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# Feelings and Work in Modern History

*Emotional Labour and Emotions  
about Labour*

Edited by  
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## Negotiating deindustrialization

### Emotions and Ahmedabad's textile workers

Rukmini Barua

On 27 March 1983, nearly 150 workers marched towards the Kankaria Lake in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad for an act of mass suicide in protest against the closures of two textile mills, Monogram and Marsden. The two mills had been shut down a few months earlier, leaving nearly 7,000 workers unemployed.<sup>1</sup> This protest was led by a newly formed trade union, the Bharatiya Kamdar Parishad of the then relatively nascent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In anticipation of this heavily publicized event, the police cordoned off the lake. The workers never reached the water and were arrested.<sup>2</sup>

This incident, dismissed as a mere theatrical protest at the time, foregrounds two significant historical processes that frame this chapter. The early 1980s marked the beginnings of a debilitating process of industrial restructuring that transformed working lives in Ahmedabad. This was part of a broader movement of deindustrialization that unfolded across India, culminating in the liberalization policies of the early 1990s. Large-scale job losses, informalization and casualization followed, accompanied by widespread despair, anger and frustration. Simultaneously, the protest signalled the arrival of a new political player in Ahmedabad. The industrial belt of the city had long been the stronghold of the Gandhian labour union, the Textile Labour Association (TLA), and its political ally, the Indian National Congress. This protest – led by a rival trade union – thus foreshadowed the rapid ascent of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the textile mill neighbourhoods and ultimately in state- and national-level politics.

Deindustrialization in twentieth-century India followed a somewhat divergent pattern from similar phenomena globally. Instead of marking a transition to a 'post-industrial' society, deindustrialization in India precipitated the displacement of workers from large (often formal sector) factories to

informal, poorly paid and precarious work arrangements. This did not so much mean capital flight to other locations with cheaper reserves of labour but rather implied a dislocation of the sites of industrial production and a restructuring of employment regimes.

Recent scholarship on deindustrialization has shifted from a focus on its political and economic causes and impact to a consideration of its cultural meanings.<sup>3</sup> Within this framework, deindustrialization is viewed as a dynamic emotional and affective process that shapes memory and animates notions of class and community.<sup>4</sup> This chapter builds on this existing body of work by placing emotions centre stage in its examination of the history of Ahmedabad's 'deindustrialization.' Such an approach allows us to trace the heterogeneous experiences of workers facing industrial restructuring and casualization and complicates the often uniform narrative of loss that dominates accounts of deindustrialization. In doing so, this chapter considers the history of deindustrialization as an ongoing process (or to use Alice Mah's term, industrial ruination) rather than a discrete event,<sup>5</sup> outlining the variegated spectrum of feelings that are tied to the changing dynamics of work. Finally, by teasing out the interaction between structural transformations and individual subjectivities, the social, political and spatial underpinnings of feelings and emotional styles are addressed.

This chapter will proceed in three interconnected steps. First, I consider the ways in which emotions were framed around work relations and workers' politics in the textile industry of Ahmedabad. Second, I trace the graded structures of anxiety and precarity that emerge at the moment of the factory closures. And third, I examine ways of remembering and forms of nostalgia (focusing particularly on the notion of harmony) that shape contemporary emotional landscapes of labour in the city. I draw on published interviews of former mill workers and oral historical and ethnographic research conducted in Ahmedabad between 2011 and 2013 to explore how emotions were mobilized, experienced and articulated in the making and remaking of working lives.

From 1861 onwards, when the first textile mill was established in Ahmedabad, the city acquired a reputation as the Manchester of the East. Mill chimneys and workers' neighbourhoods bloomed in a crescent along the eastern banks of the river Sabarmati. At its peak, there were sixty-three composite textile mills operating, employing roughly 155,000 workers daily.<sup>6</sup> Ahmedabad's mill workers, though living and labouring under distinctly trying conditions, were among India's best-paid industrial workers.<sup>7</sup> The 1980s, however, marked a period of social and economic upheaval in Ahmedabad; along with large-scale

mill closures resulting in over 100,000 job cuts, the city witnessed long periods of caste and religious violence. The responses to deindustrialization in Ahmedabad appeared to be dramatically different from those in Bombay, which was also undergoing an acute industrial crisis. Textile mill workers in Bombay banded together for an eighteen-month-long strike against factory closures, even in opposition to the stand taken by their representative trade union.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to this militant collective action, contemporary observers saw Ahmedabad's workers as 'docile'.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand this representation of Ahmedabad's workers (and its connected emotional registers), we must begin by examining the dominant (if not hegemonic) conceptualization of working-class politics in the city. The story of Ahmedabad's mills and those who worked in them was inextricably tied to the story of the city's main trade union, the Textile Labour Association (henceforth TLA). And to grasp the emotional dynamics of deindustrialization, it is to the TLA that we must first turn.

### The TLA and its emotional style

Born of Gandhi's first political fast in 1918, the TLA established itself by the early 1920s at the forefront of the labour struggle – a move that Breman points out was actively encouraged by the industrialists.<sup>10</sup> The union established a model of arbitration and negotiation between labour and capital that has partly contributed to the image of Ahmedabad's working classes as peaceful or even 'passive'.<sup>11</sup> This model of arbitration had an impact far beyond that of the city's textile industry, forming the basis of the national-level Industrial Relations Act, shepherded into existence in 1947 by Gulzarilal Nanda, the labour minister for the Bombay province and TLA general secretary.

The militancy that engendered the formation of the TLA was gradually replaced by an unwavering commitment to arbitration<sup>12</sup> that did not sway even during the crisis of the textile industry. The union cast the mill workers as members of a *parivar* or family, encompassing the owners, managers and workers, and sought to instil obedience and docility in them by emphasizing their duties towards their employers and a reciprocal responsibility of the management towards the workers. The language of kinship thus worked to imbricate the control of workers' lives and spaces with a sort of filial duty. Emotions were clearly implicit in the union's view of industrial relations, which were geared towards harmony between labour and capital and encouraged a collaborative, peaceful and

righteous approach to industrial disputes. Strikes were only to be used as the last resort, when all peaceful and constitutional methods of negotiations had been exhausted. Even on strike (which was exceedingly rare under the aegis of the TLA), workers were enjoined to be peaceful and non-violent and to 'bear no ill-will towards their employer or their officials'.<sup>13</sup> The union was convinced that a harmonious atmosphere in the mills would not only encourage higher productivity and enable the workers to 'render valuable service to the industry' but also make the experience of working itself 'lighter and more pleasant'. The intertwined logics of emotionality and productive efficiency in this case produced specific forms of workers' subjectivities that would support the needs of capital.<sup>14</sup>

As part of its 'righteous struggle', much of the union's efforts were directed towards the material, moral and social upliftment of textile workers. This was aided in no small measure by the TLA's prodigious political presence. From 1924, the union began participating in electoral politics, contributing large numbers of representatives to the municipal bodies, up until the late 1960s. With connections in politics and civic administration and armed with a well-oiled network of neighbourhood-level union representatives, the TLA embarked on its goal of 'all around progress'.<sup>15</sup> The TLA negotiated for the provision of civic amenities, mediated quotidian conflicts, appealed for better housing, and ran libraries, dispensaries and gymnasiums. In short, the union operated a sort of 'parallel government' in the mill districts.<sup>16</sup> Through such a presence in working-class neighbourhoods and its role as the sole representative union (and therefore the only union authorized to negotiate with mill owners), the union retained a tenacious hold over the textile workers, despite several challenges to its authority. As part of its efforts towards the material improvement of workers' lives, the union carried out its social reformist agenda of remaking Ahmedabad's workers into responsible and respectable citizens.<sup>17</sup> Central to this civilizing mission was a focus on developing a specific emotional repertoire for the working classes that spanned spaces of work and home. It emphasized non-violence, restraint, moral virtue, temperance, prudence and civility, with an aim towards building workers' self-respect and dignity.<sup>18</sup>

### Work in the textile mills

While the TLA's own reportage and occasionally nostalgic accounts of the past tend to render textile workers as a unified body, divisions did exist and were

reinforced by the TLA's very mode of functioning. I take a brief detour here to outline the composition of the workforce to better contextualize the discussions that follow. Work in the textile mills was historically segregated by caste and religion, with each department drawing labour from particular groups.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Dalit<sup>20</sup> subcastes were employed primarily in the spinning departments, Vaghris in the frame departments and upper castes such as Brahmins and Vantias in bundling and reeling. The weaving sheds were staffed mainly by Muslim workers, with a gradual increase of middle-caste Patels and Patidars. Among others, Bavchas, Marathas and Kolis (a numerically dominant but lower-caste group) also formed a fair proportion of the workforce. While there were changes in the caste-based occupational groupings of textile mills, much of the earlier segmentation persisted and was, in fact, strengthened by the TLA's structure as a federation of various departmental unions and by its mode of organizing.<sup>21</sup> The bulk of the union's membership was composed of Dalit workers, while the often better-paid Muslim weavers remained somewhat distant from the TLA.<sup>22</sup> This constellation of caste, community and regional ties resulted in somewhat heterogeneous workers' settlements. Workers lived in poorly serviced *chawls*<sup>23</sup> and for the better part of the twentieth century Dalits and Muslims – the two groups that dominated millwork in Ahmedabad – lived in close proximity.

Women workers, who had formed a considerable proportion of the workforce in the early decades of the twentieth century, had been whittled down to 3 per cent by the early 1980s.<sup>24</sup> The TLA actively encouraged women to withdraw from waged labour and supported the rationalization of female workers by promoting an ideology of feminine domesticity that called for women to emotionally sustain the home.<sup>25</sup> Many of the women workers retrenched in the rationalization drives of the 1930s and the 1960s returned to the mills as contract or *badli* (substitute) workers. Thus, at no point was the workforce an entirely secure, 'formal' one. Nearly half of the mill workers by the late 1970s were non-permanent workers, who laboured with meagre protection.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there was an overarching security offered by textile mills that distinguished mill work from forms of casual labour – the fact that it 'effectively guaranteed work every day'.<sup>27</sup>

### The 'shock' of the closures

When the mill closures happened, it came as a 'shock', even though the textile industry had been sputtering for several years. Indications of impending closures were signalled when the third shift in the mills was discontinued, vacancies no

longer filled and entire departments shut down. Between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, the composite textile mill industry was dismantled almost entirely. However, as the closures unfolded, anxieties and uncertainties were more finely graded – with the possibility of certain mills reopening, certain segments of the workforce were more secure, certain skills more valued. Political connections, for instance, influenced which textile mills managed to evade regulations governing closures and also, perhaps, their selection for reopening.<sup>28</sup>

Another layer of tension was introduced by the staggered layoffs during this period. *Badli* (substitute) and contract workers, for instance, were often the first to be dismissed.<sup>29</sup> In Abhay Mills, first *badli* work was stopped, then the third shift, followed by large-scale retrenchment and finally, a complete shut down in early 1984.<sup>30</sup> With the very survival of the composite mill in doubt, additional pressures were placed upon the work process and the production units. *India Today* reported that while the spinning departments remained reasonably profitable, the costs incurred by the weaving units were partly responsible for the textile crisis. Some mill owners had indicated that the mills could be reopened if the weaving units were scrapped.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Ashok Mills retained only the spinning department, liquidating its weaving, processing and dyeing units.<sup>32</sup> Differential anxieties and apprehensions were thus generated by one's place in the hierarchy of work, often articulated in the idiom of caste and religion. These anxieties were reflected, for instance, in Valirambhai's account of his work life in Ahmedabad:

I worked at the Silver Mills for one and a half years. After the closure of the third shift, I worked in a factory for one month or so. For Muslims, it is very difficult to get work in some mills. Everywhere, one will find nepotism, casteism, communalism. In mills, there will be back-door recruitment.<sup>33</sup>

The Muslim workforce in the textile mills had been gradually shrinking, and the weaving departments were increasingly being staffed by middle-caste workers (in particular, Patidars).<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Dalit workers recognized stigmatization, discrimination and increasing vulnerability as stemming from their caste position. Despite the TLA's public posturing of inter-caste unity, forms of untouchability persisted in the establishment of separate drinking water facilities and rest spaces, among others.<sup>35</sup> As Danabhai of Marsden Mills reflected,

In the textile industry, we Dalits are the worst hit sufferers during the last 20 years. The reason is the most of the Dalits are in spinning-throstle department only. In this departments, single row of machines was doubled . . . doubled was made



four-fold . . . six-fold . . . and eight-fold . . . obviously an axe of retrenchment will fall on the Dalits only. Is it not so?<sup>36</sup>

The tensions over industrial restructuring and shrinking mill employment, expressed in terms of community, thus indicated deepening schisms between various groups of mill workers. Such concerns tied together questions of work segmentation in textile mills, experiences of systemic prejudice and the sense of discrimination that marked working lives.

Simultaneously, a pervasive sense of anger and betrayal surfaced against the TLA. The union had retreated from taking any kind of militant stand and concerned itself with appealing to the principles of trusteeship. Social activist Manishi Jani's fact-finding report on retrenchment (which included a series of interviews conducted with former mill workers) commented on the union's attitude during the most intense period of unemployment:

they believe the textile industry is one big family and the mill owner is the head of the family, while the worker is the younger brother. That is why the worker must request the family head with folded hands. And if he is not satisfied, he should seek help from the Sarkar mabaap.<sup>37</sup>

Referencing the union's well-established emotional repertoire of harmony, such commentaries foreground the practices of supplication and paternalism that marked the TLA's relationship with the state and capital.<sup>38</sup>

The union, at this point, was 'deaf and dumb' and busy trying to 'persuade the workers not to wash dirty linen in public by getting excited and angry'. The TLA's stand as perceived by retrenched workers was to 'remain peaceful and starve', reinforcing widely held assumptions that 'the workers of Gujarat are mild natured, peace loving and not struggle minded'.<sup>39</sup> For the workers, however, the TLA appeared as their 'weak point'. As Amrutbhai, a former worker at Tarun Mills mentioned, 'If I was a TLA president, all the mills of Ahmedabad would have gone on strike! The Government would get baffled!'

Emotions (or, more precisely, appropriate ways of feeling) in the face of extreme economic crisis emerged as the site on which workers and the union were pitted against each other. The disillusionment with the TLA's response was exacerbated by rumours circulating around the union's complicity in the closures. Workers reported that their concerns over imminent mill closures were deliberately dismissed by the TLA.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary reportage suggests that the TLA did not merely take a passive position in the face of mass retrenchment but was actively involved in the corruption that surrounded mill closures. Workers' feelings of discontent were not just directed towards the union but were also

aimed at broader institutional structures that they had so far been part of. Social insurance schemes that they had contributed to failed to provide any support once the mills closed down. Similarly, acts of solidarity extended by workers during previous moments of crisis (such as donating a day's wages or working on holidays to raise funds for floods) were not reciprocated. As Mithabhai of Monogram Mills put it, 'Now when we are jobless, why is there no relief fund for us?'

It was under these circumstances that the workers' mass suicide attempt (with which I began the chapter) took place. It was an attempt to call attention to their suffering and hardship and articulate it in a visible, public form. It was also an occasion for the BJP to signal that they were listening. Ashok Bhatt of the BJP, who orchestrated this protest, responded to Congress Party leaders who dismissed the incident as a political stunt: 'It will sound like a joke to all insensitive people. But to those whose kitchen fires are dead, this may mean many things.'<sup>41</sup>

### After the mills

The anger, resentment and sense of betrayal that former mill workers felt towards the TLA is perceptible in present-day conversations about the past. 'It was less of trade unionism and more of brokering deals', Jigneshbhai told me,

But after the mills closed down, did the workers die? Or did they become completely destitute? No, this didn't happen. We all went into different lines of work – some got jobs in power looms and workshops, other started hawking or began petty trades, like running phone booths, or driving rickshaws.

This shift towards informal employment or the 'fall from paradise', as Breman put it, was accompanied by profound emotional upheavals. 'These neighbourhoods became "dull" once the mills closed', Amritbhai recalled, 'that kind of *mahaul* (atmosphere, ambience) was lost forever'. The *mahaul* that Amritbhai was referring to was one that is remembered as brimming with vitality, oriented by the rhythms of the mills and framed by bonds of sociality and conviviality between mill workers. The mill sirens, likened to a mother's call to come home, governed everyday life – structuring domestic chores and meal timings and directing the bustle of large groups of workers on foot or cycles from their *chawls* to the mills.<sup>42</sup> The loss of this *mahaul* was felt as a sensory one.

As contemporary reportage and oral narratives point out, the emotional implications of the mill closures were felt across generations. For older male workers, deindustrialization signalled an enduring trauma. It was articulated as an embodied loss: 'I did not know how to live, where to go and what to do. It was like losing my hands.'<sup>43</sup> They spoke of the closures in the language of bereavement, 'as if somebody had died in the family', in terms of 'a shock like a parent's sudden death' and as a form of intimate grief, 'of feel[ing] like becoming a widower'.<sup>44</sup>

Having to then find employment in unskilled or otherwise poorly paid jobs (sometimes doing the same work they did in the mills) was perceived as shameful.<sup>45</sup> Female work participation increased, and while women were considered to be more 'resilient' in weathering the crisis of deindustrialization, there was a shift towards work that had been previously considered humiliating or degrading.<sup>46</sup>

In other contexts, scholarship on deindustrialization has shown that unemployment produced a crisis of masculinity and a loss of male pride.<sup>47</sup> 'Now every member of the household has to work', Jigneshbhai told me, 'and even then, this household won't ever be able to afford jaggery or ghee or seasonal vegetables.' Jigneshbhai's conversation betrays a nostalgia towards the past that is fairly common among older residents of the mill neighbourhoods in particular. In such recollections of life during the peak of the textile industry, the trope of the male breadwinner that Jigneshbhai recalled was seen as a measure of a good life. Although women in the mill neighbourhoods had been involved in waged work throughout (often in home-based, casual or contract work), there was a transformation in the dynamics of work following the mill closures. The fiction of feminine domesticity and the sole male earner, thus punctured, unsettled notions of masculinity in this social milieu.

Deindustrialization not only transformed employment regimes but also unsettled a way of life. The network of institutions that was largely mediated by the TLA – access to credit, dispensaries, reading rooms – disintegrated. As workers turned to lower-paying, more precarious jobs, there was a collective drop in the standard of living, which had generational repercussions:

Along with higher salaries in the textile mills, there used to be a lot of support – scholarships and so on. And mill workers' children benefitted from this. You see, earlier, with education you could see the birth of a new 'middle class'. Now, this [kind of upward mobility] has become very difficult for the working classes.<sup>48</sup>

The new middle class that Jigneshbhai referred to was an entire generation of Dalit workers who acquired economic prosperity through stable mill employment and government affirmative action, often physically relocating from the cramped quarters of the mill districts to the suburbs.<sup>49</sup> Even workers like Jigneshbhai, who were never made permanent in the mills, felt this loss of possibility and connected it to diminishing social respectability more broadly. Jigneshbhai's concerns are not so much a sentimentalized longing for the past but rather the 'occupation of past possibilities in the present moment'.<sup>50</sup> They lament the loss of possibilities, opportunities and a vision of the future that was conceivable in the past.<sup>51</sup>

The emotional attachment that (especially the older generation of) workers retained with the materiality of the mills was visible decades after the closures. Mill identity cards are safely stored away inside trunks and cupboards and brought out with some reverence to show researchers. As are curfew passes, which allowed mill workers some mobility during intermittent episodes of violence. The mill compounds – whether desolate and overgrown or 'rejuvenated' as shiny new commercial, industrial or residential complexes – remain part of the emotional geography of these neighbourhoods. Jeevanbhai, a former TLA representative and worker in Sarangpur Mill No. 2, would etch out the contours of his spinning department onto the flattened, empty landscape as he recalled his work life. Other workers would conjure their mill gates out of thin air, as they outlined their daily commute to the mills. This sense of place is one that is clearly grounded in their historical experiences of work and its everyday rhythms.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, there were other ways in which workers related to the spaces of the closed mills. The mill structures and boundary walls were gradually dismantled by the local residents.

Everyday people . . . you know, poor people like me . . . would set out in the morning with their lunch boxes, combing through the mill buildings to forage bricks, iron scrap, anything that could be used or sold. There was no work at that time, and a kilo of scrap would fetch Rs. 12, 13. If one could find 5-6 kgs, they could take home Rs. 60.<sup>53</sup>

The material remnants of the mills thus found their way into workers' housing and formed a tenuous safety net during the harshest period of the crisis.

The process of compensation for retrenched workers was a fraught one – the textile mills had declared bankruptcy, the mill lands were caught between competing claims and the TLA was routinely accused of corruption. However, as compensation trickled in, one of the first investments was made in housing.

Against the backdrop of declining standards of living and the loss of social prestige that followed the mill closures, these new material practices can be read as carrying profound emotional significance. Workers could, for the first time, afford to renovate their *chawls*. On the foundations of the original low-roofed structures, two or sometimes three storeys were added. Walls were cemented, floors were tiled and, gradually, other markers of relative affluence were added – attached toilets and bathrooms, a television, a fridge. Workers had lost the social and institutional support afforded by employment in the mills, but as Jigneshbhai put it, ‘they had something to show for it’. The process of deindustrialization and the emotions embedded in it were not necessarily consistent but rather gave rise to spatially and temporally contingent feelings of ambivalence.

Coeval to the collapse of the textile industry, there were tremendous changes unfolding in the political realm. The TLA’s electoral presence had diminished considerably and its political ally, the Congress Party, was rapidly losing its grip on municipal politics. In the meantime, the nascent Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (and its umbrella organization, the Sangh Parivar) stepped up efforts to broaden its initial upper-caste, middle-class constituency.<sup>54</sup> In the wake of its involvement in caste violence in the mid-1980s, the BJP embarked on a nationwide effort to embrace Dalits into the greater Hindu fold. BJP-affiliated trade unions proliferated across Gujarat as the party aimed to reach the urban poor.<sup>55</sup>

Once the BJP entered the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1987, party officials opened local offices in the mill neighbourhoods. In this way, the party penetrated existing arenas of urban sociality – the street life of the mill areas, the *addas* – historically forged and finessed by the TLA and its representatives. At these *addas*, sites of male sociality, large numbers of men would linger for hours, chatting, playing board games and discussing the state of the world. While the TLA was embedded in this form of public life through its vast network of worker representatives, the BJP’s mode of functioning relied on an engagement of senior party members with local youth. A new channel of proximate intimacy was inaugurated, offering closeness to political leadership and the state.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning with widely established techniques of gaining neighbourhood support – organizing health camps and distributing school supplies and books to students – the party moved on to incorporating young Dalit men into the lower rungs of its leadership.<sup>57</sup> At a time when the first shock of mill closures had sent the industrial districts into a crisis – of livelihoods, social identity, reputation and social honour – this move can be seen as offering a space in

which young working-class men could make an attempt to reclaim some degree of social respectability.

The BJP's presence and success in the mill neighbourhoods thus knitted together a range of (complementary and sometimes contradictory) sentiments. These included specifically local and classed feelings of isolation from networks of political power and visibility, resentment (as a form of perceived injustice) against the TLA and feeling 'useless'.<sup>58</sup> The Gujarati legacies of non-violence and connected practices of vegetarianism were paradoxically mobilized into a sacrificial imaginary by employing a rhetoric of disgust against Muslims (and their supposedly carnivorous appetites).<sup>59</sup> At the same time, it also drew on national-level emotive strategies of being and feeling part of a unified Hindu body.<sup>60</sup>

### Harmony, nostalgia and memory

In post-independence India, Ahmedabad acquired the reputation of being one of the most 'riot-prone' cities in India – major episodes of religious and caste violence occurred in 1969, 1981, 1985–6, intermittently through the 1990s and reaching its horrific peak during the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002. Much of the scholarship on Ahmedabad tends to view the collapse of the textile industry (and the TLA's decline) as a crucial factor in the communalization of the city's politics. Varshney, for instance, contends that organizations like the TLA constituted a 'bulwark of peace' and were instrumental in establishing 'civic contact between Hindus and Muslims';<sup>61</sup> hence, the disintegration of the city's formerly 'harmonious' social fabric can be dated to the collapse of the textile industry. Breman suggests that the TLA diffused communal tensions by appealing to 'working-class solidarity'. This form of social consciousness rested on 'communal harmony', which was replaced by an attachment to 'primordial loyalties' with the decline of the mills.<sup>62</sup> Spodek understands endemic urban violence, in part as a consequence of criminalization that surfaced once 'civic order' – fostered by institutions such as the TLA – eroded. Violence was an effect of the 'breakdown of institutional and moral cohesion'.<sup>63</sup> It is not my intention to suggest that deindustrialization did not precipitate profound transformations with far-reaching social, political and emotional consequences – much of this chapter has argued that new emotional registers emerged to articulate the changed relationship with work and trade unionism. Rather, it is to prise open the category of harmony, which

seems to colour so much of how the past is seen. What does it mean to say that mill workers were a more harmonious lot in the past? Or that the TLA promoted social harmony?

At one level, the narrative of harmony appears not only in scholarly accounts but also in popular memory in the mill neighbourhoods of contemporary Ahmedabad. Jasani sees an 'almost tangible desperation' to believe in and represent a 'once peaceful past that has progressively decayed'.<sup>64</sup> I noticed a similar tendency during my own conversations with residents of the mill localities. In every conversation that I had with Imdadbai, then Congress municipal councillor and the son of Muslim migrant mill workers, he would repeat, 'Have you written down that earlier there was a spirit of harmony? Make sure you write that down.' Another resident remarked, 'There was so much camaraderie amongst people then. We would celebrate festivals together and all three faiths [Hindus, Christians and Muslims] lived together.' The memory of the 'mixed neighbourhood' surfaced time and again, counterposed against the much more starkly segregated living arrangements of the present. This image of the past linked together work in the mills with feelings of neighbourliness, implying that a shared work culture translated into social warmth and cohesion outside the mills. These narratives of an idealized working-class community certainly elide both the social divisions that existed and the drudgery and hardship of work in the mills but nevertheless offer a counterpoint to talk about<sup>65</sup> or even critique sociopolitical dynamics of contemporary Ahmedabad.

Even in these nostalgic accounts of harmony we can find traces of other more ambivalent and contradictory feelings, however. One of the crucial ways in which harmony is conceptualized in Ahmedabad is related to intercommunity support and mutual protection (bolstered by the TLA) during episodes of violence.<sup>66</sup> This understanding of harmony implies that violence came from 'elsewhere' and its perpetrators were 'outsiders'. Jeevanbai's recollections of the violence of 1969 complicate this. Jeevanbai is a former TLA representative and a Congress municipal councillor who has built his political career on the plank of 'communal harmony'.<sup>67</sup> During the riots of 1969, when there were months of unrest and curfew, Jeevanbai recalled that he would slip through the warren of streets behind his home at Kundawali chaali, making straight for Sarangpur No. 2 Mill. Workers of each shift would move together, 50–100 people at a time. 'The ones who would live amongst their own community managed to go to work. . . . Here, we [Dalits] were in the majority, so we would cut through the *gallis* and get to the mill.' Muslim workers from Bapunagar, for instance, could not come to

work in Gomtipur mills, for they would have to cross three or four Hindu areas on their way. Neither could Hindu workers from Gomtipur go towards Ajit Mill in Rakhiyal, crossing the Muslim neighbourhood of Rajpur on the way. But there was no violence within the mills.<sup>68</sup> Jivan Thakore makes a similar observation:

Hindu and Muslim friends met and discussed what was happening in their respective localities . . . [workers] refrained themselves and saw to it that their family members did not participate in the violence . . . The supervisors and jamadars feared that the outrage outside might creep into the mill and its premises. But we had communal harmony inside the [mill] compound.<sup>69</sup>

However, while Thakore relates peace within the mill to 'feelings of brotherhood', Jeevanbhai sees it as a function of distance: 'their departments and our departments were separate.' He presents an entirely different profile of the perpetrators – local strongmen who were his friends and fellow TLA representatives who 'cleared out' neighbourhoods of Muslim mill workers:

For 2-3 months afterwards, Hindu and Muslim workers would not talk to each other while at work. After that the sense of brotherhood was repaired a bit . . . you know, Hindus are very forgiving. Muslims never forget or forgive . . . say their wife or child has died [killed], they hold on to that anger, to that enmity and always nursing vengeful feelings.

To my mind, there is often a slippage in the ways in which the operations of the TLA are understood, in the accounts that posit the union as the keeper of social cohesion and harmony. Or in other words, accounts that suggest that the TLA's emotional repertoire that emphasized non-violence and harmony was not contested. Elsewhere, I have argued that the TLA's extensive apparatus of grassroots control was often buttressed by precisely the kind of 'unruly' worker that it was publicly committed to sanitizing.<sup>70</sup> Thus, even as the union urged the (male) workforce to be non-violent and respectable, its actual operations on the ground depended on those who embodied fearlessness, aggression and the ability to inflict violence and inspire respect. The TLA was not, as other scholars have also suggested, an institution separate from the textures of everyday life in the workers' neighbourhoods.<sup>71</sup> But if this was so, then the argument that harmony was something that the union fostered and disharmony something external to it does not hold. Indeed, in Jeevanbhai's nostalgic recollections of the past, it is the feelings associated with virile, aggressive (and clearly bigoted) masculinity (and the social bonds that came with it) that he highlights.

This chapter offers a long history of working-class politics, trade unionism and its discontents by looking at the emotional dynamics of deindustrialization.



By focusing on the broad range of feelings that emerged following the closure of mills, I suggest that emotions of loss, betrayal and despair were framed by the communally segmented structures of the work process. These feelings had a spatial location and a sensory dimension. Life in the mill neighbourhoods following deindustrialization reconfigured workers' emotional practices, combining working-class anxieties with Hindu nationalist militancy. Deindustrialization did not just manifest in emotions of loss and resignation but also in complex and often troubling registers of feelings. Finally, this chapter has critically evaluated the nostalgic rendering of a harmonious past in light of recurrent sectarian conflict, suggesting that harmony and disharmony, unity and disunity were enmeshed even in the 'glory days' of mill work. As Ahmedabad remakes itself as India's first Heritage City, there have been renewed efforts to preserve its industrial past.<sup>72</sup> Memorializing and aesthetizing the city and its mills as sites of peaceful coexistence runs the risk of erasing the violence and dispossession that has marked the city's twentieth-century history.<sup>73</sup>

## Notes

- 1 *India Today*, 31 January 1983.
- 2 *The Times of India*, 28 March 1983; *India Today*, 31 January 1983.
- 3 See for instance Mah, *Industrial Ruination*; High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland*.
- 4 High, 'The Wounds of Class'; Strangleman and Rhodes, 'The "New" Sociology'; Bonfiglioli, 'Post-Socialist Deindustrialisation'.
- 5 Mah, *Industrial Ruination*.
- 6 Spodek, *Ahmedabad*, 195.
- 7 Spodek, 'Manchesterisation'.
- 8 Representative trade unions in India are those that have been granted exclusive rights of collective bargaining.
- 9 *India Today*, 15 January 1985.
- 10 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 46.
- 11 Patel, *Industrial Relations*.
- 12 Patel, 'Class Conflict'.
- 13 TLA, 'Six Decades of the TLA', 3–4.
- 14 TLA, 'Annual Report 1950–51', 12. See also Donauer, 'Emotions at Work'.
- 15 TLA, 'Six Decades of the TLA', 16.
- 16 Spodek, 'From Gandhi to Violence'.
- 17 TLA, 'Annual Report 1950', 2.
- 18 See select TLA Annual Reports 1924–81.

- 19 Lakha, 'Character of Wage Labour'.
- 20 Formerly untouchable caste groups, in this case mostly Hindu.
- 21 See Lakha, 'Character of Wage Labour'; Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*; Gillion, *Ahmedabad*. See also Royal Commission of Labour in India, Vol. 1, Part 1. 7 ff.
- 22 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*.
- 23 One or two room dwellings, with shared facilities, common in industrial cities across India.
- 24 Jhabvala, *Closing Doors*.
- 25 Barua, 'Feminine Domesticity'.
- 26 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 204.
- 27 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 28.
- 28 *India Today*, 31 July 1984.
- 29 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*.
- 30 Jani, *The Textile Workers*.
- 31 *India Today*, 29 February 1984.
- 32 Howell and Kambhampati, 'Liberalization and Labour'.
- 33 Jani, *Textile Workers*, 11.
- 34 Muslim workers nevertheless constituted nearly 7 per cent of the retrenched workforce in the mid-1980s, as opposed to 3 per cent in Bombay. See Patel, *Workers of Closed Textile Mills*; Mhaskar, 'Indian Muslims in a Global City', 17; Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*.
- 35 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 57.
- 36 Jani, *Textile Workers*, 7–8.
- 37 Jani, *Textile Workers*, 3. 'Mabaap' lit. translates as 'mother-father'. This term suggests an engagement with the state in terms of goodwill or benevolence rather than through rights and entitlements.
- 38 *India Today*, 31 July 1984.
- 39 The interviews cited in this section have been drawn from Jani, *Textile Workers*.
- 40 Interviews Ahmedabad, 2011–12.
- 41 *India Today*, 30 April 1983. Ashok Bhatt went on to serve as a member of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly for nearly two decades. Formerly an employee of Arvind Mills, he is widely credited with building the BJP's support base in Ahmedabad. He was accused of inciting anti-Muslim violence in 1985 and 2002.
- 42 Breman and Shah, *Working in the Mill*.
- 43 Noronha, 'Duration of Unemployment'.
- 44 Noronha, 'Duration of Unemployment'.
- 45 Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 214.
- 46 Shah, *Ahmedabad*, 119; Jhabvala, *Closing Doors*.
- 47 Joshi, 'On "De-Industrialization"'.
- 48 Jigneshbhai, interview.

- 49 Banerjee and Mehta, 'Caste and Capital'.
- 50 Finkelstein, *The Archive of Loss*, 92.
- 51 See also Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*.
- 52 Meier, 'Encounters'. A broader literature exists on the relationship between social space, emotions and affect. See for instance Khan, 'The Social Production'; Bondi, Davidson and Smith eds., *Emotional Geographies*; Thien, 'After or Beyond Feeling?'
- 53 Jeevanbhai, interview.
- 54 Nandy, *Creating a Nationality*.
- 55 Shah, 'Tenth Lok Sabha Elections', 2924.
- 56 See also Berenschot, *Riot Politics*, 143.
- 57 In other contexts, organizations of the Hindu right have deployed similar techniques of mobilization. For instance, in Bombay, the Shiv Sena entered mill neighbourhoods through social and community work. See, for instance, Menon, *One Hundred Years One Hundred Voices*; and Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, 53–7.
- 58 For resentment as injury and injustice, see Fassin, et al., 'On Resentment and Ressentiment'. See also Jasani, 'Violence, Urban Anxieties and Masculinities' for an analysis of the aftermath of violence and feelings of 'being used'.
- 59 Ghassem-Fachandi, 'Ahimsa, Identification and Sacrifice'.
- 60 In particular, reclamation of Hindu masculinity against the Muslim 'other' is a common trope employed by Hindu fundamentalism. An extensive body of work exists on this subject, including Hansen, 'Recuperating Masculinity'; Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror'; Gupta, *Justice before Reconciliation*.
- 61 Varshney, *Civic Life and Ethnic Conflict*, 231.
- 62 Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence', 1485–8.
- 63 Spodek, 'From Gandhi to Violence'.
- 64 Jasani, 'A Potted History of Neighbours', 160.
- 65 Jasani, 'A Potted History of Neighbours', 160.
- 66 Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence'.
- 67 Jeevanbhai and Imdadbhai have contested municipal elections together for over a decade, neatly dividing the Dalit and Muslim constituencies in Gontipur. Their commitment to communal harmony was mentioned in *The Indian Express*, which noted that their 'firm resolve to maintain peace meant that no untoward incident took place'. *The Indian Express*, 8 March 2002.
- 68 Jeevanbhai, interview.
- 69 Thakore, cited in Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*, 223.
- 70 Barua, 'The Textile Labour Association'.
- 71 See Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*; Spodek, *Ahmedabad*.
- 72 *The Times of India*, 27 April 2010; *The Hindu*, 9 July 2017.
- 73 For other discussions of Ahmedabad's remaking of heritage, see Da Costa, 'Sentimental Capitalism in Contemporary India'.

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