle Committee

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Datta Iswalkar, January 2011.

In addition to the provision for free accommodation for those ex-millworkers living in the *chawls*<sup>17</sup> on the textile mill land, DCR 2001 also made provision for the ones living in the mill owned *chawls*. When the DCR 1991 gave the permission for the sale of surplus land it came up with the One-Third formula whereby the mill land was to be shared between the mill owner, the Maharashtra Housing Area Development Authority (MHADA) and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for parks and public spaces. Later in the amended DCR 2001 of the total land allocated to the MHADA, 50 per cent was reserved for ex-millworkers housing. This has been the most contentious issue as only 10 private mills has surrendered the land share meant for millworkers' housing. DCR 2001 also made major changes in the distribution of land share. It is the change in the DCR from 1991 to 2001 that is crucial to our understanding of the issue of ex-millworker housing.

#### **4.1 From DCR 1991 to DCR 2001: Shrinkage in the land share for ex-millworkers housing**

The DCR 58 introduced in 1991 gave permission to the mill owners to sell the surplus land in order to generate funds for the revival and modernization of the mills and for paying off debts and workers dues. This was supposed to be done with the prior approval of the BIFR (Board of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction). DCR 1991 was a major breakthrough in the land use regulations as it allowed for the first time to use the surplus land for "commercial/residential" purpose with the 'condition that they use the resultant funds for revival of the mills' (Adarkar 2006: 98). While introducing this change, the regulation also stipulated that the textile mills seeking the permission to redevelop the surplus land were supposed to surrender, of the land to be developed, 1/3 to the BMC for open spaces and civic amenities and 1/3 to the MHADA for public housing and the mill owners would retain the remaining land for redevelopment. The mill owners also got Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) equal to the area surrendered by them. The calculation of the land share was based on the 'open lands and lands after demolition of existing structures in case of a redevelopment scheme' (DCR 1991). However, the regulation did not require the land to be shared with the MHADA and BMC if 'the open land allowed to be utilised or developed' did not exceed '15 per cent of the total land and space' (DCR 1991, 58). Needless to say, all the proposals cleared by the year 1997 invoked this exemption (LHS 1997: 8).

In practise, however, various studies have reported gross violation of the amendment, as none of the textile mills that availed this scheme 'undertook any kind of modernization' (e.g. Adarkar 2006: 99). Moreover, there was no state body to monitor whether mill owners followed any of these provisions. As noted previously, Phoenix Mills violated the rules and constructed bowling alley under the pretext of creating entertainment space for the workers. It is clear that mill owners could not have been done without the connivance of the state and the RMMS. Since DCR 1991 came under severe criticisms a committee was appointed in 1996 to examine the holistic development of the textile mill lands (Kanga 2006: 30). Charles Correa who headed the committee did not receive co-operation from the private mill owners, and therefore he could only examine the premises of state owned textile mills. The Correa committee report was never made public, and in 2000 a new committee was constituted under

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<sup>17</sup> The word "chawl" means 'a corridor or passage in local language'. 'The Chawl is a group of one or two dwelling units along a corridor, sharing sanitary facilities... A chawl building may be one storied to five storied. Sanitary facilities, usually lavatories and sometimes bath and washing also, may be common to the residents on one floor or in the entire building. Dwelling units, one or two room, with or without balcony or verandah may be arranged in a row on one side or on both sides of the corridor or open court' (Shah 1981: 7).

‘Ranjit Deshmukh, Minister of Textiles, to revise the mill land sale policy, and to look into the grievances of the workers as well as the mill owners’ (ibid: 30).

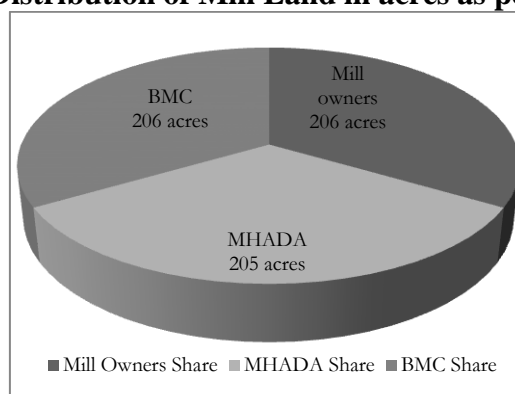
Table 1.2 Share of Mill Lands as per DCR 1991 and DCR 2001

|                          | DCR 1991      |            | DCR 2001      |            |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
|                          | Land in Acres | Percentage | Land in Acres | Percentage |
| Mill Owners              | 206           | 33.5       | 524           | 85         |
| MHADA                    | 205           | 33         | 46            | 7.5        |
| BMC                      | 206           | 33.5       | 46            | 7.5        |
| Total (58 Textile Mills) | 617           | 100        | 617           | 100        |

Source: This table is compiled from the information in a request letter dated 2 December 2010 by Sarva Shramik Sanghatana submitted to Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

In March 2001, the Government of Maharashtra amended DCR 1991, in which mill workers’ grievances figured too, however, in a “diluted” form (Adarkar 2006: 104). It made a provision for the Monitoring Committee that would look into the sale and redevelopment of the mill lands. Most importantly, there was a provision for the mill workers’ housing (ibid: 104). However, there was a “minor” modification in terms of calculating the mill land to be surrendered to the MHADA and the BMC. It dropped the words ‘lands after demolition of existing [textile mill] structures’ and substituted it with ‘open lands and balance FSI [Floor Space Index]’ (DCR 2001, 58). This had major implications on the land sharing formula as now the ‘land that became vacant after the demolition of existing [textile mill] structures was not to be taken into account for sharing’ (Kanga 2006: 30). The result was that mill owners got most of the land, leaving very little for the MHADA, and the BMC. This has major implications for the mill workers, as 50 percent of the MHADA land share was reserved for their housing (See Table 1.2 and Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.1 Distribution of Mill Land in acres as per DCR 1991



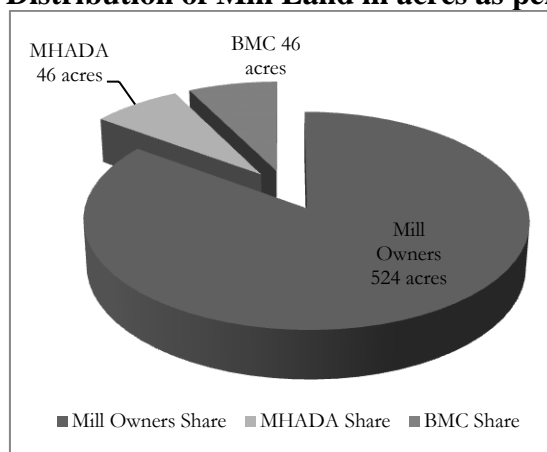
Source: Author’s compilation

The DCR 2001, particularly, its land sharing formula, was challenged by the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG) in the Bombay High Court. The Bombay High Court, upheld in its October 2005 judgment that the ‘vacant’ spaces include those spaces created after the demolition and therefore the total mill land sold should be divided as per the DCR 1991. As the main appealing group was concerned with environmental aspect, the judgment stood in favour of open spaces<sup>18</sup>. In terms of textile mills, the judgment stated that both the

<sup>18</sup> Mumbai has one of the lowest ratios of open spaces per 1000 people. ‘The ideal ratio recommended for the open spaces for Mumbai is 4 Acres per 1000 persons. The New York has 5.33 Acres of open space per 1000

regulations (DCR 1991 and DCR 2001) were meant to fulfil ‘the purpose of achieving the revival and rehabilitation of the textile mills, and curbing unregulated development of their lands’ (Bombay High Court 2005: 337). The judgment further noted that in case the mill owners were interested in just developing the land, then it is ‘permitted to do so on the terms and conditions set out in the Regulations’ (Bombay High Court 2005: 342).

**Figure 1.2 Distribution of Mill Land in acres as per DCR 2001**



Source: Author’s compilation

This decision by the Mumbai High Court was challenged in the Supreme Court, which set aside the High Court order, and supported the amended DCR 2001. On behalf of the mill owners, it was argued that since DCR 1991 was not attractive enough, changes were brought in via DCR 2001 ‘to hasten the development of the mill land’ (Kanga 2006: 37). The government had done this change consciously, they further argued, ‘to give more land to the mill owners so as to induce them to develop lands in a planned manner’ (ibid: 37). Once the government, the officially recognised union that is the RMMS and the Supreme Court stood by the mill owners this was bound to affect the share of MHADA land, which in turn affected mill workers housing question. In some cases, such as the Jupiter Mills, the land share almost ‘disappeared’ (Correa 2006: 25). As we can see from Table 1.3 below, the share of MHADA and BMC reduced drastically from 27 and 33 percent to 1 percent.

**Table 1.3 Difference of the land share of Jupiter Mills as per DCR 1991 and 2001**

|                    | (Area in Sq. meters) |         |          |         |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|---------|
|                    | DCR 1991             | Percent | DCR 2001 | Percent |
| Area for BMC       | 14869                | 33      | 513      | 1       |
| Area for MHADA     | 12165                | 27      | 419      | 1       |
| Area for the Owner | 18023                | 40      | 44124    | 98      |

Source: (Correa 2006: 24)

Despite the fact that now mill owners owned a major share of the mill land, till date, of the 32 private mills only 10 have surrendered land to the MHADA and BMC. This clearly shows that the state continues to connive with the mill owners in giving the latter a major land share. This not only had environmental implications, it reduced the share of mill land meant for the ex-millworkers housing. Only after the political mobilisation the state surrendered one of the

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persons, whereas the London has 4.84 Acres per 1000 persons. On the contrary, when the study conducted in 1970 the city of Mumbai had a shocking 0.03 Acres of open space per 1000 persons, whereas today, the ratio would be 0.015 Acres per 1000 persons which should be approximately 540 times less than the minima recommended (Mumbai High Court 2005: 327)



entire mill land belonging to NTC but it did not show willingness in acquiring from the private owners. Despite the directions from the Monitoring Committee, in some cases the mill owners approached the higher judiciary and got the orders overturned. Given that in some cases the proportion of land share received by the MHADA is almost negligible, the workers demanded extra land from the state in order to have housing for all ex-millworkers. It is to examine the various ways in which unions are mobilising the workers I now move to the following section.

## 4.2 Political Mobilisation and the Rehabilitation Question

Mumbai's textile workforce has been a political force and therefore its present re-organisation on the rehabilitation question might be seen as an act of continuance. However, given the changed political economic environment, whereby the state has become 'pro-business' and is, thus, creating a greater space for the private capital, it holds a special significance. Through political mobilisation the ex-millworkers have once again acquired the centre stage in Mumbai's politics, and it seeks to claim their entitlements. It is due to the political nature of mobilisation that ex-millworkers have been able to force the state to intervene in the neo-liberal era. The dispersal of ex-millworkers to various parts of the city has made them electorally weak but their political mobilisation has given them required attention. The support it has received across political continuum has forced the state to intervene but it only remains at the level of stipulation and not at the level of implementation.

### 4.2.1 Revival of Unions and Mobilisation

As noted above the issue of housing has fuelled the political mobilization of Mumbai's ex-millworkers. This is also the first time after the 1982 strike that the political mobilization is not limited to Mumbai city but has reached rural areas, most particularly Konkan and the western Maharashtra region. Three unions, Sarva Shramik Sanghatana (SSS)<sup>19</sup>, GKSS and Girmi Kamgar Karmachari Nivara and Kalyankari Sangh (GKKNKS)<sup>20</sup> have started mobilising the ex-millworkers in the city as well in their rural areas. Given the scale of reverse migration SSS opened new offices for the ex-millworkers in Kolhapur and Sindhudurg district on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009 respectively. The present mobilisation has also given birth to new organisations such as the GKKNKS. One can safely say that the demand for housing has led to the revival of workers unions in Mumbai. In most cases the mobilisation was driven by the elections. When I conducted the fieldwork in 2009, two important elections, the Maharashtra State Assembly elections, and the General Elections were to take place. Looking at the mobilisation all major political parties extended their support for the rehabilitation question. Similar was the case during the February 2012 Mumbai Municipal Corporation elections, during which across political continuum ex-millworkers received support.

#### 4.2.1.a Registration, Meetings and Rallies

As ex-millworkers began mobilising unions started registration for housing and employment claims. Although none of the workers' union were authorised by the state to collect any such information all of them collected the information for mobilisation. Initially the information was collected at various union offices, and in many cases ex-millworkers who came to fill up the form were given the area level responsibility to distribute the forms, and if they agreed were made representatives. GKSS has nearly 44 representatives in different parts of Mumbai.

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<sup>19</sup> All Labourers Organisation

<sup>20</sup> Mill Workers and Employees Housing and Welfare Federation

Not all of them representatives are equally active but depends upon the concentration of ex-millworkers in the area. In some areas such as Worli BDD Chawls weekly attendance was organised by Vaishali Girkar. More than hundred workers showed up for the attendance. Other unions, such as the SSS organised ex-millworkers on the basis of mill committees. Similarly, in the villages too ex-millworkers were organised.

Depending on the union, meetings are organised on a weekly or monthly basis. They are still organised around neighbourhoods in Girangaon, and in some cases around textile mills. All the three unions organised a weekly meeting to inform workers about the situation of their housing and other demands. This was also the time when workers came to fill the form for housing. These small-scale meetings were organised for mobilising the ex-millworkers and their families for bigger rallies and demonstrations. An interesting point to note about the ongoing mobilisation is the participation of the families in the rallies. All union urged the ex-millworkers to bring along their families during important rallies. SSS activists told me that they were able to mobilise ex-millworkers' families for their village rallies but in the cities they received less enthusiastic response.

At the union office meetings there were a few workers attended union meetings on a regular basis. Most of those present at the meetings primarily came to fill up the form. The scenario that I witnessed during my fieldwork gave the impression that there was almost a race for filling the forms. The only parallel one can think of is the early days when the trade unions were attracting workers for union membership. All the union leaders I spoke to claimed that they had the highest number of registrations. The fact of the matter was that, with the exception of very few workers, who were probably local level representatives, most workers had filled up the forms with all three unions. While conducting my survey I came across many ex-millworkers who had come to fill the form in different union offices.

Nevertheless, towards the end of my fieldwork in 2009, GKKNKS, led by Kishore Deshpande, did make a special arrangement for filling up the forms in a library (managed by the local BJP unit) in Worli. This was advertised in the local newspapers and local cable television channels. As a result, more than 200 workers came every day for the registration. This registration process was carried out for more than two months. Given the 'hi-tech' arrangement made by the GKKNKS, such as the use of computers at the time of filling the form, and the use of printed forms, made them seem more 'authentic'. By the end of my fieldwork in August 2009 GKKNKS had registered more than 75,000 ex-millworkers. However, when the GKKNKS submitted this information to the government, the latter did not accept the same and published separate forms for housing in December 2009.

The Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) issued the housing forms at the rate of Rs.50 per form. More than 100,000 ex-millworkers submitted these forms. The fact that a government body issued the housing forms gave further legitimacy to the demands of the ex-millworkers. The political mobilisation had led to the construction of flats for the ex-millworkers. About 6948 houses have been constructed for the ex-millworkers from the NTC mills. According to the information from V.K. Ambre of the SSS, the total cost of the house is Rs.10, 32,000. The distribution of the housing was caught up over the issue of fixing the price and on the way of distribution is to be done. In 2012 the Maharashtra state government decided to go with the lottery system and allotted housing to nearly 6000 ex-millworkers. However, during my August-September 2013 visit I was told by the unions and ex-millworkers that only 600 workers were in a position to take the possession of their rooms. Even the ones who managed to obtain the possession had to submit a variety documents

which at times was a herculean task. In addition, banks are unwilling to grant loans which is also one of the major reason why ex-millworkers are not in a position to obtain their allotted flats. This has resulted in a few ex-millworkers selling their flats in the black market as they are not in a position to pay for it.

While a miniscule proportion of ex-millworkers have obtained housing there are still about 80,000 flats that needs to be built. Besides, many mill owners, as noted previously, have not surrendered the land for housing, and there is a need for more land for the construction. For instance, the mill land share that will eventually be handed over to the MHADA is merely 26 acres. This can only solve the need of 25,000 houses leaving the question of 60 thousand ex-millworkers unresolved.

#### **4.2.1.b The commitment question and the nativist current**

While the ex-millworkers demonstrated enthusiasm for filling the forms, the unions realised that most workers would not turn up for regular meetings. As a result, in their weekly meetings, the union leaders brought up the issue of *commitment* to the labour struggles. Ex-millworkers were urged to regularly attend the meetings, and more importantly they were asked to attend the important rallies to demonstrate their strength. A proper attendance record was maintained at meetings and rallies. In the case of SSS, the union committee would distribute stamped paper chits which workers were supposed to return by filling up the information such as their name and address. This ensured a certain amount of control over the ex-millworkers' attendance, particularly at the important rallies.

This issue of commitment evoked by almost all the unions to 'avoid' the *free riders* at time took a nativist turn. Without doubt this influence came from Raj Thackeray's nativist campaign against the north Indian 'outsiders'. Across union offices, I witnessed north Indian ex-millworkers being categorically told that 'it is not enough to fill up the form, and sit quietly in your villages in Uttar Pradesh'. In one of the rallies, when a few ex-millworkers from Uttar Pradesh approached the SSS union representative with queries about filling up the housing form, the latter told them that 'only if you are willing to attend regular meetings and show up for important rallies they should fill the form'. North Indian ex-millworkers were given examples of reverse migrated ex-millworkers from Maharashtra who travelled to Mumbai for various rallies. They were expected to show similar commitment.

This selective targeting of the north Indian ex-millworkers, without looking at the practical obstacles, gave credence to the nativist campaign. For those who have migrated back to their villages in the north India faced practical problems such as travelling the long distance and the cost involved. Those who remained in the city did not attend the meetings on regular basis for other reasons. The language of mobilisation was a crucial factor. The union meetings and the rallies were always conducted in the Marathi language. A couple of north Indian ex-millworkers, who I happened to speak after the meetings, told me that since they did not understand the language they do not attend the meetings on a regular basis. SSS did try to correct this inconsistency by conducting one meeting in Hindi. But this experiment did not last long, as the union representatives themselves found it difficult to speak at length in Hindi, and therefore they switched back to Marathi.

Notwithstanding the nativist current, this did not create a rift between the north Indian and the rest ex-millworkers. In fact, there was less scope for enmity now that they were all "ex-millworkers" and not worker from this or that department which were segregated along caste,

gender, religion and regional lines. These barriers were dissolved after the closure of mills. However, I must note that ex-millworkers continued to retain their status acquired inside the mills. In fact other ex-millworkers too continue to address them as, for instance, Chandu or Shaukat jobbers.

#### 4.2.2 Petitions and Rallies: Pressurising the Political Class

All the unions engaged on the issue of ex-millworkers' rehabilitation were aware that only political intervention could lead to the rehabilitation of the ex-millworkers. But the unions also knew that they were weak in the electoral arena and therefore it was necessary to build up an all-party consensus. Therefore, they organised rallies, held demonstrations and submitted petitions to political leaders of all major parties. By submitting their memorandum they pressurised the political representatives to raise ex-millworkers' grievances during the sessions of the State Assembly, and the Parliament.

The SSS tried to mobilise support on the rehabilitation question by organising *nivedan morcha* (petition rally) at various political party headquarters, and MLA, MPs and Municipal Councillor's offices in Girangaon. One such rally that I attended was carried out by the SSS to submit a petition to the Shiv Sena MLA Dattaji Nalawde for raising the issue of housing and employment in the Assembly. By organising these rallies the unions pressurised the opposition representatives to raise their demands in the assembly session, such as the one held in Nagpur in 2008. These *nivedan morchas* were then followed by a rally in Nagpur when the Maharashtra state assembly was in session. Due to the pressure from various opposition leaders, and the unions who had gathered outside the assembly, Hasan Mushrif, then Minister of State for Urban Development informed the assembly that housing will be provided to 55,000 ex-millworkers<sup>21</sup>.

Similarly, rallies were organised by the GKSS and GKKNKS. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2009 GKSS organised a rally in Delhi of nearly 200 women ex-millworkers from various districts in Maharashtra. They had gone to meet the Congress President Sonia Gandhi (DelhiSolidarityGroup 2009). They organised a day long fast and later submitted a memorandum to Prithviraj Chavan, then Minister of State for PMO (Prime Minister's Office). Their main demand in this memorandum was to have more land for the ex-millworkers housing. During this *dharna* (sit-in) in Delhi the GKSS received support from various groups and NGOs and also from leaders from different political parties. Given that this *dharna* was organised a few months before the 2009 General Elections it was bound to attract support from various political formations. In 2010 December, I was informed that the SSS also held a meeting with Congress President Sonia Gandhi whom they explained the problems of land allocation and requested her to look into this matter<sup>22</sup>.

Along with the petition rallies, the unions also organised rallies on various occasions to demonstrate their strength. Workers across the globe celebrate 1st May as Labour Day. In Mumbai, it has double significance. On this day, after a long drawn struggle, the state of Maharashtra with Mumbai as its capital came into existence in 1960. In this struggle for a separate Maharashtra state Mumbai's mill workers participated in large numbers and were

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.karmayog.org/news/news\\_21231.htm](http://www.karmayog.org/news/news_21231.htm) Accessed on 5 July 2011

<sup>22</sup> A request letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 submitted by the Sarva Shramik Sanghatana to the Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

also a substantial numbers of martyrs<sup>23</sup>. On this occasion too, when the state would celebrate the Maharashtra formation day, ex-millworkers would organise protest demonstrations. Similarly, on Gandhi's birth anniversary on 2<sup>nd</sup> October when the state conducted official celebrations, various unions made a point to organise some protest in a *Gandhian* way, by way of fasting on that day in front of Gandhi's statue.

Of the various rallies that the unions organised, in my view, the 'Long March' organised by the SSS on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009 is quite noteworthy. The March began from Parel, in the heart of Girangaon, and concluded in Azad Maidan, which is at a distance of 8 kilometres. In this rally not only the ex-millworkers participated along with their families, the SSS also managed to draw support from the security guards and the domestic workers. This was the first *Long March* organised by the SSS after the death of Datta Samant in the mid-1990s. One got the impression that ex-millworkers as a "class" were mobilised for the attainment of their demands. Given the scale of this mobilisation and the pressure of electoral politics, it did attract leaders from various political parties.

Political leaders across the party spectrum came on the SSS platform assuring their support. The political parties were aware that many of their supporters participated in the Long March and therefore it was necessary for them to attend these rallies. During the Long March a few ex-millworker from the rally crowded in front of the Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS)<sup>24</sup> leader, Bala Nandgaokar, who had come there to extend his support. This also made the political formations realise that their potential voters were part of this movement. In a way this fragmented nature of ex-millworkers in the electoral arena strengthens their rehabilitation claims. The fear that they might lose the votes forced all major political parties to extend their support for ex-millworkers rehabilitation question. Given the support ex-millworkers was receiving across political formations the ruling parties had to make grant few concessions.

#### 4.2.3 Rehabilitation Question and the Unions

There is a consensus amongst all the workers' unions on the issue of housing and alternative employment. They also agreed on the issue of providing Yellow Ration Card (Below Poverty Line Card) for subsidised food grains, and health benefits for the ex-millworkers. They only differed on the issue of price to be paid for housing. GKSS has expressed their willingness to pay a subsidised price for housing. They argue that since the land is freely available to the MHADA, they should charge only the construction cost. SSS on the other hand has been quite vocal about the need for *free housing* for the millworkers. They argue that when the slums in Mumbai have to be evacuated, as a result of some redevelopment activity, the slum dwellers are given free accommodation. Given that the millworkers' livelihood has been "uprooted"<sup>25</sup> due to the new development policies, they also have the right for rehabilitation. Furthermore, SSS argue that the sale of mill land in the real estate market has generated enormous revenue, to the state as well as for the private mill owners. For instance, by selling 58 acres of the NTC mill land the state has earned revenue of Rs.4000 crores. Given the revenue generated then it is possible to given the workers free housing<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> During the *Samyukata Maharashtra Chalwal* (Unified Maharashtra Movement) about 108 people lost their lives as a result of police firing on the protesters.

<sup>24</sup> Army for the Construction of New Maharashtra

<sup>25</sup> Kishore Deshpande, the leader of GKKNKS, suggested me to title my thesis as *Uprooted Ex-Millworkers Rise Again*. January 2011.

<sup>26</sup> A request letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 submitted by the Sarva Shramik Sanghatana to the Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

One of the interesting developments that took place in 2012 was the coming together of all unions on a common platform, headed by Jayashree Khadilkar-Pande, a senior journalist, and editor of the Marathi daily *Navakal*. It was through this joint platform that the question of ex-millworkers rehabilitation is now raised. On the eve of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation elections held in February 2012, the opposition parties staged a walkout in the assembly on the question of alternative employment for ex-millworkers' children. Elections therefore appear to be crucial time for the mobilisation of ex-millworkers. However, this coalition of different unions did not last long and there emerged two groups: one for the free housing and the other for subsidised housing. Also, during my August-September 2013 visit SSS union leaders expressed their disapproval of Khadilkar-Pande by arguing that she has created a split in the current political mobilisation. The fact that the political mobilisation of ex-millworkers has the potential to create anti-government feeling also tells us that there could be some truth in the apprehensions expressed by the SSS union leaders. This is also the reason why the state has never entirely brush aside ex-millworkers demands. The response to the questions, raised by the opposition members in the assembly, has always been in the affirmative. In fact, in the era of neo-liberal restructuring, the state has stepped in for the ex-millworkers and has granted few concessions. It did grant the ex-millworkers 'Yellow Ration Card', and a few thousand flats have been built by the NTC. It has also opened a separate employment cell for the ex-millworkers and their children. It has been forced to provide institutional support to train the children of ex-millworkers. Whether such interventions will have positive implications remains a matter of debate. Even on the issue of housing the response from the state has been affirmative.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the political mobilisation of the ex-millworkers on the rehabilitation question. From the evidence presented above I have shown how the state facilitated the closure of textile mills, and also introduced new legislations (DCR 58) to transform the land from industrial into post-industrial use. In doing so, it provided benefits to the mill owners and the real estate developers at the cost of the environment, and space for ex-millworkers' housing. I have argued that the state and the mill owner/developer relation always cordial has become even closer under the neo-liberal era, where the state continues to overlook at the irregularities committed by the latter. While the state pretends to be benign mainly because of the electoral implications, once that compulsion is over it pursues the policies that suits the neo-liberal model of development.

The politically sensitive nature of the ex-millworkers forces the state to make provisions for their rehabilitations. However, as I have demonstrated these remain at the level of stipulation because of states' connivance with the mill owners/real estate developers. As a result, the state does not ensure the implementation of re-skilling initiatives by the private mill owners nor is there much emphasis on providing alternative employment. Only as a result of political mobilisation the state is forced to intervene which again remains at the level of stipulation. This gap in the implementation of the provisions paved the way for the revival of the unions.

It is the political mobilisation of the ex-millworkers that has given them a strong sense for claiming their entitlements in the form of employment and housing. The ex-millworkers saw their rehabilitation as a rightful entitlement, which could only be actualised by state intervention. As various political parties extended their support to the rehabilitation question, their sense of entitlement has become even stronger. This is very crucial given the adoption of neoliberal policies by the Indian state. As ex-millworkers received support from across

political parties the state had to respond to some of the demands. As such it granted the ex-mill workers the facilities to buy cheaper food grains by granting them Yellow Ration Card intended for the people 'Below Poverty Line'. The state also created a separate employment exchange for ex-millworkers and their children. However, given the 'world class' vision it has adopted for the city, it is less likely that there will be many jobs for the ex-millworkers or their children. Moreover this employment provision leads to the curtailment of the employers' freedom to 'hire and fire'. While the employers have resisted in providing alternative employment to ex-millworkers, where they cannot resist, they use tactics, such as humiliation, so that the worker will leave the job.

The scale and intensity of the mobilization, that has brought the ex-millworkers into the centre of political debates, has compelled the political forces to pay due consideration to the rehabilitation question. The absence, or very weak presence of the unions in the electoral arena, and dispersal of the ex-millworkers to the various parts of the city, meant that they could not be the deciding factor in the politics. It is this attention from various quarters that further strengthens the political movement for rehabilitation, which helps them to claim their entitlements. To conclude then, the textile mill closures in Mumbai have not resulted in ex-millworkers moving towards communal or nativist organisations. Through the politics of rehabilitation they seek to secure the space they had once commanded in Girangaon. The present transformation of Mumbai into a 'world class' city where the state and business groups have come closer pose a major challenge for the ex-millworkers. Only through political mobilisation do they manage to force the state to intervene but event that remains at the level of stipulation due to latter's connivance with the mill owners and real estate developers.

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