

Capitalism, Violence and The State: Crime, Corruption and Entrepreneurship in an Indian Company Town

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In the Tata company town of Jamshedpur, incisive popular discourses of corruption posit a mutually beneficial relationship between 'legitimate' institutions and organised criminality, a dynamic believed to enable pervasive transformations in the city's industrial and financial infrastructures. This article situates this local discourse within the wider body of anthropological work on South Asian corruption, noting a discursive departure from the hegemonic, personalised and essentially provincialising corruption models encountered by many researchers. The article interrogates the popular model of crime and corruption in Jamshedpur through a focus upon the business practices of local violent entrepreneurs, exploring the extent to which their negotiations with corrupt institutions and 'legitimate' capital may indeed inform their successes. Drawing analytic cues from material on organised crime in the former USSR, this article identifies a mutually beneficial relationship between political influence, violence and industrial capital in an Indian company town.

❖ Key words Crime, Corruption, Entrepreneurship, Violence, Capital

Introduction: 'India's Wild West'

Whilst I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Jamshedpur in March 2007, the city's Member of Parliament, Sunil Mahato was assassinated. Mahato had been the guest of honour at a local football match when Maoist guerrillas stormed the stadium and opened fire, killing him and several members of his entourage. Within days, rumours began to circulate within the city that Mahato had met his end due to a less than ideological difference of opinion with his assailants. Both popular and local media consensus held that

Mahato's infamous negotiations with mafia syndicates had eventually claimed his life.¹ This assertion was vehemently denied by the local party wing of the Maoist uprising, which held that he had been executed as a 'chamcha'² of the state's industrial corporations.³

By the end of the week, the *Times of India* addressed Mahato's assassination in an editorial provocatively entitled 'India's Wild West'. The article tacitly supported a reading of the region as an anarchic frontier where: "the gun dictated the law". Mahato's death, the article claimed, was but one in a long line of provincial disputes, in which personalised disagreements all too often degenerated into senseless violence.⁴ This 'Wild West' model is an elaboration upon a discourse of the 'Jungle Raj' which portrays Bihar and Jharkhand as a violent pre-modern backwater, distant and distinct from the shopping malls and stock markets of metropolitan India. Bihar and Jharkhand do have long standing and periodically very serious issues of law and order. Levels of violent crime, in particular, are significantly higher than the national average. Murder accounts for 4.73% of all reported crimes in Jharkhand, against a national average of 1.83% (Bhandari and Kale 2007: 86). In the region's urban areas, this bias becomes more pronounced; in the city of Patna, the murder rate is 23 times as high as that of Kolkata (Dreze and Khera 2000: 335-352).

The Jungle Raj discourse which builds upon these troubling facts is essentially a provincialising one, which argues that many of Bihar and Jharkhand's problems in this regard are both a symptom and expression of a localised culture of violence. As was frequently articulated to me by metropolitan Indians and the mainly Bengali management cadre of local Tata industry, Biharis and Jharkhandi Adivasis had violence and sectarianism in their blood (Sanchez 2010). The region's problems with crime were therefore as much a matter of passion as they were of planning, and as such were liable to resist the well meaning authority of central government. Where discussed, the so called 'Mafias' of Bihar and Jharkhand were accordingly presented as distinctly local institutions, which drew upon pre-existing identities of caste and ethnicity to define both their membership and interests.

Based on ethnographic research conducted in Jamshedpur among industrial workers, trade unionists and violent entrepreneurs, this article attempts to construct a more empirically substantiated model of the ways in which organised criminality in the 'Jungle Raj' actually works, and the ways in which the region's people discuss, conceptualise and critique it. In doing so, I pursue two complementary lines of analysis. Firstly, I respond to the Jungle Raj model through the case studies of the murder of a local trade unionist and the extra-legal escapades of a senior state politician. Rather than being directionless outpourings of local lawlessness, I argue that moments of organised violence must be considered as instrumental political actions. In this instance, I demonstrate that the 1995 assassination of Tata Workers' Union president VG Gopal played a crucial role in enabling a transformation of Jamshedpur's employment regimes, and that the murder of the Jharkhand

chief minister's personal aide was closely related to a well publicised corruption scandal in the national government. Rather than being distinct from the entrepreneurship of neo-liberal India, Jharkhand's goondas⁵ may well play an integral role in the state's political, industrial and financial infrastructures. In developing this argument, I draw upon the large body of Post Soviet and Italian ethnography, history and political science, which identifies the role that violence plays in the operation of industrial and financial capitalism.

Secondly, I note that popular corruption discourses in Jamshedpur respond accordingly to the social context in which they are constructed; namely they identify the use of violence to explain political authority, industrial profitability and the failure of collective action. These incisive and critical discourses challenge anthropological analyses which posit popular Indian understandings of corruption to either inflate the phenomenon or else personalise and localise it in such a way that relationships between elites and bureaucratic functionaries are obscured. I argue that in this regional context, prevalent institutional corruption and organised crime are mutually constitutive and as such require a somewhat different analytic framework with which to approach the discourses surrounding them.

The latter half of the article takes these observations on the role and perception of institutional violence in Jamshedpur's economy and tests them against the business practices of two of Jamshedpur's 'violent entrepreneurs'. A largely descriptive ethnographic account of the fortunes of these interlocutors demonstrates that entrepreneurial success in Jamshedpur relies upon a mastery of corrupt institutional influence and organised criminal violence. This material reveals that local corruption discourses on the relationship between 'legitimate' institutions, capital and violence are to some extent well substantiated, and are as such politically incisive.

The Decline of a Company Town: Discourses of Institutional Corruption

More than a million people currently call the Tata company town of Jamshedpur home; the vast majority of residents are descendents of the labour migrants who came to the region in the first half of the twentieth century, displacing the local Adivasi tribal population (Weiner 1978:161).⁶ The city is the site of the Tata Steel Plant which is arguably the first integrated works of its kind in South Asia, having been built in 1904 by the industrialist Jamshedji Tata, after whom the city is named (Bahl 1995; Fraser 1919; Pillai 1923). In Jamshedpur, Tata have historically provided not only jobs, but also homes, schools, hospitals and utilities to all of their employees since the early 20th century; fulfilling many of the needs which outside of the company town are normally met by the state.

The formalised permanent Tata workforce presented in Bahl's (1982) account of 1920's Jamshedpur provides an early historical counterpoint to the

shifting and insecure modes of Indian proletariat production described by Chandavarkar (1985, 1994, 1999) and Gooptu (2001). However, the company town is a far from stable category, and following India's economic liberalisation of the 1990s, Tata struggled to maintain profitability against the foreign capital and competition that flooded the domestic market. In an effort to cut production costs, the past two decades have seen the majority of permanent company positions in Jamshedpur casualised, taking with them the right to Tata civic care for all but a minority of employees. In the late 1990's, the proportion of casual workers in the Tata Motors plant where I conducted several months of research was less than a quarter. As of 2006, the number of casual employees had risen dramatically to 76%, their positions having been made available through the early retirement of large numbers of older workers. These 'casual workers' were themselves almost entirely drawn from traditional Tata families, many of whom explained their rapid descent down the labour hierarchy with reference to a corruption within the Tata Workers' Union that refused to allow them membership.

India's economic liberalisation of the early 1990's sought to capitalise on the nation's high rate of growth during the 1980's, which increased in the manufacturing sector at almost double the rate (8%) of any other industrialised nation (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 147). Following Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's 1991 budget, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act was considerably relaxed and provision made for foreign investment in certain industries of up to 51% of total equity.⁷ In addition, tariffs on imports were lowered and the state began to directly invest more heavily in manufacturing infrastructure (Guha 1990: 45).

Throughout the 1990s, both Tata Steel and Tata's automobile venture, Telco were increasingly unable to match the progress of more dynamic Indian firms that utilised, rather than competed against growing foreign investment. Companies such as car manufacturer Maruti, entered into partnership with foreign firms and shifted their production to largely automated plants, producing lower cost, higher specification vehicles. After narrowly avoiding bankruptcy in 2003, Telco was rebranded Tata Motors, and a large scale expansion of their casual workforce embarked upon, significantly lowering labour costs (Sanchez 2010).

In Jamshedpur early resistance to casualisation had been mounted by the president of the Tata Workers' Union, V.G. Gopal, who deemed early retirement and mass casualisation to be antithetical to the principles of collective action. However, Gopal was something of a lone voice within the union, the majority of whose committee members supported Tata's casual labour initiatives; support which the majority of my shopfloor interlocutors deemed to be motivated by company bribe taking. In October 1993, V.G. Gopal was shot on the steps of the union's office as he left his car, somewhat curtailing his effectiveness. When I visited the union's building in January 2006, his vehicle was still parked where it was 12 years ago, with flat tires, slowly rusting away. This decaying monument was complemented by a bronze

bust of Gopal which graced the building's entrance, garlanded with marigolds. I was told by the present union bureaucrats that he had been 'killed by gangsters'.

In fact, Gopal had not been simply killed by gangsters; he had been assassinated at the behest of one of his fellow union committee members, Amrendra Kumar Singh. Singh had indeed hired local goondas for the actual shooting but in 2006 was nevertheless found guilty of murder himself. During his trial, it was the prosecution's contention that the plot had involved a large number of individuals from the union and Jamshedpur's criminal underworld, a line of inquiry that was hampered by the disappearance and suspected murder of a number of key suspects in the intervening years. The Indian Central Bureau of Investigation issued statements to the effect that the two suspected gunmen had probably been murdered by their co-conspirators.⁸

Convicted of Gopal's murder, Amrendra Kumar Singh is currently serving a life sentence in prison. The union's official stance is that he was jealous of the president's control, craving the position himself. The murder is therefore presented as a personalised and emotive affair. However, Gopal was the only high ranking officer from the TWU who attempted to resist casualisation in Tata Steel, and it was popularly believed by many city residents that it was his stance on this matter, rather than any personal feud, that motivated the killing. One individual, himself a high ranking Tata officer even went so far as to allege to me that senior Tata Steel management had paid for the assassination; emphasising the role of violence and organised criminal negotiations within the transformation of a company town labour regime.

As the Tata Workers' Union (TWU) was at the heart of the Tata working class' creation in the industrial disputes of the 1920's, so it seemed to play a central role to the unravelling of their security during the first decade of the 21st century (Bahl 1982, 1995). To wit, the casualisation process has one important characteristic, which is that all casual workers are denied membership of the Tata Workers' Union and as such cannot rely upon that organisation to petition for either regularisation or the increase of casual wage rates. Key to the popular corruption discourses of Jamshedpur's industrial workers was the contention that the union's refusal to represent casual workers was itself motivated by company bribe taking; an exercise of corrupt self interest that is popularly related to the interests of industrial capitalism and economic liberalisation. This is a very particular form of corruption discourse, which as suggested in the introduction to this article, is of a politically critical nature, and which directs itself towards not only the character and morality of given actors and institutions, but the relationships between them. For their part the Tata company effectively supports the deunionising of casual workers through its closed-shop policy, which stipulates sole company negotiation with an officially recognised worker organisation; in this case the TWU.⁹ As such, discourses surrounding the casualisation of Tata labour draw upon the intersection of elite union self interest, large scale

economic change, legislative complicity and violence.

Jan Breman notes a similar failure of collective action in his discussion of the decline of the Ahmedabad textile industry from the 1980's, in which the Textile Labour Association (TLA) is said to be comprised of political climbers in the Congress Party; possessed of neither the competence nor compulsion to fight for their members' interests. In this particular 'corruption' discourse then, elite self interest is similarly the Achilles Heel of collective action; indeed, the result of the union's antipathy was the dismissal of huge numbers of workers and the eventual 'unmaking' of Ahmedabad's industrial working class (Breman 2004: 163). However, there are a number of differences between these contexts, which illuminate the nature of corruption discourse in Jamshedpur.

Crucially, where in Breman's study the union is perceived to be incompetent and self interested (ibid.), in Jamshedpur its leaders are perceived to be actively criminal. What affords and defines this perception is a more systematic focus upon the political and economic processes of corruption. Where Breman's interlocutors primarily identify the nature of their union leaders (self interested, ambitious, yet incompetent), in Jamshedpur primacy is given to the productive function of the relationships between union leaders and other agents, such as the Tata company, the state and organised crime. The business models to which both cases relate are also rather different, although both represent the 'unmaking' of an industrial workforce in varying degrees. In Breman's case, the emphasis is primarily upon large scale redundancy. In Jamshedpur however, the aim of casualisation was instead to preserve the city's large and steady industrial workforce; but at a lower cost and with less capacity for collective bargaining. The exercise of extreme violence was a partial means to secure this aim, and in this regard, the union proved themselves to be effective allies to company interests.

The popular perception among my interlocutors in Jamshedpur was that neo-liberal economic change had proceeded with the support of an institutional 'corruption' that was characterised by the mutual aid of political and union influence, goonda violence and industrial capital. Corruption in this context is directed towards wealth generation, and serves to create and maintain a class of those able to negotiate such practice (Szeftel 2000: 303). Reinforcing the popular discourse of corruption were not only the violent scandals surrounding the union and Tata company, but also the equally well publicised criminality of the state's politicians, which helped to consolidate an image of institutional corruption that intersected closely with organised criminal violence.

Chief among the state's political scandals were the activities of Siblu Soren, the first leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha party who, in 1993 was centrally implicated in a 'bribes for votes' scandal. During this affair, Congress Prime Minister, Narashima Rao had allegedly paid members of Soren's party in excess of Rs1Crore to support the government in a vote of no confidence. One year later, Siblu Soren's aide had allegedly attempted to blackmail him

with information relating to the bribe; his body was discovered in a Jharkhandi forest in 1999 and a painfully slow murder investigation against Soren opened. In the years since the aide's body was found, Soren went on to become the first chief minister of the Jharkhand state and the Coal Minister of the national government. During his tenure as Cabinet Minister, he spent one year behind bars and several months in hiding, actually absconding whilst on bail.

In November 2006, Soren was convicted of his aide's murder, receiving a life sentence in prison. After serving only nine months of this sentence, his conviction was overturned on the grounds that the identity of the aide's body could not be established beyond reasonable doubt. Soren walked free from Dumka Jail in Jharkhand on August 25, 2007 and a year later, on August 27, 2008, was once again reinstated as the state's Chief Minister.

While languages of corruption in Jamshedpur may draw on the wider model of Kali Yug social decline, they are far from provincial reckonings of morality and custom (Pinney 1999). Corruption is popularly utilised as an explicitly legal category, and draws its cues from media discussions of the violent actions of state politicians and trade unionists. Gupta's analysis of corruption discourse in local north Indian media reveals an everyday perception that somewhere there exists a moral centre from which the financial self interest of provincial bureaucrats deviates (Gupta 1995). In Jamshedpur the same methodology reveals the rather different perception that violent criminality in the provinces is closely related to the political interests of a corrupted central government and the financial interests of industrial conglomerates. Alpa Shah's recent work on Maoism in Jharkhand would seem to suggest that this scepticism and fear of state institutions is far from a simply urban phenomenon (Shah 2006).

The type of corruption that I turn my attention to in this article is therefore distinct from that in much Indianist scholarship in which the 'motor' of corruption is the satisfaction of a short term, local and individual interest, primarily manifested as bribery (Das 2001; Gupta 1995; Parry 2000). In Jamshedpur, the corruption in question is the systematised practice of institutions and the state, and is directed towards long term interests, having a closer resonance to Robert Wade's work on agricultural irrigation corruption in South India (Wade 1982). Where Wade's context and that discussed here most notably differ, is that in Jamshedpur, while corruption is often focussed upon industry and business, its methods are perceived to be at least partly violent.

In Jharkhand, corruption discourses such as those surrounding the murder of VG Gopal or the criminality of politicians, refer directly to ongoing relationships between state authority, capital and violence. These discourses are primarily political, and illuminate local conceptions of industrial capitalism and the nature of institutional authority. Where discourses of petty corruption across India may well identify the immorality of provincial individuals (Gupta 1995), in Jamshedpur they pertain to a far wider perception of the state as an

assemblage of corrupt and at times dangerous elites, united in their pursuit of capital.

What makes these discourses particularly illuminating is that they are not simply a discursive reaction to the structural inequalities of a transforming company town; such a perspective would suggest local corruption discourse to be something of a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1985). On the contrary, although corruption discourse may well enable a moral critique of social elites, such commentaries are nonetheless remarkably incisive, building models of elite cooperation that are often founded on the facts of daily life; either directly experienced, or engaged with in the criminal trials of politicians and trade unionists.

Parry incisively notes that Indian bureaucratic corruption is often something of a self fulfilling, yet mystifying prophecy, fuelled by the self-aggrandisement of corrupt 'middle men', for whom the public perception of the 'crisis of corruption' is a means to demand larger and more frequent bribes (Parry 2000). In this analysis, corruption discourses are essentially hegemonic, stimulating those that engage with them to part with resources in order to secure a reward that is never likely to materialise. Constructed in the context of high levels of violent crime and a historical precedent for institutional violence, the corruption discourse in Jamshedpur is altogether a less mystified type of commentary one that points towards actual, rather than imagined political and economic processes. In the latter sections of this article, the incisiveness of this model is tested against the activities of two city entrepreneurs, for whom business negotiations with corrupt institutions are indeed frequently coloured by violence.

Corruption in Jamshedpur cannot be reduced to either the business of bureaucracies or the stuff of subjective public discourse, since the self interest of corrupt actors intersects so notably with the interests of industrial capitalism, and is sporadically fulfilled by well substantiated incidents of organised criminal violence. While anthropological analyses of India have generally failed to pay sufficient attention to these dynamics, useful analytic frameworks from different ethnographic contexts have drawn attention to the arenas in which corruption, violence and capital routinely intersect, inviting a more proper consideration of the role of both corruption and violence in capitalism (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993; Handelman 1994; Herzfeld 2009; Kang 2002; Varese 2005; Volkov 2002; Yurchak 2002).

In Jamshedpur, one can usefully talk of the profitable relationship between capital and violence, which, in the context of newly liberalised post socialist economies, Vadim Volkov has termed the 'enforcement partnership' (Volkov 2002). In Volkov's context rather than acting as an obstacle to the 'market' (see Galeotti 1998), violent entrepreneurs effectively underwrite the fragile contracts of emerging capitalism through the threat of physical harm (Varese 2005; Volkov 2002). The environment is marked by rapidly expanding opportunity in large scale industry, coupled with corrupted state authority. This form of organised crime is distinct from the informal barter networks

described by Caroline Humphrey and others, which although reliant upon a similar dynamic of entrepreneurship and institutional corruption, are focussed upon the popular demand for everyday essentials (Humphrey 2002; Lovell et al 2000).

What makes the 'enforcement partnership' framework particularly useful for a reading of Jharkhandi corruption is that it enables one to consider the role of violence and coercion in long-term relationships between mutually constituted forms of authority. This perspective allows for a theorising of the rather amorphous and often misleading category of 'organised crime' in terms of institutional negotiations, rather than considering it as a discrete type of structure, thereby bridging the misleading analytic schism between 'corruption' and 'criminality'. The Jharkhandi 'mafia', like its cousins in Mumbai and Bihar may lack the codes of honour, ties of kinship and centrality of vendetta that popularly characterise its Sicilian namesake (Blok 1974). However, even a rather cursory historical survey of the Sicilian Mafia shows its origins to be firmly economic and political, resting in the feudal patronage of post-unification Italy (Arlacchi 1983, 1986). Like both its Sicilian and Russian counterparts, the Jharkhandi mafia is marked by a tenacious economic logic and as I approached the acephalous crime structure in Jamshedpur I saw that its potential 'members' were more accurately business partners and were drawn from a variety of castes, ethnicities and class backgrounds, each united by the pursuit of capital in a markedly corrupt industrial economy. Already well documented in Post-Soviet and Italian ethnography, my focus upon this dynamic in Jamshedpur questions the ways in which Anthropology has commonly theorised South Asian corruption as an essentially bureaucratic, personal and non-violent phenomenon.

In the following sections of this article I use ethnographic cases studies of two city research participants in order to discuss the logic and character of criminal enterprise in Jamshedpur. As suggested by popular corruption discourses, the extent to which these individuals' enterprises are successful are dependent upon the mastery of something akin to an enforcement partnership logic; a logic that has been so central to both the casualisation of labour in Jamshedpur and the wider operation of Jharkhandi politics.

Rishi and the MP: Criminal Entrepreneurship

On arriving in Jamshedpur for the first time in January 2006, I quickly made the acquaintance of 26 year old Suchir, a native of Kolkata, who much like myself had recently found himself seconded to the city on a work assignment. Suchir worked for the finance division of General Electric Money, the loans department of the US multinational. His task in Jamshedpur was to assess hire-purchase applications for motorcycles. As part of his job, Suchir was required to liaise with a local financial services firm which collected weekly payments from the city's mainly young, male and unrealistically indebted motorcyclists. Suchir's Jamshedpur contact was the debt collecting firm's

owner, Rishi, who operated out of a large home and office in one of the city's slums.

Although homesick for the fun and thrills of Kolkata, Suchir initially professed that Jamshedpur was a fine place; very clean and quiet, and with a good standard of living. However, as our first weeks in the city passed, Suchir became increasingly agitated. He began to express both a mounting concern for his safety and weariness towards what he perceived to be the latent violence of the city, somewhat reproducing the 'Jungle Raj' discourse. He would often tell me that he did not understand the people of Jharkhand, he felt that they were aggressive and violent and commented: "Boss, I have seen these things before in films you know, but until I came to this place I hadn't known that it was real, this is the place where it is happening"

Suchir had hitherto equated organised crime and serious violence with their Bollywood portrayals; where gangsters drive fast cars, dress in black and spend the greater proportion of their time engaged in dangerous liaisons with enigmatic women. Quite unexpectedly, the seemingly legitimate business of hire-purchase bought Suchir into contact with all manner of threatening characters in Jamshedpur, many of whom were members of the city's elites and could wield substantial political, legal and violent influence in their favour. Quite unexpectedly, in Jamshedpur Suchir found himself playing a part, albeit minor, in a real life Mafia movie, in which there was no glitz, easy women, quotable lines or indeed fun. Suchir confided to me in June 2006, that Sunil Mahato MP was trying to force him into awarding one of his goondas a lucrative collections contract, the very contract in fact presently held by Rishi.

Sunil Mahato was not only the city's Member of Parliament and the bane of the local Naxal Brigade, he was also well known as one of its chief organised crime figures. In addition to his interests in debt collection, Mahato was also purported to run a protection racket among the city's illegal alcohol stalls and to be engaged in the traffic of stolen heavy minerals. Suchir did not have the ability to award Mahato's goondas any form of contract, since he was nowhere near senior enough. Nonetheless, he had been targeted by a group of men that phoned him several times in the period of a week with a series of ever more explicit threats. The popular corruption discourses of Jamshedpur, which identified the mutual dependency of industrial capitalism, the state, elite institutions and violence were reasonably well substantiated in their analysis of Sunil Mahato, whose purported criminality I must confess to have initially approached as something of a discursive 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1985). However, as more of my fieldwork interlocutors began to profess personal experiences of extortion and coercion by Mahato's entourage, I was compelled to regard such critiques less as discourses, and more as grass roots analyses of actual processes.

What makes Mahato's business practice particularly apt for an 'enforcement partnership' rather than 'corruption' analysis is that his negotiations with Suchir were not driven by any logic of bribery, which is to say that he did not attempt to offer any form of remuneration for receiving

tender. In Parry's framework of the relative moral and ethical content of Indian bribery a useful delineation is drawn between the 'Gift', the 'Commission' and the 'Bribe' (Parry 2000). Mahato bypassed this pan-Indian corruption etiquette entirely and progressed simply to the threat of violence; a potentially powerful means of mediating his economic negotiations.

After a week of threatening phone calls, Mahato's goondas eventually arrived at Suchir's office to discuss the issue face to face, where they threatened to shoot him. Panicking, Suchir did the only thing he could, and gave them the office number of his supervisor in Kolkata. Surprisingly, this proved to be the right tactic, as the goondas set about harassing his superior instead. Any personalised threat against Suchir quickly dissolved following the goondas' recognition of his personal inability to improve their profit margin.

Sunil Mahato's threats were understandably a source of some worry to both Suchir and I, and some weeks after the incident I was able to discuss the issue with Rishi, Suchir's debt collecting contact. Rishi's family, who were of Yadav caste, had migrated from Eastern Uttar Pradesh in the early 1900's, and had worked in the Tata Steel plant for four generations. Rishi was something of the archetypal self-made-man and despite being a successful entrepreneur, he still lived in one of the city's mainly Adivasi slums, in the house in which he had been born. In recent years he had since greatly expanded the building with various extensions and had built a two storey office at the front of the property from where he ran his business. As he told me one evening: "I live in a slum, but I compensate for it by having the biggest house".

Then 38 years old, Rishi had graduated from a Tata mixed English/Hindi secondary school 20 years earlier, and enrolled on an accountancy degree at a local college. During his degree he had worked nights as a petrol station attendant on the Sakchi highway, where he was robbed at gun point several times. Whilst studying, he had married a beautiful young woman from his neighbourhood in a scandalous elopement that divided both of their families. During some years of isolation, the couple lived alone in a distant part of the city where his wife was cruelly taunted by their neighbours almost every time she ventured outdoors. Both of their lives had taken a turn for the better when the couple were reconciled to Rishi's parents after the birth of their first child, a boy. They were able to return to his family home, where he discovered that his now ageing parents enjoyed the company of his wife, and were glad to have the house full again.

After graduating from university, and vowing to never again work nights in a petrol station, Rishi had practised as an accountant for several years. He had then begun to branch into small scale money lending and debt collection, and at the time of fieldwork, his chief source of income was his collections contract with General Electric Money. Rishi had come into the world of goondas, debts and violence more through accident than design. Whilst being necessarily well connected to the city's criminal infrastructure, Rishi was not a

personally intimidating figure. In the company of his friends, parents, wife and children, Rishi was a generous and easy-going individual; well spoken and possessed of the type of charm which inspires phrases such as ‘instantly likeable’.

The ‘men of honour’ model, which portrays gangsters as readily recognisable and drawn from a culture and symbol system of criminality, is an inadequate tool with which to approach Rishi Yadav (Handelman 1994). Rishi did not come from an obviously criminal background, neither could his present actions be readily identified as simply criminal. Rishi’s daily business practice relied upon negotiations of corrupt political influence, financial self interest, coercion and sporadic violence. His experience points towards both an understanding of criminality that is more politically and economically systematic, and an understanding of corruption that is more closely wedded to criminality. An ethnographic exploration of Rishi’s daily business enables one to identify the points at which the popular corruption discourses of Jamshedpur may indeed find their mirror in daily life.

Defying the outlaw ‘gangster’ image of popular film, Rishi was the collections agent to a large American conglomerate and to the less astute observer may well have appeared as a thoroughly respectable business man (Ruth 1996). He was not required to undergo any test or deprivation in order to become a ‘goonda’, he had in fact been trained as an accountant. Rishi had rather vaguely drifted into his work by simply being prepared and capable of making money through the complementary use of violence and influence. He felt no pride or honour in his endeavours that I could see, and no real aversion to the forces of law and order since it was often through his own close negotiations with the state that he avoided imprisonment himself. On several occasions, admittedly usually while intoxicated, he lamented that his work was that of, to use his own term, ‘a goonda’, a fact that caused him some shame.

In recent years, Rishi had become relatively well known in the city, and was regarded as a competent businessman with a successful record of collecting debts without the frequent use of violence- something which many of his prominent clients preferred. However, Rishi was also known as having the right contacts at his disposal to enact coercion should he wish to do so, and his debt collecting services were in high demand in a setting in which there was popular perception of the corruption of state institutions and the risk of everyday violence (Volkov 2002). Coercion then, like the use of political and judicial contacts, was but one avenue through which Rishi was able to pursue profitable business opportunities.

The vast majority of Rishi’s work involved filing for court orders, calling debtors on their mobile phones, completing reports for General Electric and the leg-work of travelling about the city collecting and recording weekly payments. However, in a minority of cases, clients would refuse payment after repeated phone calls and verbal threats. In these cases the first port of call would be to establish whether the vehicle (in the case of his General Electric contract) was still at the client’s home, in which case an effort would be made

to repossess it, usually illegally, that is to say, a member of the firm would steal the vehicle in the early hours of the morning, and hold it at Rishi's office for collection by a General Electric agent. If neither the vehicle nor money were immediately forthcoming, Rishi told me that in about five per cent of cases (his figure): "We are getting a little rough with the customer".

Being acquainted with such activities, Rishi was unsurprised at Sunil Mahato's threats to Suchir, and saw these as an expected hazard of doing business in the town; neither was he surprised that the perpetrator was an elected member of parliament. Rishi, whilst a man with notable criminal contacts which he wielded against unfortunate debtors, was himself immersed in a wider dynamic of influence and coercion of which he was sporadically a victim. Chiefly, he had been the focus of several extortion demands by Jamshedpur's politically connected goondas whom he held in low moral regard. Indeed, Rishi was of the opinion that rather than precluding one's engagement with criminality, political connections were in fact a prerequisite to any successful criminal career.

Rishi's own corruption discourse reproduced a model of elite cooperation that bore a marked similarity to that voiced by the disenfranchised casual workers of the Tata Motors plant. Although a relatively low-level agent in the influence/violence/capital dynamic, Rishi's assessment of the mechanics of corruption and criminality is nonetheless a valuable commentary from 'inside' such processes, rather than a discursive appraisal from afar. Whilst discussing the threats to Suchir's life, I put it to him that the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's local elite were essentially a criminal syndicate, he agreed. I asked whether he believed this to be the case with, for example, the BJP.¹⁰ He responded:

Look, you have the tribal people here in Jamshedpur, and their goondas are the JMM, and you have the BJP, and they are the Brahman goondas, and then there are the RJD, and they are like me, they are the Yadavs. But, they are goondas too. All of them are goondas...if you are a big goonda and you have some charge against you, what can you do? You will be caught eventually, and you will go to prison. So you simply must become a politician and then get the charges dropped. That is why there are so many criminals in politics

Rishi held local financial, industrial, political and criminal infrastructures to function on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation between goondas, netas and state institutions. Rishi's observation that the state's various political parties were composed of distinct ethnic and caste groups is generally speaking a valid one. However, what became clear during the period of my association with Rishi was that goondas did not restrict their activities endogamously to their own communities, neither could they operate their businesses in the absence of inter ethnic cooperation. Rishi navigated the spheres of sporadically criminal city authority with a great deal of skill,

primarily through employing workers of varying ethnic and caste backgrounds on the basis of their differing abilities, political and criminal connections. Rishi's firm was something of a microcosm in which the logics and processes of Jharkhandi corruption, criminality and business were enacted on a daily basis.

Rishi's office staff included a number of smart young middle class Bengali women whose well-spoken phone calls connected the narrow streets of the slum with clean cut businessmen in Kolkata. He also employed a distant relation of Sunil Mahato who undertook many of the firm's negotiations with the town's Adivasi politicians, as well as two young Punjabi men who had good working relationships with Jamshedpur's mainly Sikh merchant class. In addition, he employed the Adivasi husband of a local female police officer, despite regarding him as exceptionally slow-witted. Through this relationship he was able to stay on good terms with the local police force and to be kept abreast of any impending charges to be filed against him.

Rishi kept the police officers in his neighbourhood well remunerated with small bribes of money and alcohol, which ensured that any complaint against him was highly unlikely to make it even as far as a charge sheet, let alone a court room. On one occasion when accused of illegally repossessing a car on the orders of a national bank. A FIR (First Information Report) was lodged against him with the local police who accordingly came to his home and asked for Rs30, 000 (£375). Rishi paid the amount and subsequently the case never surfaced again. On another occasion a debtor in the city made an allegation of assault against a member of his collecting team: an allegation which I would assess to be certainly well founded. After hearing the complaint, the police in the area came immediately to Rishi's home, and in my presence, believing me to speak no Hindi, asked for Rs13, 000 (£162). After the sum was paid, the case was never followed up or even filed.

In order to negotiate the 'enforcement' aspect of his partnerships, Rishi also employed a member of the Jamshedpur criminal gang headed by Akhilesh Singh, the Mafia Don (a local term) who was himself the son of the Jharkhand Police Association Secretary, Chandra Gupta Singh. Rishi's contact in the gang, Ragu, was a Bihari Rajput. In contrast to Rishi, Ragu was a man of few words, powerfully built and with an invariably deadpan expression. He would occasionally arrive at the firm's social gatherings bearing injuries which he had earned in the service of collecting General Electric payments. Rishi's business was therefore based around a series of negotiations with a wide variety of individuals and institutions of various caste, class, ethnic and work backgrounds, some of whom were obviously criminal, some of whom were probably legitimate but most of whom were both as and when necessary. This was how the misleadingly named 'Jharkhandi Mafia', Jamshedpur's business world and corrupted state institutions worked.

What Rishi and Suchir's experiences reveal is the exceptionally close, and in many cases mutually dependent relationship between politics, capital

and violence in Jharkhand. This dynamic requires a re-conceptualisation of South Asian ‘corruption’ that can explain those instances where criminality and violence relate to capitalism and the state in ways that are integral (rather than incidental) to their functioning. In the following section this model is supported counterfactually by the discussion of a less successful goonda; an individual whose forays into criminal entrepreneurship were defined by a lack of access to the resources of corrupted institutions and were, as such, markedly less profitable.

Wheeling and Dealing: Criminal Aspirations

For a number of Jamshedpur’s unemployed sons, criminal entrepreneurship presented itself as a route to the status and economic security presently lacking in the city’s industrial economy. During the period of research, younger men from traditional Tata backgrounds seemed highly receptive to the charms of what would be best termed in colloquial English as “Wheeling and Dealing”, or in Hindi as “Lena Dena”.¹¹ To provide for oneself through shrewdness and enterprise embodied a spirit of entrepreneurship that was distinct from the frustrated submission to the uncertainty of casual Tata employment.

The notion of the self determining, resourceful criminal entrepreneur in Jamshedpur was reminiscent of the wily, loveable gangster in Bollywood films; fictional folk heroes such as Sanjay Dutt’s ‘Munna Bhai’ from the immensely popular film franchise of the same name and his side kick, ‘Circuit’, played by Arshad Warsi. Such characterisations were part of a modern mythic arena of film, from which Jamshedpur’s aspiring badmarsh¹² drew their archetypes of success, daring, charisma and an undeniable aesthetic sensibility (Osella and Osella 2004:224). Several unemployed Munna Bhai in Jamshedpur had hopes that my personal connections with the West could facilitate their criminal scams. Chief among these individuals was 21 year old ‘Lucky’.

Lucky was the jobless son of a former Tata Tinsplate Co. employee. Being unemployed, he was financially supported by his father’s early retirement settlement. For Lucky, criminal entrepreneurship was one of the short-term means through which he endeavoured to attain some degree of financial security and status. Unlike Rishi, Lucky embodied the Munna Bhai aesthetic, opting to remain clean shaven and drawing his fashion cues from Bollywood music videos. With his father’s money, excellent English and links to his brother resident in London, Lucky was able to play the badmarsh-about-town rather well, and was part of a crowd of heavy drinking young Punjabi men that congregated each evening at the end of my street. Lucky was always smartly dressed in the latest city fashions (white trainers, tight bleached jeans and T shirts with English slogans), and would spend most of his time drinking outside a nearby liquor store, or touring about the city on the silver Enfield motorcycle which was his pride and joy.

Lucky was fairly typical of an early retirement package son; although he

probably had a couple more years of idle roaming to look forward to, this could not feasibly last for ever. Eventually either his father's funds or patience would be exhausted; at which time Lucky's probability of securing well paid employment did not appear high, since he lacked any discernible skills and possessed only a school leaving certificate. Lucky's lack of employment furthermore made his likelihood of a good marriage in the near future very slim.

However, impending doom aside, for the time being, Lucky was a man of leisure who's life revolved around socializing with a close knit group of friends and staying far from the closely applied and diplomatic work ethic of Rishi Yadav's office. A typical day would be for Lucky to rise at a scandalously late hour, watch TV, eat lunch and then ride his bike to the park with a friend. There, he would lust after girls for several hours until it was dark enough to drink beer in the street with companions. This would continue until ten or eleven at night, from where the gang would ride to some distant part of the city to eat snacks in a cheap eatery and vainly attempt to buy more alcohol. On many evenings, these roaming parties would end in one or several of the group becoming drunk to the point of vomiting in the street. Perhaps not surprisingly there was a ubiquity of minor motorcycle accidents at Lucky's social gatherings.

When not drinking or riding his bike, Lucky was constantly engaged in some imagined scam or another; always having a plan in the pipe line that never quite came to fruition, and which quite typically of such entrepreneurs relied heavily on his forging personal relations with individuals of particular capacities or potentials (Pesmen 2000). One evening in summer 2006 Lucky asked that I meet him in a bar to discuss a 'personal problem'. Apparently his elder brother had been living illegally in London for the past 6 months, having overstayed his tourist visa whilst working in his uncle's convenience store. Lucky's suggestion was that I locate an English woman who would be prepared marry his brother in return for a cash consideration. He believed this to be a quick route to UK citizenship.

Lucky and his father offered me Rs1 Lakh (approximately £1,250) to find a willing spouse. They advised that I could pay the bride's fee from my own payment, and that its amount would be at my discretion. Lucky's proposal also had a more decidedly entrepreneurial edge; he went on to outline a long term business plan whereby his family and I could repeat the scam at regular intervals, flooding London with mainly Punjabi men from Jamshedpur. I learnt that Lucky's father had been working on this plan almost since our first introduction. Lucky himself claimed to already have approached around a dozen local men who were found willing to emigrate to the UK, where to my horror they had been told that I would find women to marry them. Although quite evidently a less than sincere form of modern global marriage (Lucky ventured that his suitors would divorce their brides in a matter of months after satisfying the UK Home Office), Lucky's marriage scam is nonetheless a fascinating inversion of what has been termed the 'global hypergamy' of cross-

border marriage (Constable 2005). The received wisdom of global hypergamy dictates that brides move from the impoverished regions of the global south to join grooms in the affluent global north. In this understanding, women seek the promises of future prosperity by cleaving to men in permanent bonds of marriage (ibid; Tadiar 2003). For Lucky's would-be émigrés, this dynamic is inverted, with southern men seeking to exploit temporary, legal relationships with northern women as a means to realise ambitions.

Ethical quandaries aside,¹³ the plan was quite evidently doomed to failure, lacking anything like a realistic capital investment, and no means at all of negotiating with the more violent local entrepreneurs who would almost certainly have demanded some if not all of the business for themselves. In addition to his foreign marriage scam, during the same year Lucky also went on to begin a business relationship with a corrupt member of the Ranchi civil service who pledged to help him procure fake Indian passports for members of Jamshedpur's criminal underworld; presumably should they have the need for swift emigration themselves. The scheme had little success, and Lucky's relationship with his partner was ultimately severed over a financial dispute; a dispute in which Lucky was unlikely to emerge the victor, lacking as he did the capital to invest in the use of violence.

Lucky's numerous schemes, scams and plans were attempts to enter into the ongoing series of financial and political negotiations which may be termed 'Jharkhandi organised crime', a practice which has the capacity to engender economic stability in its participants where for Lucky Tata employment had failed to do so. However, in his enterprises Lucky had missed one important part of the criminal success equation, which holds true as much for Jamshedpur's Goondas as Vadim Volkov's Violent Entrepreneurs in the former USSR (Volkov 2002). The most successful entrepreneurs, like Rishi Yadav and Siby Soren were those that could invest legitimate influence, significant capital and unassailable violence into their endeavours. Lucky had none of these resources in abundance, and was perhaps rather lead astray by the romanticised Munna Bhai portrayal.

In the cinematic portrayal of organised crime one is able to negotiate a dangerous world that is yet still ripe with entrepreneurial potential (Ruth 1996). Part of the reason why this portrayal is so appealing to the 'Luckys' of the world is that it implies success from peculiarly personalised investments. If one is dangerous, brave, charming and resourceful, then in the Munna Bhai universe success is sure to follow; an understanding routinely reproduced by respondents in studies of low level criminal gang culture (Bourgeois 2003; Whyte 1993). Lucky's negotiations with specialists such as his civil service contact reveal his recognition of the centrality of institutional politicking to entrepreneurial success; echoing Yurchak's discussion of such entrepreneurs as valves which operate between both bureaucratic and highly personalised public spheres (Yurchak 2002). However, Lucky's experience broke with that of more successful entrepreneurs in his inevitable over reliance on charismatic investments. Until the much longed for ticket to London did arrive, Lucky

continued to fruitlessly pursue his Lena Dena fantasies while the city's real Goondas went about their business with a more highly attuned political sensibility, and quite possibly less of an eye for popular fashion.

Conclusion

What Rishi and Lucky's corresponding successes and failures reveal is the ways in which Jharkhandi criminality, business and corruption may work as interdependent forms of capital accumulation, rather than as distinct social phenomenon. This insight, whilst seldom articulated in South Asian research, is nonetheless not a particularly new one. Across different ethnographic contexts, understandings of criminality and state corruption routinely benefit from a close analytic focus on the ways in which such practices not only intersect, but serve the interests of capitalism; particularly, it must be said, in contexts of economic liberalisation (Arlacchi 1983, 1986; Gambetta 1993; Handelman 1994; Herzfeld 2009; Kang 2002; Varese 2005; Volkov 2002; Yurchak 2002). My intention here then is quite simply to suggest that these dynamics are replicated in the still-liberalizing industrial zones of India, where corruption and criminality are not only mutually reinforcing, but play a central role in consolidating the interests of capitalism, be it though the everyday violence of debt collection or the suppression of collective action in industry.

Quite evidently, the 'Wild West' model of impetuous regional violence is both a misleading and prejudicial one, which I hope to have deconstructed through a discussion of applied violence and corrupt institutional negotiation. In national media discourses of the Wild West model, Jharkhandi criminality is inaccurately constructed as a regressive provincial force that is distinct from, rather than inculcated within national politics and neo-liberal capitalism (Kang 2002). Despite the evocative nature of their media portrayals, provincial goondas are not modern-day Billy the Kids, executing senseless violence in the dusty towns of the Jharkhandi frontier; they are rather violent entrepreneurs, whose success relies upon their close relationships with corrupted institutional authority. The nature of these relationships is dyadic, which is to say, at pivotal moments in the city's recent history, Jamshedpur's goondas have proven themselves to be key agents in the progression of neo-liberal economic change. What makes this context of particular analytic interest is the extent to which local discourses identify the political and economic negotiations that facilitate this 'corruption'.

Situated against a pervasive public assumption of criminalised elite mutual aid, I argue that the ethnography of Rishi Yadav's office suggests there to be a remarkable degree of insight and political consciousness on the part of Jharkhandi corruption discourses. Discourses of elite immorality and violence in Jamshedpur are not metaphorical commentaries on the contradictions and inequalities of capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Scheper Hughes 2000), they are not localised and personalised appraisals of conveniently visible individuals (Das 2001; Gupta 1995), neither are they

hegemonic assumptions that serve the interests of those to whom they are directed (Parry 2000). Rather they are incisive and often accurate appraisals of the operation of capitalism and state politics

Jharkhandi corruption discourses are born from a high level of institutional violence and a rapidly changing economic and industrial environment. The corruption discourses that this context inspires are directed towards the ways in which mutually constitutive forms of power are inculcated in the functioning of a liberalised industrial economy. These commentaries eschew subjective metaphors and instead speak directly to actual moments of corruption, violence and economic change. The nature of these discourses is political (in the more precise sense of the term), in that they are directed towards the collective negotiations that facilitate corruption and criminality, rather than the individual moralities that pertain to them. This focus on the negotiations of corruption serves an important function vis-à-vis the Jungle Raj model, in so much as that it has the capacity to de-provincialise regional violence; relating the coercion and criminality of Jharkhandi goondas to the ostensibly legitimate authority of central government and global industrial conglomerates.

Whilst the everyday frustrations of bureaucratic corruption may well impact directly on the lives of millions of Indians; giving rise to an accelerating momentum of public crisis, in Jamshedpur, 'corruption' refers to something altogether more systemic and yet still more tangible. The corruption in question is the mutually beneficial relationship between political influence, violence and industrial capital in a company town economy; illuminated, rather than obscured by popular discourses.

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Notes

¹ 'Broken vow led to killing', *The Telegraph* (2007). Jamshedpur edition.

² Hindi idiom for 'sycophant'. Literally: 'spoon'.

³ Sections of this official statement initially appeared in several English language daily newspapers in the region. At the time of writing, the full version of the statement is also available at the following CPI (Maoist) affiliated website:

www.resistanceindia.wordpress.com (posted April 9, 2007; accessed most recently May 31, 2010).

⁴ 'India's Wild West', *Times of India* (2007).

⁵ Popular Indian idiom for 'gangster'. Literally: 'thug' or 'hooligan'

⁶ Jharkhand's formation follows 40 years of petitioning from tribal interest groups, who have historically claimed the southern areas of Bihar to be a homeland for the autochthonous peoples of the region; mainly those from the Ho, Munda, Santal and Oraon Adivasi communities. However, whilst the state has a tribal population of 26.3%, there is a pronounced lack of integration between the state's urban industrial region's and poorer rural communities. The Census of India, 2001, records an official city population of 1,104,713: of that number, barely 12% are members of scheduled tribes. For discussions of the Jharkhand movement see Corbridge (1988, 2000, 2002); Devalle (1992); Weiner (1978)

⁷ Statement On Industrial Policy, Government of India, Ministry of Industry, New Delhi, July 24, 1991: 7, 5.

⁸ *The Telegraph* (2003), India, quotes a 'CBI official': "Shukla and Sahu were the key figures and their arrests would have enabled us to track down the main conspirators involved in the murder case. But so far, there has been no trace of either Shukla or Sahu. We fear that they might have been killed by the conspirators for obvious reasons."

⁹ The Industrial Disputes Act (1947) makes no stipulation that there be a sole bargaining agent on a given shopfloor. Rather, the act legislates that any group of workers may, through the agency of five elected representatives, engage in collective bargaining with their employer. Importantly, there is no requirement for these representatives to be formally registered through the procedure described in Section two of the Trade Unions Act (1926). Legislatively therefore, Tata is both able and obliged to negotiate with an unspecified number of worker organisations, even those that are not officially registered as unions. However, existing convention and the pervasive influence of political patronage make all of Jamshedpur's Tata industries effective closed shops. The convention in the event of their being a multiplicity of rival unions on a shop floor is for industry to follow the Code of Discipline agreed at the 16th session of the Indian Labour Conference (May 1958). The Code of Discipline privileges the recognition of officially registered unions, and sets out guidelines for arbitrating the legitimacy of two such organisations in the workplace. Whilst the Code of Discipline has no legislative weight to speak of, the ubiquity of its use make its model of sole trade union recognition the norm in states not already covered by the more rigid Industrial Relations Bill (1978).

¹⁰ Bharatiya Janata Party. A conservative national political party, closely aligned to the Hindu Nationalist movement.

¹¹ Popular Hindi idiom for 'negotiation'. Literally: 'Give and Take'

¹² Hindi idiom for 'rascal'. In colloquial UK English, perhaps 'wideboy.'

¹³ Studies of 'street' cultures (Bourgeois 2003) have frequently stressed the cultural edifices surrounding criminality. In these contexts, criminality is often culturally inaccessible to the researcher, perhaps minimizing a very particular form of ethical dilemma, which is the extent to which one's interlocutors expect and desire one's business partnership. In Jamshedpur however, the criminality in question pertained to no particular culture, and was in fact a form of reasonably rational entrepreneurship. As such, many of my contacts

saw no reason why I should not myself engage in their forms of business, and viewed my presence as an as yet untapped source of capital accumulation. Towards the very end of fieldwork I was surprised to discover that several of Rishi's employees had believed me to be a 'business man' myself, engaged in a long term working relationship with Rishi. My close research participants however were aware of my position as a researcher, and after some time, even of my emerging political perspective on their practice. Rishi and I would often discuss the moral quandaries surrounding his business; discussions that he entered into with candour and critical self evaluation. For wider discussions on the ethical dilemmas of research on violence and criminality, see Bourgois (2003) and Gilson (2002).

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