

Half Dust, Half Deity — Women and Labour:

Case Studies of Female Migrant Construction Workers from Varamkheda

Village, Dahod, Gujarat

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Abstract

This paper argues that women's relation with patriarchy takes shape through their perception and experience of labour, owing to the all-encompassing nature of labour in villages where the incidence of migration is high. The dynamics of leisure, love, hope, and a range of other factors shape this perception and experience of labour, which become visible as women move through successive stages of life. In this work, these interrelated factors are explored through case studies of five women at different stages of their lives. Perception of labour evolves as a girl grows into adolescence and eventually gets married. In childhood, she holds hopes and wishes that momentarily defy her circumstances. In adolescence, she gradually revises this sense of possibility and begins to recognise the systems around her while learning to position herself within them. As a married woman, she settles more firmly within patriarchal household arrangements, where individual hope tied to familial roles and small securities appears immediately attainable. She negotiates necessity within the intertwined constraints of patriarchal family structures and an exploitative labour market, where individual hope persists even as possibilities of collective hope remain elusive. Through these shifting experiences of labour — central to everyday survival yet deeply shaped by social relations — women inhabit a condition marked by endurance, negotiation and the persistent search for dignity within constraint.

Keywords: Women's experience, Labour, Perception of Work, Hope, Life-cycle transitions

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Introduction

The fieldwork was carried out in two *faliyas* (a tribal hamlet) of a village called Brahmkheda, colloquially known as Varamkheda, in Dahod district of Gujarat. It is about 8–10 km away from Dahod city and has marginally easier access to the semi-urban part of Dahod. Seventy-four point three two per cent of the population in Dahod are Scheduled Tribes (ST) belonging to the Bhil community with 46.97 per cent of the population participating in the workforce (Dohad District Census Handbook 2011). The first faliya is referred to as Parmar Faliya owing to the concentration of Parmar sub-caste. For the same reason, the other one is called Bariya Faliya, both are a part of a larger faliya called Dungra Faliya, which houses in total about 11–12 faliyas.

The author conducted a basic survey on household and migration in 37 households, out of which 19 are from Parmar Faliya and 18 from Bariya Faliya. Twenty-eight out of the 37 surveyed households have active migrants who are the primary breadwinners of the households. Sources of household income are largely migrant work, agricultural yield apart from the one household among the 28 where a small provisions store yields some income. Thirty-one of the households have women who are engaged in paid work as migrant construction workers.

In my search for case studies, which the author had to sieve out of the basic survey responses, there were no overt responses of women indicating collectivisation against exploitative practices in the labour market and households. So, in spite of that, women do make marginal ruptures. Responses of these women to exploitative practices are often grey,

neither black nor white. They do not accept or deny, but ‘negotiate’ indomitable patriarchy through agency-enhancing choices (Kabeer 2001). In matters that demand structural change, women tend to rely on individual hope — a contingent outcome shaped by their lived experiences of labour, particularly under conditions of super-exploitation and migration. So, their responses to patriarchy are shaped by their perceptions and experience of labour through individual hope, which evolves in two ways: life-cycle transitions and inter-generationally. This study confines itself to life-cycle transitions, analysed through five case studies accompanied by the author’s commentary. These are organised into three sections under the subheading of ‘Case Studies’, grouped by the women’s proximity in age and the qualitative similarity of their perceptions of labour.

Literature Review

Literature review was underway as the author ventured into fieldwork. It dealt with literature on the themes of: ‘collectivisation of women in the context of work’, ‘collective and individual hope’, ‘perception of work’ for building a conceptual understanding. The format of literature reviewed ranged from books to research articles. Starting with canonical Marxist works on labour mobilisation and labour as an experience, which included Karl Marx’s *The Capital* (1867), *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1959). They were beneficial to this study in that they deal with the fundamentals.

Further, literature grounded in South Asian contexts and dealing with women was explored, it included Naila Kabeer’s *Discussing Women’s Empowerment-Theory and Practice* and another paper in this area (Kabeer, Naila, Kirsty Milward, and Ratna Sudarshan 2013), Devaki Jain’s *Women’s Quest for Power*, Martha Nussbaum’s *Women and Human*

Development: The Capabilities Approach, and Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*.

Kabeer (2001) deals with what is constitutive of 'empowerment', arguing for contextualising choices of women and thus their self-found agency instead of an outsider, leading to insensitivity to intersectional identities and lived realities. Martha Nussbaum (2000) argues conversely that given the inescapability of her being an outsider, her perspective as an outsider offers her a standpoint allowing to look at things differently, uncovering the internalised (by the women whose choices are being studied) undisclosed 'regularities'. These accounts have a developmental tone to them and understandably so; however, this discourse gains a distinct vigour with 'Standpoint Feminism', which is an unavoidable strand of thought that deals with women's experience intersectionally, as essentially critical narratives questioning mainstream theorisation of various concepts. This study, accounts for women's experience of labour as a significant determinant of their responses to patriarchy through the life-cycle transitions of hope. The author consciously brings in an explicitly critical stance that gives a taste of what it means to be a part of a community that has been historically oppressed and question the dominant end of oppression, thus trying to integrate an explicitly political language unlike the hitherto mentioned readings that are marginally plain in that they do not contest as such. Thus, Standpoint Feminism, to account for which Patricia Hill Collins (1990) not just understands and analyses but explicitly contests. Further, Collins's work is of significant importance in the author's scepticism on the homogeneity of 'women' as a category. This has sizeable implications on the positionality of the researcher, which is dealt with in greater detail in the Methodology section.

Apart from that, Devaki Jain (1980) provides particular insights into how case studies of women's collectives are to be understood. This could have been a wonderful resource had Varamkheda had any traces of women's collectives, which was not the case and so, Jain's work offered only marginal help with regard to how case studies can be handled.

Further, there is extensive literature on how the theme of hope can be dealt with and it happens to traverse into philosophy and theology, dealing with which requires extensive experience, time and resources, which at the given point, the author could not afford. Hence, certain selective readings have been reviewed; they are listed as follows: As Bloch (1954) theorises, hope is not mere optimism but a forward-directed consciousness — an awareness of the not-yet-become. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) where Kant positions hope as a moral prerogative was instrumental in understanding the theoretical utility Bloch's distinctive interpretation that hope arises subjectively. In this study, hope is seen to be emerging less as moral optimism and more as a survival strategy within structural precarity. Micha Danziger (2020) aided in how Kantian hope can be interpreted empirically.

Other than that, some preliminary work on migrant construction workers from Gujarat by Centre for Labour Research and Action (CLRA) (Behavioural Science Centre and Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action 2009) was instrumental in triangulating the accounts of the villagers regarding the nature and load of work at their migration destination.

The rationale behind this study is grounded in the existing literature in feminist standpoint theory, which identifies women's experiences as a significant subject of study but in the end such identification is typically seen to be policy or enriching existing feminist theory. Alternately, this study links it to patriarchy reproducing itself using women's labour market experiences by generating individual hope in the absence of collective action.

Methodology

The study uses semi-structured interviews combined with a life-history approach. However, to identify potential case-study participants, a primary survey to identify households with migrant workers and determine who was willing to participate in interviews was conducted. The survey covered 39 households across two faliyas. The fieldwork was

conducted during June–July 2025 across 30 days. Due to unfamiliarity with the local language of Gujarati, the author interacted with the interviewees in Hindi. While the interviewees understood with ease, their response was in a mix of Hindi and Gujarati, partial assistance with translation in field was available apart from which notes of key interactions were later translated with local assistance. For case studies, the interviews were recorded and selected parts were transcribed using assistance from local individuals who were willing to help. Despite these efforts, some gaps in linguistic interpretation and understanding inevitably remain. So, the researcher acknowledges her position as external to the village community, nevertheless trying to capture the accounts of the female construction workers in their own right. In that regard, literature on feminist methodology, especially standpoint feminism such as the essay ‘Is there a Feminist Method?’ by Sandra Harding (Harding 1987) and the book *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins (Collins 1990) were of great utility. Harding’s essay questions the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched and the possibility of a ‘feminist’ research, which aims to close such a gap. She says that while feminist research consistently yearns to reduce the gap, it is prudent for one to be aware of the irresolvable hierarchy inherent in empirical work. This makes the research reflexive in lieu of the possibility of objectivity. So, when the researcher has delineated what is meant by ‘self’ and the ‘other’ among the two parties in research, there are additional questions to be dealt with about the overlap and gap between these entities. Patricia Hill Collins’s work helped significantly in ascertaining the extent to which the researcher identifies and associates with the researched. That is, the particular and unique challenges that women face in their web of intersectionalities make ‘women’ as a category extremely diverse. This holds an inherent richness to what a researcher can chance upon in empirical engagement; it also brings along challenges of the possibility of appropriation through language and voice. These key aspects regarding the incessant inequality of the researcher and the researched, place the

researcher on a pedestal over and marginally above the researched. Therefore, the researcher identified case studies with a life history approach through in-depth interviews to be a viable option to negotiate with this challenge while being mindful of its invincibility.

For each of the five case studies, about 5–6 interviews, 2–4 of them being in-depth, were conducted. These interviews were conducted over a span of 15 days. In almost all the cases, each person constituting case study engaged in 2–3 interviews on consecutive days, followed by some gap and repetition of the same about once or twice.

The wording ‘The story of so and so’ in each case study reflects the effort to foreground the women’s narratives. These are fundamentally stories, irrespective of the methodological, academic particularities within which such narratives are presented.

Observations and Discussion

In the households of Varamkheda, women sustain family life through a combination of reproductive, domestic and economic labour. Reproductive and social labour are culturally associated with women, and they therefore possess ‘reasons to value’ these forms of work. In this context, women’s participation in migrant construction work reflects compulsion rather than empowerment. It is labour performed out of necessity rather than choice — what Marx describes as labour reduced to the mere activity of survival, stripped of its creative human essence. Many women therefore invest meaning in household labour, which they perceive as more valuable than the exhausting work at construction sites. Though the larger part of her day as a migrant construction worker is consumed in crude labour, she has no ‘reasons to value’ it. She is therefore alienated not only from labour as a realisation of human potential but also from the traditional domestic role she identifies with.

This creates a link between different forms of labour and kinds of hope. What may simply be described as an aspiration for a better tomorrow becomes ‘hope’ precisely because

it cannot easily be acted upon. Work in the household sphere tends to foster individual hope, for there is no question of collectivisation. Construction work, being shared and visible, momentarily evokes the possibility of collective hope. This is because any effective negotiation at work with the contractor or any authority for that matter cannot be taken up by an individual woman. In this impersonal labour market, women rarely interact directly with the *muqaddam* (headman), reinforcing their subordinate position within the construction hierarchy. This is owing to her inferior position, a perception she and those around her have grown up with.

This momentary sense of collective hope rarely translates into action. The difficulty is evident in the ongoing efforts to collectivise migrant women workers, which have largely proved to be an uphill task. While there are multifarious efforts put into legal and socio-economic redressal for issues faced by migrant workers, the conundrum this poses is far reaching. Collectivising migrant workers is a challenge in itself, as also asserted by existing work and literature in this regard.³ Adding to it, the determinant logic in this sphere is that of contingency, that is, conflicts arise only when a worker's family is starving, or a worker dies. Rather than taking up the burden of collectivisation at the workplace, many women seek security within the patriarchal family itself, often through motherhood and particularly the birth of sons. She has all the 'reasons to value' it. She is the entitled benefactor of marginal leisure she would enjoy say, as a mother-in-law. However, these marginal benefits weigh higher than a larger shift in relations of economic exchange. Having to migrate poses her with a strictly exclusive choice between gains in the household and burden of collectivised resistance.

In contrast, organisations such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) partially resolve this dilemma. Because domestic relations shape women's participation in SHGs, collectivisation does not appear as a direct challenge to household roles. How a similar result may be

achieved for a migrant woman labourer is a conundrum. Collectivisation in such a context is not possible in terms of production organisation as a women-exclusive construction organisation is implausible. So, collectivisation with the teleological end of collective action is the last resort for inculcation of collective hope. With increasing impediments present for collective action to take place, collective hope endures a slow death and remains an elusive idea in the wake of sporadic efforts by civil society organisations that occasionally intervene. In that way, household bound individual hope and labour market elusive collective hope remain responses that sustain rather than subvert the existing order. So, women resort to individual hope in spheres of both the sorts, household and labour market, in their quest within the double constraints of patriarchy and labour market exploitation.

When collective structural change appears unattainable, Marxian discourse shifts from class-based action towards individual hope. Which Ernst Bloch writes as, 'Only an alliance between the dreaming and the doing, between the I and the We, keeps hope concrete'. Realisation of individual hope may require collective resolution/action, precisely making it less likely, relegating it to the status of hope. The larger implication this has with respect to labour mobilisation, especially among women, is that subverting exploitative systems requires concerted intervention in terms of collectivisation, for an innate individual consciousness transcending material provisions eventually dies down into individual hope in lieu of collective hope or action. This makes any logical exercise of projecting a logical evolution of systems of economic production with reducing level of exploitation through increasing consciousness. So, the orthodox Marxist view of an impending socialist future is indeed a farfetched ideal. The following case studies ground these conceptual concerns in lived realities. Each woman's narrative reveals how the negotiations with patriarchy are mediated through labour, and how hope — individual rather than collective — takes form in the rhythm of her everyday work. For one instance, young girls in the village hope to engage

only in domestic labour after marriage. For them, this does not simply mean avoiding migration but achieving a more balanced labour–leisure equation,⁴ which persists in relation to a myriad other significant events in their lives, marriage becomes one possible moment through which they attempt to reposition themselves within the labour–leisure balance that they seek. Realisation of this hope is often possible only by luck and is extremely sporadic. If the groom her marriage is arranged with happens to be able enough to become the *muqaddam*, she'd have a better life. Once migrants reach their destination, they are caught up in the realm of 'total work'.⁵ Individual hope often takes the form of projecting aspirations into another time or place — most often life after marriage. This individual yearning may be understood as 'hope' precisely because such a balanced labour–leisure equation is a sporadic possibility. She abstains from acting upon her wishes due to self and other-imposed norms. The latter is made possible by an invincible innovation in production arrangements, the SHGs. This is because an SHG does more than allow women to leave the private sphere and enter the public. It familiarises the public with the private. The spatial and ontological shift allows the public to adapt to the private rather than dissociate from it. A major limitation of such approaches to women and development is that they offer little for sectors like construction, where work requires physical presence at distant sites and therefore compels migration. Such a model is not possible in the construction sector or any other form of work where labour and leisure are not just distinct experiences but also distinct spaces.

We now proceed to deal with empirical manifestations of the discussion so far and know of individual hope as it evolves through different stages of life through life-cycle transitions by exploring case studies that are situated in the distinct space of home seeped in patriarchy and simultaneously shaped by the domain of 'total work'.

Case Studies

Case studies 1 and 2: Labour as self-expression or something to fear? — The stories of Kamla and Rekha

Kamla, a little nine-year-old girl, among all the school-going children, stood out. She was the only one who confidently said, 'I want to become a doctor' when asked in front of all the children in the faliya (a tribal hamlet). The others giggled with ridicule, repeatedly whispering the word '*Kadia*'.⁶ One could sense that she was earnest and actually meant what she said. She did not commit the otherwise obvious activity of giggling, ridiculing and shying away. Kamla's exceptionality defies the popular image of women as innately repressed and yearning to transcend their condition. The very spirit of imagining beyond one's means and circumstances is not feasible. It marks what Kabeer (2001) calls coming out of '*Doxa*'.⁷ So, perhaps girls do not start with a doxa, rather it is developed and then people have to put concerted effort to come out of it at a later stage.

Her ambition of becoming a doctor points to the fact that she is a minority in the group who view labour as a potential form of self-expression. She 'chooses to choose' her 'dream work', not confirming to the simplistic dichotomy between labour and leisure, also having not yet assume the inevitability of her position in a patriarchal family. The dichotomy usually takes hold once one begins engaging in crude labour, and that is also approximately the same time when marriage becomes her foreseeable future. Only the younger lot from who the first two case studies are drawn from are characterised by not having a decisive dichotomy. Otherwise, migrant construction workers experience a stark separation between labour and leisure. They are both cast into zones where necessity and freedom determine the logic of production.

Children are situated in a context where crude physical labour pervades their everyday lives. At least one person in the household is a migrant worker in almost all the households in the faliya. Often, few children accompany their parents to construction sites in cities. They are distantly, yet exceedingly closely aware of what it means to be a 'labourer'. Their perception of 'labour' by itself is not as gruesome as they see themselves as potential outliers. They are aspiring to grow out of this necessity of being migrant construction workers. So, individual hope is still actionable. They retain and occasionally explicitly present their 'dream work'. This is what goes behind the '*Acha lagta hai*'! (I like it!), the simplistic reply Kamla gave when asked why she wants to become a doctor. Actionable aspirations lead to them dreams having colours other than that of cement and bricks.

These bright, distinct colours gradually fade into the duller shades of blackboards and notebooks. Every other high school girl wants to become a teacher. They can see themselves in place of their favourite teacher, not having to migrate. This is a different perception, one that is not as free as the aspirational approach of those who are not near adolescence. Rather, it is governed by a sense of fear among the young adolescents who are on the brink of turning to migration. Their reality troubles them more palpably. As Rekha, in another case study, said '*Kaam nahi karna, mujhe padhna bahut acha lagta hai*' (I do not want to work, I like studying a lot). Her nose and cheeks flushed with a despair-pink hue, as she confessed that. She probably would have broken down upon any further probe. Rekha is in 10th grade, handles household work when her parents are out for work. They come back to sow and reap harvest during the monsoon and about four months later respectively apart from the annual Holi.⁸ The author could not have mapped the responses of these women towards patriarchy if not for her meeting Rekha. She opened a new window of thought in her reply to the author asking about nature of the work her parents are involved in, which she would inevitably have to take up, sooner or later. Her reply to that question encapsulates the entire theoretical

framework of ‘consciousness’, including any modifiers like ‘class’ that one might want to add.

‘Auraton ko apni takleef ka ehsaas dilana chahiye, kaise wo apna haq maang sakti hai.’

(Interview, Rekha, Varamkheda, 18 June 2025)

(Women should be made to realise their suffering, and how she can ask for her right.)

This subtlety lies in distinguishing ‘*ehsaas*’ from ‘*mehsus*’, which is that despite women living through all the pain every day and feeling it (*mehsus*), them understanding the dynamics of the system that persists on their invisible labour, is precisely ‘*ehsaas*’. This is the exact translation of the Aristotelian ‘perception’ and ‘conception’.

For Rekha, teaching is not only a less exploitative profession but an alternative that is less exploitative in labour hours and wage. It allows proximity and suitability in handling household chores. The mention of teaching profession as preferred form of labour, it is not so much a form of free expression, but a helpless alternative to her feared reality of ‘*dammer*’ work.⁹ She now treads the path of acceptance of gendered division of labour within and out of the household, she has internalised that she is the one who has to handle the household chores, which she sees her teachers doing on a regular basis. In this public profession of a teacher, she finds a personal familiarity and certitude of some reasonable leisure in its own right; this goes back to the reason why SHG as a form of organisation of work realistically bridges the public–private distinction in work. Her range of ‘possibility’ and ‘practicality’ has shrunk.

Case study 3: Marriage as the recourse — The story of Kanku

Kanku has studied till 10th class and dropped out. *‘Papa ko ghar chalane mein madad karne ke liye’* (In order to help Papa with running the household). This implies that she

recurrently poses the question, 'Why am I to engage in this dreadful work?' to herself every time she engages in it; she has not settled into her reality of being a migrant construction worker. This is also evident when she said, '*Bachpan mein bahut achcha tha, sirf ghar kaam karo aur baith jao. Abhi pura din kaam karate hain*' (In childhood it used to feel so good, just do household work and rest. Now we have to work all day). She has not yet forgotten her life before. Kanku is at the threshold of getting married and associates it with a balanced labour–leisure equation, reinforcing a patriarchal family positioned against an exploitative labour market. Moreover, her individual hope testifies proximity to her aspiration. Kanku's sister has married a muqaddam and so does not have to work in the labour market; she confines herself to household, in the labour of love. Kanku sees that as a palpable possibility but knows that that case is an aberration. Her experience of engaging in labour characterised by super-exploitation and migration pushes her to the end of aspiring a way out. Yet, it simultaneously makes it impossible to act upon her aspirations. If acted upon collectively, the individual aspiration for a balanced labour–leisure equation could yield tangible outcomes. In the absence of collective action, this aspiration reduces to individual hope within the patriarchal possibility. Kanku thus wishes for a husband who can spare her from migrating as a construction worker. This testifies the initial proposition of women's perception and experience of labour determining their response to patriarchy through individual hope.

This phenomenon is exceedingly relevant to women owing to the gendered labour market they participate in.¹⁰ If it were a man, he could have strategized his workplace engagement in such a way that he becomes a muqaddam himself. A woman certainly cannot do that and sees marriage as a way out.

The absence of collectivisation leads her to resort to individual hope, which pushes her further towards marriage as a prudent choice despite her having her share of discrepancies with it. These discrepancies are reflected only when someone probes, because 'hope' as such

being un-actionable is not expressed. When the author asked Kanku and her cousin Sumi if they actually wished to opt for an arranged marriage and move out of their homes, they refuted saying '*Bahut ajeeb lagta hai*' (It feels very odd). Her wanting to get a better labour–leisure balance pushes her closer to accepting patriarchal means, which in this case is marriage.

Case study 4 and 5: Settling in the home — The stories of Ramilaben and Raniben

Ramilaben is married and has three kids, two sons and a daughter. She is an active migrant. She goes to work only during her children's summer vacation. At migration destinations she engages in dammer work along with her husband. When asked about the work, she explains that it is extremely exhausting, with no such scorn or distaste as Kanku did, and mentions that since her husband earns enough for the family, she can afford to stay back for a while. She certainly has a better labour–leisure balance. She works in their agricultural field, kitchen and allied activities, and gets relatively more leisure time. When the author asked her about her life before marriage, she had no particular reminiscent tone. Probably she had lesser reasons to remember and value it than Kanku. Ramilaben seemed to the author as the most contented woman she spoke to for she is relatively well-off than other women in the faliya. Ramilaben does not insist on her daughter's participation in household chores. When asked if her daughter Jharnika helps her in household chores, she said with a smile, '*Woh thodi der mere saath baithti hai, phir khelne nikal jati hai*' (She sits with me for a while, then goes out to play). She has nothing significant to hope for as she sees herself in a relatively better position. If this is the case, then doubts on the rationale behind this case study is bound to arise. In order to clarify that, I will elaborate on the last case study.

The last case study is that of Raniben. She has three sons. Her household is one of the poorest in the faliya. Her situation is almost a counterpart to Ramilaben's. She has to borrow grain, oil and other everyday essentials either from her maternal home or from her in-laws in the same neighbourhood. She is deprived of any help in household chores as she does not have a daughter. She compulsorily has to work as a migrant worker, but does not complain regarding that, she calls it her 'fate'. Despite repeatedly posing the same question to her, she did not have any opinions regarding her work or workplace. On the other hand, she had extensive opinions on her household work. She is stuck in a double bind. One compulsion pushes her into her household and gives her 'reasons to value' this arrangement, and the other pushes her to migrate and go away from home. But at the migration destination, in the face of an absence of any collective hope/action, all she does there is expend labour. She has no reasons to remember/remorse/resist her experience as a migrant construction worker. But she does have such reasons in matters of the household and holds individual hope.

Her situations highlight the contrasting dynamics that lead to her indifference towards experience in the labour market, turning her to deal with patriarchy at home. Raniben said that she had always hoped for a daughter who could help her in the household chores. She has 'reasons to value' and looks for respite only in the household. Her partaking in the patriarchal regularity of wanting a daughter to ease household chores reflects the lack of any possible collective hope/action at the workplace to ease exploitation. This is clearly not the case with Ramilaben. Though this is not to establish an unflinching distinction between stay-at-home and migrating women, but to say that distinct workplace practices have a significant impact on how women negotiate their relationship with patriarchy.

Conclusion

The study, grounded in the lived experiences of women in Varamkheda, thus examines the life-cycle transitions of individual hope. It demonstrates that the super-exploitative labour market makes collective action impossible and collective hope elusive despite labour market conditions at the destination of migration distorting the labour–leisure equation of these women. This leads to the women confirming to patriarchal households where the question of collectivisation is irrelevant. Thus, in both the household and the labour market these women are subjected to individual hope and so make both the labour market through super exploitation and patriarchy through gendered household labour sustain rather than subvert existing order. Thus, through this, Varamkheda’s women indeed remain what Lord Byron articulates quiet poetically, albeit in a largely different theme.

‘Half dust, half deity, offer

me anything but the self-obliteration’ (Lord Byron 1817).

End Notes

1. Sai Devi S. 2024. 'Untold Tales of Toil: Tracing the Lives of Women Construction Workers in India's Capital City of Delhi', *SSRN*.
2. Kabeer , Naila, Kirsty Milward and Ratna Sudarshan. 2013. 'Organising Women Workers in the Informal Economy', *Gender & Development*, 21(2): 249–263.
3. Bjarke Refslund and Markku Matias Sippola. 2022. 'Migrant Workers Trapped between Individualism and Collectivism: The Formation of Union-Based Workplace Collectivism', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 43(3): 1004–1027.
4. It is important to clarify what it means to have a balanced labour–leisure equation. It is about having a qualitatively distinct consideration for both labour and leisure in their own right unlike the regular understanding of leisure being inevitably preferred over labour and the Aristotelian proposition of 'We work in order to be at leisure'.
5. Adrian Piper. 1996. *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968–1992*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
6. Referring to a type of construction work involving carrying loads of bricks, cement and other materials used in construction and assorting them as walls, roads, etc. It is slightly less laborious but better paid compared to 'dammer' work, which involves unloading, mixing and laying down the construction raw materials, this excludes the significantly laborious work of carrying material here and there.
7. Naila Kabeer. 2001. 'Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', in Anne Sisask (ed.), *Discussing Women's Empowerment – Theory and Practice*, Stockholm: Sida Studies No. 3, 21(2): 249–263.
8. Festival that occurs in March when the whole village engages in indulgent food, drink, dance in simultaneous marriage processions.

9. Referring to the work that involves unloading, mixing and laying down the construction raw materials, excluding the significantly laborious work of carrying material here and there.
10. Sharma, Shikha. 2021. 'Migrant Women Find Moving Up Is Still Hard', *IndiaTogether*, <https://indiatogether.org/gender-move-women>.

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