Arun Kumar

3 The Nights of Bombay Workers (1870–1920)

Nights are usually an absent analytical category in the history of labour, even though nights occupy at least a little less than half of our lives.[1] Historians and scholars have framed working lives from the vantage point of labour, work and struggle. In doing so, they have privileged the daytime, especially while writing the history of industrializing societies. Night, on the other hand, appears as a moment of rest and leisure – the social reproduction of labour, and with the introduction of electric lights as an artificially created work time. My attempt in this chapter is to invert this image of the night and also rescue workers from their constant reduction to a labouring frame. I locate night as a site of contestation between workers and employers and among workers, state and employers who gave it a special character at the end of the nineteenth century. I ask a question as to who owns the workers' night? Is it the worker, or the employer, or the state? And, can a focus on the nights result in a nuanced understanding of worker politics, labour-capital relationship and the self-perception of workers?

In general, night, in workers´ lives, was not simply a temporal category but because of extreme work conditions, long work hours and alienation, the night acquired a significant political and emotional meaning. This chapter analyses the nights of Bombay workers, primarily textile workers, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when India was under the British colonial rule.

1 A particular exception to this is the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière who explored the night time of French artisans in the nineteenth century. My own work has been influenced by his work in many ways, including the focus on the literary traditions of workers and use of the night to question the neat partitioning of thinking as an exclusive arena of the high class and manual labour as the world of the worker. Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

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Bombay emerged as a global industrial metropolis by the end of the nineteenth century with cotton mills dominating the industrial landscape of the city and workers its habitation pattern. By exploring the history of night schools that the labouring poor attended at the turn of the nineteenth century, the text will show that the nights of Bombay workers remained a political issue both before and after the introduction of electric lights. Both practised time and abstract time was a bone of contention between workers and employers which a cautious colonial state watched over and intervened into when it required to impose its own interests. The presence or absence of the colonial power manifested through legal and economic interventions had far-reaching effects the way labour politics developed in colonies.[2] It is argued that the contestation over the ownership of the night was itself produced through the interventions of the colonial state.

This study also challenges the dominant notion that workers in this period were an illiterate group.[3] While workers' relationship with gymnasium, religious festivals, communal gatherings and cultural gatherings, alcoholism and political protests have been explored in the perspective of leisure activities,[4] their intellectual engagements do not get the same attention. The apathy of educated elites (both colonial officials and Indians) towards workers and the absence of workers' writings have occluded us from raising the question of workers' education, intellectual life and subaltern literary culture both from caste and class perspective. Labour historians have analysed the history of the working class from the standpoint of reducing workers to their labouring identities. Here, I focus on the dark hours between 7 and 10 p.m., in a very unconventional manner by not reducing it as an extension of the worktime or as a repose, rather, as a time where workers aspired and experienced new things in their life, namely, schooling, knowledge production and circulation, which had impacts also on the rest of their night as well as day.

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2 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Aditya Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill. Factory Law and the Emergence of Labour Question in Late Nineteenth-Century Bombay* (Corby: Oxford University Press, 2017); Nitin Varma, *Coolies of Capitalism: Assam Tea and the Making of Coolie Labour* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Jan Breman, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market Profits from an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

3 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 429, 431; Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, *Existence, Identity, and Mobilization: The Cotton Millworkers of Bombay, 1890–1919* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004).

4 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*; Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 115–26; Nikhil Menon, "Battling the Bottle: Experiments in Regulating Drink in Late Colonial Madras," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 52, no. 1 (2015): 29.

In the first half of the chapter, I will discuss workers' struggle to carve out non-work time (leisure hours), especially, freeing up the late evening time for attending night schools, attending to household needs and socialising with friends and family. In doing so, they also produced a critique of the intense factory work culture imposed onto them by employers. The struggle for leisure time straddled through the incipient labour movement, the necessity of wage in working lives, the debates of the colonial government-appointed factory commissions and workers' desire to have a non-work life. In the second half of the chapter, I will move to analyse workers' participation in night schools. These were a visible phenomenon in the industrial landscape of Bombay since the 1880s. I will answer the following questions. Who established them, and why? Moreover, why were workers interested in attending these schools at the expense of their well-earned sleep?[5]

3.1 Day and Night in Working Lives

Although the first textile mill in Bombay was constructed in 1854, the real growth in the numbers of mills occurred in the post-1870s. Between 1855 and 1860, only eleven mills were inaugurated, and then came the years of "cotton mania" as a result of the American Civil War (1861–64) which inflated the prices of raw cotton and the demand of Indian cotton in the world market.[6] Parsi merchants consolidated their profits from the cotton trade, but with the end of the war came the crash of the cotton boom. Historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar shows that the capital investment in early mills by Parsis was part of their strategy to diversify their entrepreneurial activities and risk as cotton trade came with considerable uncertainties both in terms of accessing the highly lucrative European market and maintaining a secure supply of the cotton from the Deccan Plateau fields in Southern India due to the lack of proper transport. In the 1870s with railways entrenching into the cotton belt of India, European agency houses with a supportive colonial administration and a greater capital organisation took over the cotton

5 My analysis here is limited to the later part of the nineteenth century even though night schools continued to proliferate, and the introduction of electric lights complicated the issue of work-hours and night schools.

6 S. M. Rutnagur remarks that the value of cotton export from India increased from 5¼ millions to 80 millions in just four years. S. M. Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries: The Cotton Mills* (Bombay: Indian Textile Journal Ltd., 1927), 13.

trade from Indian merchants, forcing them to explore alternative means of capital accumulation.[7] The expanding demand of the cotton yarn since the 1870s by the Chinese market provided an opportunity for Parsi merchants to invest their capital in mill buildings and machinery. While only two mills were built between 1861 and 1870, in the next five years between 1870 and 1875, 15 new mills were established, followed by 21 mills between 1875 and 1885 and a further 21 mills between 1885 and 1895.[8] Throughout this period, the Bombay textile industry was geared towards meeting the foreign demand rather than producing yarn and cloth for local consumption as the internal markets were dominated by the goods of the Lancashire mills in North-west England. R. Chandavarkar points out that almost two-thirds of the total demand for clothes was met by the British cotton mills, leaving little market for Indian entrepreneurs.[9]

Historian R. Chandavarkar shows that shifts and fluctuations in the global political economy, especially the demand from the Chinese markets, along with the cost of raw cotton and price of the finished products, decided the fate of industry which in turn shaped the nature of the labour market and industrial organisation.[10] Two clear outcomes of this heavy dependence on the uncertain global market were (1) the deployment of a huge casual labour force and (2) fluctuating work hours. To meet the sudden increase in the demands of yarn and cotton goods, employers intensified their production by employing a larger workforce and operating mills for longer hours, and when there was a slump, they reduced the work hours and workforce, laying off hundreds of workers.[11]

The industrial workforce was mainly comprised of peasant migrants from the Deccan and the Konkan region (in the mid-Western coast of India) who were later joined by the distressed peasantry from the eastern regions of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (in North India).[12] In terms of numbers, about 13,550 workers laboured in the mills in 1875. By 1885, already 41,550 workers were mill employees. And between 1885 and 1895, 34,200 more workers joined the mills, making the total population about 75,750. In the following ten years (1895–1905), the number of additional workers was just 17,250, which shows the slump in the industry first due to changes in the currency policy

7 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 63–65.
8 A slump came in-between 1877 and 1878, halting the progress momentarily due to market saturation and the great famine in India. See Chandavarkar, 245–46; Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries*, 10–20.
9 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 249.
10 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 60–71.
11 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*.
12 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 129–30.

(delinking of the Indian coin from silver) and then due to the plague epidemic and recurring famines.[13] By 1905, 93,000 workers were working for the textile industry in Bombay. This number would go on to increase by 129,510 in 1945.[14] Meanwhile, the overall population of Bombay city increased from 644,406 in 1872 to 1,489,883 in 1941.[15]

These two phenomena – the uncertain production process and a relatively new industrial labour force drawn from peasantry – were closely linked with the question of work hours. Hours of the factories for male adults remained unregulated until the 1911 Factory Act; the 1881 and 1891 Factory Acts only regulated the work hours of children and female workers. Mills in the late nineteenth century operated unevenly to meet the demands for the Chinese market but a central feature in this period was the extreme exploitation of workers. Mills usually run for between twelve and fourteen hours per day depending on the sunlight and season. The mill management gave varied answers as to the number of daily work hours to the 1875 Factory Commission.[16] For example, Mothiram Bhagubhoy, General Superintendent of the Frere and Mazagon Spinning and Weaving Companies, revealed that his mill operated between 5:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., but in cold seasons it operated from 6 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.[17] James Helm, Manager of the Bombay United Spinning and Weaving Mills, told that his mill usually worked for twelve hours, but there were no fixed work hours.[18] From the evidence presented to the commission by employers, workers, engineers and health officers, it appears that a 12-hour workday was a norm, but it could be extended depending on the demand. However, what is intriguing is that none of the workers demanded a reduced

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13 For number of workers see Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries*, 10–21; on plague and industry see Aditya Sarkar, "The Tie That Snapped: Bubonic Plague and Mill Labour in Bombay, 1896–1898," *International Review of Social History* 59, no. 2 (August 2014): 181–214; on famines see David Hall-Matthews, *Peasants, Famine and the State in Colonial Western India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

14 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 250.

15 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 30.

16 Factory commissions were appointed by the British colonial government at various intervals to enquire into the conditions and regulations of factories and factory work. Employers, workers, medical experts and managers were called in to give their opinions on various set themes/questions of factory commissions. I will refer to some of these commissions in this essay.

17 Evidence of Mothiram Bhagubhoy, Second Meeting, April 21, 1875, "Bombay Factory (Arbuthnot) Commission 1875: Report, Proceedings and Evidence. Bombay, 1875," British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/V/26/670/85 (1875).

18 Evidence of James Helm, Second Meeting, April 21, 1875, "Bombay Factory (Arbuthnot) Commission 1875."

workday if it jeopardised their daily wages.[19] It is not impossible that this idea was implanted on to workers beforehand that any demand for a reduced workday would come with a wage reduction.

Evidence from the 1875 Factory Commission suggests that although the customary working hours were from sunrise to sunset, they varied from one mill to the other and from one season to the other. The 1881 Factory Act had neither prescribed the timings of factories nor the maximum hours of work. In summers, work hours, the 1884–85 Bombay Factory Commission noted, could go up to fourteen hours a day, that is 98 hours per week.[20]

R. Chandavarkar argues that the uneven nature of cotton textile production in Bombay was such that it required flexible recruitment and deployment of labour and flexible work hours. He explains that the reported instances of workers not working during the work hours inside the mill were not evidence of workers' non-industrial agricultural instincts but a result of flexible work organisation that suited mill owners and the management.[21] Re-emphasising the widespread practice of flexible working hours and flexible labour employment in Bombay mills, historian Hatice Yildiz in her recent essay shows that Bombay workers used clocked time as a point of resistance to clearly demarcate between their "work time and personal time."[22] She suggests that it is difficult to apply E. P. Thompson's top-down notion of clock-based timed work in the context of Bombay textile mills and cotton ginning and pressing factories who, though part of the global economy, were structured by the local economy, agrarian world and workers' needs.[23] Thompson's notion that the emergence of the modern factories marked the beginning of a clock-based industrial time neatly divided into work hours and leisure hours was a powerful explanation that changed our understanding of industrial capitalism and modernity. The labouring classes who until now worked in fields and workshops were governed by a task-oriented time which exhibited little distinction between work and life. But the industrial capitalism required that workers be alert, attentive, efficient and committed at the shop floor. To produce this committed and disciplined workforce, employers and mercantile moralists invested in the division and supervision of

19 Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, "Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918: Conditions of Work and Life," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 30 (1990): PE87–99, PE88.

20 "Report and Proceedings of Commission Appointed to Consider the Working of Factories of the Bombay Presidency" (hereafter FC 1885) (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1885), 5.

21 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 326–30.

22 Hatice Yıldız, "The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay: Labor Patterns and Protest in Cotton Mills," *Journal of Social History*, 54, no. 1 (2020): 206–85, accessed May 25, 2020, 7–13.

23 Yıldız, 7–12.

labour, bells and clocks, schooling and preaching, timesheets and time-keepers.[24] In the context of England, Thompson remarks that there was an internalisation of this worktime discipline by the nineteenth century but it remained a problem in still predominantly agrarian industrial societies like India, where a task-oriented peasant turned industrial workforce forced employers to maintain "elastic time-schedules, irregular breaks, and meal-times."[25]

In anticipation of a legislative framework regulating factories and work hours, there emerged an interesting discussion around the boundaries of work and leisure hours between workers and employers in Bombay. Employers, in their writings and evidence to the factory commissions, maintained that workers did not respect work hours and were undisciplined in contrast to British workers. Lack of work ethics on the part of workers and the structure of the industry forced them to keep the factory hours extended.[26] Mill owners pointed out that workers' leisure habits popped up during work hours. Time spent at work was not equal to the time spent on work. Workers were accused of taking naps, visiting latrines for smoking and breaks, reading Bhajan books and taking unannounced leave.[27] The mill management made a similar type of argument in relation to the use of child labour stressing that children did not work all the time while they were inside the factory.[28] The idea behind creating an image of undisciplined work culture was to show that Bombay cotton mills were not exploitative as the Lancashire lobby was claiming. This image construction was also key to keep the wages low and work hours long. It was no surprise that such an image persisted even at the time of the Royal Commission of Labour in 1930. One mill-authority pointed out: "workers do not work all the time; they may be sitting down in one of the departments, they may be sleeping – and I myself have seen some sleeping – or they may have their meals."[29]

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24 E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967).

25 Thompson, 92–93. See also, Yıldız, "The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay."

26 Nasir Tyabji, "Primary Education, Working Hours and Half-Timers: Contentious Shopfloor Issues in the Turn-of-the-Century Textile Industry," in *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002), 290–309, 297.

27 India and 1890 Factory Commission, *Report of the Indian Factory Commission, Appointed in September 1890* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of government printing, India, 1890) (hereafter FC 1890), in *Copy of Report of the Recent Commission on Indian Factories* (London: Hansard Publishing Union Limited, 1891), 14.

28 "Bombay Factory (Arbuthnot) Commission 1875."

29 *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (hereafter RCLI), Vol. I, Part 2, Bombay Presidency (Oral Evidence) (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publications, 1931), 83.

Workers also complained that work intruded into their leisure hours. Once what seemed satisfied workers over the question of long work hours as long as due wages were not reduced (1875 Factory Commission) began to critique long work hours by the 1880s. On the one hand, workers took industrial action to declare Sunday as a leisure day, and on the other hand, they began to disentangle the night from the workday.[30] The first workers' political organisation, the Millhand's Association under the leadership of Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, mobilised workers over the question of fixed factory hours.[31] In 1884, the Association organised huge gatherings of workers in Byculla and Parel and drafted a memorandum with 5,500 signatures to be presented to the 1884–85 Factory Commission. Among various demands included: work from 6:30 a.m. till the sunset, a half an hour recess at noon, Sunday as a rest day and wages to be paid before the fifteenth day of the next month.[32] Later, a petition with similar demands was submitted to the 1890 Factory Commission.[33] These were bold demands, indicative of workers' calculation of time, in times of no welfare laws.[34] Yildiz demonstrates that workers' internalisation of time was closely linked to their struggles "for control over their work and life."[35] Social historian Keletso E. Atkins in her fascinating work on time shows that Natal zulu workers, who followed moon and stars to calculate their time (28 days month), were frequently termed as offenders, contract breachers and lazy by European employers who followed the solar calendar which had months of differing days (between 28 and 31 days). These differing calculations, Atkins shows, often led to labour-capital conflicts and clashes.[36]

By the time the 1890 Factory Commission recorded the oral evidence of workers, historian Aditya Sarkar shows that an incipient labour movement had started around the question of work hours and protective labour legislation.[37] Workers' politics, which emerged in the light of factory acts, also weaved in the

30 Aditya Sarkar discusses in detail how the limitations of the factory laws opened up spaces for new industrial disputes. Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill.*

31 On the rise of Lokhanday as a labour leader, see Aditya Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill: Factory Law and the Emergence of Labour Question in Late Nineteenth-Century Bombay* (2018), 236–50.

32 J. C Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation in India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1920), 36–37.

33 *FC* 1890, 106–07. See also, Yıldız, "The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay," 10–11.

34 Arun Kumar, "Learning to Dream: Education, Aspiration, and Working Lives in Colonial India (1880s–1940s)" (Göttingen: University of Göttingen, 2017), 247–48.

35 Yıldız, "The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay," 11.

36 Keletso E. Atkins, "'Kafir Time': Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal," *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 229–44.

37 Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill*, 236–247.

question of the social reproduction of labour and timely wage payment.[38] They argued that with present working conditions, they do not get enough time for rest (sleep), to attend to family needs and to spend time with children.[39] The memorandum presented their concerns through a language of social reproduction that might appeal to the state and employers. A reduced workday, workers argued, would generate healthy working bodies which "working with energy would turn out work satisfactorily both as to quantity and quality." They reminded, "The loss to mill owners from over-taxing the energies of their servants by the unnatural system of incessant work for nearly 13 to 14 hours a day, is far greater than they are aware of."[40] Workers knew that industrialists' extraction of labour surplus and theft of the family time was unjust, but it took time to build a consensus over the issue. However, it is not clear whether the demand for shortened working hours was made for both male and female workers or just for male workers. In the official discourse surrounding the amendment of the 1881 Factory Act which defined "the factory" for the first time as using steam power and employing more than 100 workers, the question of an overall shortened work day and timely wage payment was omitted. Just before the 1890 Factory Commission, about 17,000 workers signed a petition organised by an industrialist N. N. Wadia addressed to the government demanding Sunday as a holiday and half an hour recess at noon.[41]

Later, when the 1890 Factory Commission sat for gathering the perspectives of workers, both male and female workers overwhelmingly demanded a shorter work day. Like in 1875, they were worried about losing their earnings, but it did not stop them, this time, to demand a decent workday.[42] Working mother Doorpathee requested the commission, "It will be better if the hours are shortened."[43] For workers, the workday easily stretched into the night. To arrive at work at 5:30 a.m., Babajee Mahdoo woke up at 3 a.m.[44] The worker-mother Doorpathee woke up at the same time to cook food for herself and for her little daughter and then she would take a quick bath, dress and run for the mill which was one and a half miles away.[45]

38 Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill*.
39 *FC* 1885, 100. See also, Yıldız, "The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay," 11–12.
40 *FC* 1885, 106. See also *FC* 1890, 106–07.
41 Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 50–52. On Wadia, see Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill*, 302.
42 Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill*, 261–63.
43 *FC* 1890, 27–28.
44 *FC* 1890, 24.
45 *FC* 1890, 27–28.

Although dominated by male migrants, cotton mills of Bombay comprised a quarter of female force in the 1890s and about 22.2% in 1926.[46] A larger number of women were employed in the casual and low-paid industries and services such as beedi-making, domestic service, sex work and cleaning and manual scavenging.[47] Within the cotton mills, they were employed as casual labourers and mainly in the reeling and winding department, receiving much lower wages than their counterpart male workers.[48] This economic exploitation was often accompanied by sexual exploitation at the workplace. The burden of the social reproduction of labour which fell on her side made her life harsher and the night more intense. Once relieved from the factory, household work, i.e., cooking, cleaning, caring of the males and collecting water, awaited her. A 1933 academic study of India's industrial labour stressed that the working women living in chawls (working-class one-room houses) woke up quite early, first to collect water from the common tap and then to fire cow dung cakes to cook food. It was only "after such a night and morning; they have to go to their respective mills and to work in their stuffy atmosphere till the evening."[49] Moments of relief and socialisation had to be combined with work. Queuing to collect water since very early in the morning in the crowded chawls was also probably the time when they fought over the scarcity of water and nurtured their social ties with other women of the neighbourhood by discussing topics of common interests (the cruelty of jobbers and headmen/women, differentiated wages, the future of their children, sex scandals and love affairs of chawls and workspaces).[50]

The result of the intense labour politics of the 1880s was the 1891 Factory Act which declared Sunday as a holiday, limited the work day of female to eleven hours and of children (between the age of nine and 14) to seven hours.[51]

46 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 94; Radha Kumar, "Family and Factory: Women in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1919–1939," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 20, no. 1 (1983): 81–96, 81.

47 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 96–97.

48 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*; Kumar, "Family and Factory."

49 S. G. Panandikar, *Industrial Labour in India* (Longmans, Green and Co. Bombay, 1933), 232.

50 On water scarcity in Bombay see, Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920* (London: Routledge, 2016), 39–40.

51 See Act XI of 1891, "A Collection of the Acts Passed by the Governor General of India in Council, 1891" (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1892). At the same time in the metropole (England), women only worked for 56 hours per week compared to 66 hours in India. Children under the age of eleven were not employed, and children between the age of eleven and 14 only worked for five hours and were given compulsory education. Both of them were also not allowed to do work in the night. See Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 74–75.

The 1891 Factory Act was not applicable in factories that worked on the shift system.[52] This proved to be a major loophole; factory owners installed an expensive electric lighting system in the 1890s to start working on the shift system and extend working hours into the night.[53] The colonial state allowed the theft of the recess time from workers' lives, including of those whom it sworn to protect through the law. The number of mills fitted with electricity increased from five in 1896 to 13 in 1898 to 39 in 1905.[54] And all these mills worked for 15 hours from 5 a.m. to 8 or 8:30 p.m. with half an hour recess. Atmaram Alwe, a worker and labour leader, while narrating his life history to the Meerut Court, told that when he joined the industry as a half-timer in the 1910s, mills worked for 16 hours between 5 a.m. and 9 p.m., confirming the extensive use of electric lights. In addition, adult workers had to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning to be ready.[55]

Since the 1880s, employers in Bombay were in the habit of reducing working hours when the market for the yarn and piece goods were down and extending them when the market was up again.[56] The mid-years of the 1910s were particularly good as both the home market (due to the boycott of foreign clothes) and the China market had revived. Out of 85 mills on the Bombay Island, 60 mills had installed electric lights.[57] In the face of a growing demand for a regulated and shorter work day, mill owners maintained the position that the factory work acted as a disciplinary mechanism for workers, as otherwise workers would indulge with "undesirable social elements."[58] This language of morality had grounds in the growing discourse that workers wasted their money and energies on sexual pleasure, drinking, gambling and in theatres (tamashas).[59] For employers, the day and the night of workers belonged to the employer and were part of seamless commodity production. Any intrusion in the cycle was an intrusion in the process of commodity production. In employers' understanding, to drink alcohol, gamble, engage in labour politics, fall ill and be absent from the next day's work was to break the cycle. Despite resistance from mill owners, the Factory Act of 1911 limited the working hours of male

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52 Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 68, 75.

53 Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 77.

54 Upadhyay, "Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918," 89.

55 *Merrut Conspiracy Case 1929–32, Defence Statements. P 933–1606*. Alwe's examination, 935. Dhananjayrao Gadgil Library, Online Archives, File no. GIPE-024101, https://dspace.gipe.ac.in/xmlui/handle/10973/22824, accessed August 7, 2020.

56 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*.

57 Upadhyay, "Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918," E89.

58 *TOI*, October 8, 1909, 8.

59 Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 203–4.

adults to twelve hours and of child workers to six hours per day.[60] Reduction in the working hours, we will see later, had a direct bearing on the number and attendance of night schools in the city.

3.2 Sacrificing the Sleep: Workers in the Night Schools (1880–1910)

"A great many of the labouring classes had a great difficulty in making both ends meet; and when they managed somehow to send their children to these [night] schools, they sent them with the object of giving them a rise in life, which showed that they appreciated the advantage of learning," wrote a *Times of India* correspondent in the spring of 1890.[61] The contemporary newspaper provided glimpses into an alternative framework of working lives which is missing in the official archive and remains unexplored in scholarly works. The importance of education was firmly placed in the lives of a number of Bombay workers in the 1890s when there was no limit to work hours. The first Factory Act of 1881 had only fixed the working hours for child workers (between the age of seven and twelve) to nine in a day. Clearly, it was not like that workers first waited for a shorter work day and then attended the school.[62] Instead, the demand for a shorter work day and schooling went hand in hand. Although long-working hours constituted a barrier to workers' non-work aspirations, this was overcome by expanding the horizon of the night. By sacrificing their rest in the dark hours, workers diluted the sacred relationship of education with the high class/caste that employers maintained.[63] Education was one of the chief elements that distinguished them from the "influential" classes residing in better-off areas.[64] Workers challenged the idea that the difference of the intellect was natural. Attendance in night schools, despite long hours of work and characterisation of their self as "illiterate" and apathetic to education by the elites,

60 Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 174.
61 *TOI*, April 23, 1890, 3.
62 Tyabji, "Primary Education, Working Hours and Half-Timers: Contentious Shopfloor Issues in the Turn-of-the-Century Textile Industry."
63 I discuss this relationship in great detail in my PhD thesis, see Kumar, "Learning to Dream: Education, Aspiration, and Working Lives in Colonial India (1880s–1940s)" (PhD thesis, University of Göttingen, 2017).
64 Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 35–38; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the Wars," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 603–47.

reflected their vision of themselves. Workers flooded night schools established by workers, individual philanthropists and social reform bodies with their vibrant presence.

When the dusk rolled out and mills got closed, many workers turned into students. Tired workers went straight to night schools at 7 p.m. and spent two hours enjoying the pleasure of reading, listening to the master and holding a book. It is hard to tell precisely how many workers attended night schools or how many night schools operated as no systematic records of these schools were kept by employers or the state. Our only sources are the annual reports of organisations who maintained these schools, workers' testimonies, labour enquiry commissions, contemporary sociological and labour writings, and journalistic writings. These diverse set of writings reported about these schools with different motives – some to show how benevolent social reform organisations were, some to report the success of their civilising, reforming and disciplining the urban poor, some to suggest their ability to explore the hidden aspects of working lives and others to highlight the educational aspirations of workers. Evidence of these schools, as I will show later, were then framed by the narratives of those who ran and reported about these schools. The history of workers' dreams, desires and aspirations is hidden in the routine narrative of these organisers' hagiographies.

3.3 Bhiwaji Nare's Night Schools

The first workers' night school was established by a mill worker, Bhiwa Ramji Nare (?–1917), in 1874. He funded the school from his wages. We do not know if Nare was married or had children, but he started his career as an ordinary worker at eight rupees per month in the Dinshaw Petit Mill, one of the largest mills in Bombay. He worked in the mill industry for 37 years and retired as a master-weaver from the Morarji Goculdas Mill at Rs. 250 per month.[65] Nare belonged to the first generation of mill workers and worked with premier mills of Bombay raising from an ordinary worker. This gave him experience and authority to speak for the second generation of the mill workers. Nare was probably one of the earliest labour leaders who mobilised workers politically and intellectually. In 1887, Nare with the help of his worker friends expanded the night school into a free day school for workers in the Mararji's Chawl (Old Government House Road, Parel) and named it "Nare and Mandali's Free School." The

65 Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries*, vol. 2, 716.

school became popular and existed even after his death in 1917.[66] Seeing the response for education among workers, Nare further established two schools which he could not maintain after his retirement in 1906.[67] By now, he was a public leader, a representative of workers' voices who was invited to speak to the 1907–8 Factory Commission. He founded the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha in 1909 (an association for the promotion of workers' interests) and served as its president for eight years.[68] As one of the earliest work association, the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha helped workers in distress, unionised them, provided them with legal support through pleaders, mediated their concerns with the mill management, opened schools and promoted temperance. The Sabha ran a Marathi night school in the house at 247 Ferguson Road.[69] It was perhaps the only workers' body that pushed the question of education so centrally.[70] Bhiwaji Nare's commitment to workers' education was definitely an influence.

We do not know what was taught and who attended these schools. What is clear is that a section of influential workers recognised the need for a formal school for their and their children's growth as early as 1874. Nare's schools disturbed the rhythms of a worker life that employers created so passionately in front of the Factory Commissions. His schools questioned employers' orthodox partitioning of the workers' day as a time of work and the night as a time of rest. By not attending mill-work, educating their children in schools and mobilising workers for readdressing grievances, workers learned to question the norm of the industrial life in which they were caught for the first time. All this was happening in the absence of effective trade unions and governments' and employers' denial to provide education for workers and their children. Nare generated a politics of intellect in the poor working-class neighbourhoods that threatened to collapse the "natural" distinctions of society and culture which the "the educated and more influential classes" of the town maintained.[71] The mouthpiece of the employers, the *Indian Textile Journal* wrote mockingly, "The

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66 Chimanlal H. Setalvad (Chairman), *Educational: Report of the School Committee of the Bombay Municipality for the Year, 1920–1921* (Schools Committee's Office, Bombay, 1921), 290, http://dspace.gipe.ac.in:8080/xmlui/handle/10973/35259.

67 Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries*, vol. 2, 716.

68 Rutnagur, *Bombay Industries*, 716. On the history of this association, see Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 191–92.

69 S. D. Punekar and R. Varickayil, eds., *Labour Movement in India: Documents: 1891–1917, Vol. 2* (New Delhi: I.C.H.R, 1990), 338.

70 Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 191.

71 Quoted from Chandavarkar, "Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the Wars," 605.

president was a man in ten thousand giving his leisure time to conducting a school for the children of mill-hands . . . The Indian operative is no more fit for Trade Unions than he is for scientific education or ever reading and writing. He has to first learn things that are much more necessary, touching his daily life and work."[72] The editor reasserted the dominant elite view that the realm of workers was labour and hard manual work; it was not education, not politics, not intellect.

The effort to intellectualise and politicise workers was to take them away from their immediate identities and necessities. And yet, Nare's schools were imbedded into the everyday realities of the working life. On the one hand, his schools became a tool that disturbed the status quo and the fixed image of workers; on the other hand, they taught workers to become conscious of their self, be disciplined and be responsible beings. Nare's schools provided new hope to the exploited working class to think of their and their children's lives in alternative terms. When workers in large numbers supported Gokhale's Education Bill for the introduction of compulsory education in 1911, the same journal commented, "their ideas of education must have been no clearer than those of the Indian people, who believe that the purpose of education is not to make the recipient an honest, capable and intelligent workman, but to raise him above the degradation of manual labour."[73] To workers, night schools presented an opportunity to achieve what seemed impossible – an entry into the world of literates.

Nare's vision of educating workers was framed by his vast experience and authoritative presence in Bombay's factory world. He distinguished the older generation of workers which had settled in Bombay from the incoming migrant generation. The latter, according to him, was a degenerated lot. It wasted its leisure time and resources on drinks and theatre. He called them "uneducated and thoughtless workers" who, finding ready cash at hand, indulged in vices. At work, they were controlled by employers and in the night by drinking habits and other "vices." The worker pedagogue remarked, "All this is due to [the] want of education and want of knowledge of the value of time and money."[74] Nare cherished the ideals of self-control, work ethics and values of time management and thrift. Education, he believed, was a tool of self-control and regaining the lost dignity. However, he had little hope from the current generation. It was probably

72 Punekar and Varickayil, *Labour Movement in India*, 337–38.
73 Punekar and Varickayil, *Labour Movement in India*, 339; see also Sarada Balagopalan, *Inhabiting 'Childhood': Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 77–80.
74 *TOI*, December 12, 1907, 5.

for this reason that during the oral testimony before the 1907 Factory Commission officials he only spoke of educating workers' children and worker-children. For adults, he proposed a 13-hour workday, from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. with a half an hour recess, throughout the mill industry and no wage rise. More money meant more spending on vices by workers. Instead, he demanded that the cost of education should be borne by mill owners, but schools should remain under the administration of the local educational officials.[75] Nare was fully aware of the scandals of "non-functional" factory schools set up by mill owners. And he was equally aware of working parents' temptation to send their children to earn wages. As a solution, he proposed that "It should be made compulsory for the children to attend school by making the production of a monthly certificate of attendance at a school a condition to their admission to, or continuance in, a factory."[76]

The Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha, administered by three secretaries and legal advisers, raised issues of the exploitative practice of wage withholding, a shorter work day, rampant alcoholism among workers and schools for workers.[77] By II, its programme also included the issues of workers' housing and sanitation, hospitals and free education for workers, appointments of Indian factory inspectors, laws ensuring compensation for accidents, workers' representation in municipal bodies and legislative councils.[78] It continued to conduct the night school for workers in Lower Parel. In 1919, it was an organisation of the labour aristocracy – comprising 200 workers who were "leading jobbers, muccadams, and railway workmen" who further commanded many workers.[79] In 1919, the Sabha continued to maintain a night school at the Lower Parel and a night class in its central building there.[80] Besides, as a social reform body, the Sabha was also politically engaged: "Their [Sabha and the Bombay Social Service League] aim was to rescue workers from the depths of ignorance. In response to low wages, they suggested more education; as a solution to bad housing conditions, they tried to teach workers hygiene; faced with poverty, they advocated thrift."[81] However, his analysis that the elite organisation of the Sabha made it difficult to adopt a radical programme is framed in opposition to the 1920s militant worker politics:

75 *TOI*, December 12, 1907, 5.
76 *TOI*, December 12, 1907, 5.
77 Punekar and Varickayil, 339.
78 The *Indian Textile Journal*, October 1919, 16–17.
79 *Indian Textile Journal*, October 1919, 16.
80 *Indian Textile Journal*, October 1919, 16.
81 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129.

"[Sabha leaders] secretly held meetings in the chawls and only saw if anything could be secured by goodwill by going to the bungalows of the owners. But this clandestine management of affairs did not meet with success. Afterwards, people gradually lost confidence in that union also and that (union) too came to an end."[82] The fierce nature of the emerging workers' politics after the war years and a growing dependence on outside leadership pushed the programmes of education backward from the agenda of the workers' political organisations. In the late 1920s, the newly formed workers' trade union, the Girni Kamgar Mahamandal (GKM), maintained three day and night schools for workers and their children.[83] The union paid the salaries of teachers, but Alwe complained that Mayekar, the ex-secretary of the Union, often usurped these funds for his own interests.[84] We do not know if these schools were continued, and even if they were continued, they operated on a very small scale. The majority of workers attended schools established by the social and religious reform bodies, charity institutions, the Depressed Class Mission, Christian missionaries and Dalit organisations. In the following, I will focus on the activities of one such religious and civic organization, the Prarthana Samaj.

3.4 Theistic Association Night Schools

At a time when Nare's schools were pursuing workers to send their children to schools, the Theistic Association, a social and religious body advocating belief in a supreme being, began to organise night schools for the city's labouring poor on a large scale. The Theistic Association was an offshoot of the Prarthana Samaj (another theistic religious body) which was established in 1867 to promote the universality of God but it operated within the larger frame of a reformed Brahmanical Hinduism.[85] The Samaj, which had a limited membership, became a more social institution when the educational work began under the newly constituted Theistic Association in 1872. The Association's history can also be seen as part of the emerging public culture in the nineteenth-century Bombay where various religious and civic associations emerged to take the role of integrating the heterogenous populace in a rapidly changing society and

82 Kranti, January 20, 1929, 1.
83 *MCC*, Alwe's examination, GIPE-024101, 961.
84 *MCC*, Alwe's examination, GIPE-024101, 961.
85 Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis*, 162.

economy.[86] However, operating within the traditional hierarchies of caste, religion, region and class, these associations often reproduced the social tensions prevalent within the society.[87] The Theistic Association was no exception to this; run by educated upper-caste elites, it had a patronising tone towards workers and saw their identity as ideal and disciplined labourers of the mills and other employers.

The Association was first established by Keshab Chunder Sen in Calcutta in the early 1870s as an affiliate body of the Prarthana Samaj to discuss "religious and moral questions."[88] Sen, who had returned from England after seeing the role of the Anglican Church in educating and disciplining the industrial poor through schools, stressed the idea of social-cum-religious work in his lectures in Bombay and inspired others.[89] Association members proclaimed to raise the poor masses from their "degraded status." Hinduism, as it was practised by conservative upper-castes, was too ritualistic for the members. According to them, it had little sympathy for the poor and for their moral and intellectual needs. From the very beginning, it began to focus on the educational needs of the labouring and artisanal classes "whose lowly condition and want of means did not permit them to obtain it in the usual course, and whose leisure is otherwise likely to be injuriously spent."[90] Partly to control and discipline the leisure hours of the poor and partly to recognise the long working hours of factory workers, it constituted a night school committee. Education seemed the best method for the members to alleviate the mental and material status of the poor. Night schools allowed the Association to create a space where Indian elites and local European officials such as court judges, doctors and municipal officers affirmed their "progressive liberal" thoughts, benevolent human nature and contributions to the larger society. Primarily led by Atmaram Pandurang (1823–1898), the prolific social reformer and medical practitioner, the Association was able to receive the patronage of the local colonial government who presided over the night school annual functions and contributed to its fund collection.[91] For his social services, Pandurang was appointed as the sheriff of Bombay, Justice of the Peace and a fellow of the Bombay University.[92] Within the emerging modern Bombay's civil society, the presence of a

86 Kidambi, 201.
87 Kidambi, 201.
88 TOI, January 15, 1883, 3: February 28, 1912, 10.
89 Followers W. Modak, N. M. Parmanand and A. Pandurang were inspired by the idea and established the Association. TOI, Samaj Night Schools, February 28, 1912, 10.
90 *TOI*, January 15, 1883, 3.
91 *TOI*, April 27, 1898, 4.
92 *TOI*, April 27, 1898, 4.

large oppressed labouring population offered an opportunity for the upper class and elite castes to fashion their own selves in a distinctly modern sense where ideals of social reform, charity and service were closely intermingled with promoting the imperial and emerging industrial order. At the annual prize distribution ceremony of the Association's night schools in 1881, George Cotton, the Chairman of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, was the chief guest. He remarked that he was at the brink of declining the invitation sent by Pandurang and then suddenly he experienced a "selfish gratification" which persuaded him to attend the ceremony and be part of the greater good.[93] From the movement emerged important social reformers and the public advocated who redefined the social and industrial landscape of Bombay,[94] including those who ran the Depressed Classes Mission Society which established night schools for Dalit labourers.

The first night school of the Association was established in 1876, and by 1889, five more schools were added.[95] Established in the working-class neighbourhoods of Kalbadevi, Girgaum, Gamdevi, Byculla and Dongri, these schools met the educational needs of a diverse labouring people and castes. In 1891, there were 279 students in these schools. Of these, 65 were mill workers and office peons, 23 book-binders and compositors, 13 shopkeepers, 11 hamals, 10 each carpenters and goldsmiths, 9 tally-clerks, 8 fitters, 3 each coppersmiths, painters, beggars, Marathi teachers and electro-platers, 2 each day-labourers, barbers, coachmen and domestic servants, one tailor, and 18 unemployed.[96] The diverse occupational backgrounds of these students confirm the flourishing and expanding labouring market of Bombay.[97] And we see that education is not only sought by the skilled workers and workers that might benefit from literacy such as mill workers, printing press workers, teachers, painters, electroplayers and tailors but also by those whose occupations may not necessarily require literacy at all such as day labourers, beggars, barbers and domestic servants. Unskilled and unemployed people also saw some benefits from education in their lives.

In terms of caste, these schools again present a unique social world as they comprised high and low castes at the same time. Among its ranks, there were 166 Marathas, 27 Bhundarees, 11 each Vaishyas and Brahmans, 10 each Sonars and Kolees, 8 each Muslims and Agrees, 4 Simpees, 3 each Soothars, Cammattes,

93 *TOI*, March 21, 1891, 5.

94 These included the social reformer and lawyer N. G. Chandavarkar and Vithal Ramji Shinde.

95 *TOI*, January 15, 1883, 3.

96 *TOI*, March 21, 1891, 5.

97 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, Chap. 3.

Kassars, Coombhars and Hajams, 2 each Telis and Vanjarees, and 1 each Parbhu, Shenvee, Gowlee, Jew and native Christian.[98] These schools were truly diverse in their social composition except for including women and Dalits. Like in textile mills where Dalits employment was resisted in high wage weaving departments, Dalits of the city were absent from these night schools.[99] However, a growing presence of Dalit labour in the city, and particularly in cotton mills, meant that any politics of social reform and service had to include and negotiate the presence of the diverse labouring population.[100] In 1890, the Association established a night school for Mahars (a Dalit caste in the Bombay Presidency) in the Dongri area who were mainly employed by the Great India Peninsular Railway Company workshop.[101] Later, they also established another night schools for Dalits of the Madanpura neighbourhood which was predominantly inhabited by Muslim workers.[102]

The age of students in these schools ranged from twelve to 35 – from child worker to the adult worker.[103] In terms of proportions, very few workers, and fewer mill workers, were passing through these schools. Nonetheless, this number was not insignificant and static. If we count, including the irregular students who attended the Theistic Association night schools infrequently and left with a little smattering of English and arithmetic, no less than 2,748 workers attended these six schools between 1886 and 1890. In 1912, we came to know that three more schools were added in the working-class neighbourhoods of Thakurdwar, Khetwady and Dongri. And the number of students increased to 565 students.[104] The Theistic Association calculated that by 1912, over 26,000 workers had attended these schools.[105] In 1911, the Bombay city was inhabited by 979,445 individuals.[106] If we assume that all those 26,000 people were living in 1912, about 2.65% of the city's population was educated by just these six schools over roughly three decades.

98 *TOI*, March 21, 1891, 5.

99 On Dalits' exclusion from weaving departments see Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 325–26.

100 The proportion of Dalit workers in the textile mills increased from 1% in 1872 to 12% in 1921. Upadhyay, "Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918," PE 87.

101 *TOI*, April 30 1891, 5.

102 *TOI*, December 19, 1901, 5.

103 *TOI*, January 15, 1883, 3.

104 *TOI*, February 28, 1912, 10.

105 *TOI*, February 28, 1912, 10.

106 On Dalits' exclusion from the weaving department see Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, 325–26.

And these were not the only night schools running in the city; there were several others which the labouring population attended after their work hours. For example, the Theistic Association reported that there were three other night schools in Byculla, Dongri and Girgaum run by Christian missionaries and a "private gentleman" which directly competed with their schools.[107] We also came to know of a Day and Night schools for workers and their children in Colaba area which was run by one Mrs. Trimbuck. Workers of the Oriental Spinning and Weaving Mills and of the Government Central Press along with some shopkeepers attended these schools.[108] Similarly, there was another Free Night School at the Parel opposite the Kohinoor Mills run by the Young Men's Hindu Association for Dalit labourers.[109] The growing number of students in these schools caught the attention of one Madhaudas Morarji of the Times of India who stated that about 2,000 people (0.204% of the total population and about six % of the school attending population) attended night schools daily in 1911 in Bombay.[110]

Usually run from 7 to 9 p.m. in the buildings of the local schools or in some working-class buildings, these schools replicated the curriculum of government primary schools. Falling in line with the guidelines of the Public Instruction Department meant that these schools could get some financial help in the form of grant-in-aid from the government.[111] They taught reading, writing and arithmetic. However, the diverse social composition of these schools meant that different languages were taught in these schools ranging from Marathi, Gujrati, Urdu and English. Some schools also taught history and geography.[112] However, the Theistic Association schools reported that worker-students resisted learning geography and grammar but did not reveal the reasons for this.[113] The Association authorities always argued for keeping its schools close to the workers' needs. Courses on bookkeeping, accounting, drawing and designing were suggested as the ideal subjects for workers.[114]

107 *TOI*, April 23, 1890, 3.

108 "The Colaba Day, Night, and Sunday School," *TOI*, February 1, 1890, 3.

109 "Parel Free Night School," *TOI*, January 16, 1911, 8.

110 *TOI*, May 11, 1911, 6. The number of students attending schools up to high schools was 36,126 in 1909, and the above percentage is based on this number. See S. M. Edwardes, *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island, Vol. 3* (Bombay: Printed at Time Press, 1910), 125.

111 For example, the grant-in-aid of the Theistic Association was increased from Rs. 247 to Rs. 400 in 1911–12. "Samaj Night Schools," *TOI*, Feb 28, 1912, 10.

112 "Exhibition of the Theistic Association's Night Schools," *TOI*, January 15, 1883, 3.

113 *TOI*, March 27, 1885, 3.

114 *TOI*, March 27, 1885, 3.

Though radical in its time and unprecedented in its scale, these schools were framed by a language of "improving" the working class in a rapidly industrialising society where the poor was predominantly seen as a source of problems ranging from diseases, prostitution, raucous gatherings and communal violence. Except for Nare's schools, these schools were run top-down, and those running these schools saw themselves as coming from an altogether different world. In 1883, the authorities of the Theistic Association asked for financial support from the city's mill owners. They argued that their schools saved factory workers from idling their leisure hours, taught them to be "honest, sober, thrifty, skilled and intelligent" which ultimately helped mills in managing the labour efficiently.[115] Such a line of argument resonated with the concerns of mill owners who, at this point, inhabited contradictory positions – that is to not spend anything on the education of workers and constantly complain about the lack of work ethics among workers. Initially dependent on the annual contributions from members and charity of the wealthy class, the Association by the 1890s stabilised their novel institutions through the grant-in-aid from the education department. Among its contributors included the earliest labour leader Sorabjee Shapoorjee Bengali who not only contributed Rs. 50 yearly but also provided special book grants for students. Support from Bengali suggests that the early labour movement and the demand for workers' education was a linked issue as it was not just Bengali who was associated with night schools but also the prominent labour leader, Narayan Lokhande.[116] It was perhaps from this school going crowd that Lokhande was able to gather support for his 1884 petition and labour activism.

This enthusiasm for education among a section of workers sits in contrast to the portrayal of workers as not interested/engaged in education that both the colonial sources and subsequent labour historiography present. Despite the constraints of long hours of work, absence of public education and poor wages, workers traversed the world of manual labour and education seamlessly. Of course, their education was full of ups and downs, and night schools were ephemeral entities. Excessive long hours of work and later temptation to do double shifts to square wages limited workers' participation in education projects but none of the school reports mentioned a lack of engagement from workers. In fact, the local educational administration cited the lack of funds to reject

115 *TOI*, September 26, 1883, 3.
116 Lokhande, the most influential labour leader in nineteenth-century Bombay, was a member of a Night School Committee which ran seven night schools (perhaps of the Theistic Association). On Bengali and Lokhande, see Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill*, 100–114, 187; *FC 1890*, 43.

the applications of opening new night schools.[117] Commenting on the enthusiasm of workers for education, Madhaudas Morarji wrote, "how low paid workers who somehow or other are able to maintain themselves and their families, [are] attending these night schools so enthusiastically instead of enjoying their well-earned rest."[118] But at the same time, it remains a fact that the majority of workers did not attend a school.

Since the second decade of the twentieth century, a new social service organisation, the Social Service League, would start opening night schools on a larger scale. In 1917, the League ran 15 night schools in various working-class neighbourhoods with 450 enrolled students.[119] The Theistic Association schools which had come back under the umbrella of the Prarthana Samaj in 1899 continued to survive but on a smaller scale. In 1925, the Samaj reported that it had seven schools with 186 students on school registers.[120] The 1920s also marked the period of the emergence of a fragmented welfare capitalism in Bombay where many mill owners began to invest in the welfare of workers, especially in their leisure hours.[121] And the Social Service League was a key player in invoking and sustaining the discourse of welfare capitalism.[122] This also marked an intense contestation over the control of the nights of workers as keeping workers busy during the leisure hours meant control over workers' political activism.[123] I explore this colonisation of night elsewhere in great detail.[124]

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that nights are an important moment to study working-class history, albeit not restricted to the labouring frames. The movement towards night-time work shifts with the installations of electricity was

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117 *Report of the Indian Education Commission* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1883), 147.

118 *TOI*, May 11, 1911, 6.

119 "Social Service League," *TOI*, November 16, 1917, 4.

120 "Prarthana Samaj Night Schools," *TOI*, May 20, 1925, 11.

121 Two major groups of mills, Currimbhoy Ebrahim and Sons and Messrs. Tata & Sons organised welfare work on a large scale and established the Workingmen Institutes.

122 Rangildas Kapadia, "The Bombay Social Service League," *The Modern Review*, April 1936, 395–408.

123 Chandavarkar calculates the number of strikes in individual mills as 189 between 1917 and 1920 along with two general strikes in 1919 and 1920.

124 Kumar, "Learning to Dream: Education, Aspiration, and Working Lives in Colonial India (1880s–1940s)," PhD dissertation.

accompanied by another phenomenon in Bombay that is the use of nights by workers to educate themselves, be literate and eligible for more respectable jobs and status. In doing so, I have explained that struggles for carving out leisure hours (non-work time) from the 1880s, particularly the evening time and the night time (dawn and dusk), was an important feature of the late nineteenth-century labour politics. Night schools fitted into the wider struggles of workers to lay claim over their freedom, leisure hours and lives. In this period, night emerged a critical arena for workers to reconstitute their self, and night schools took them away from the everydayness of the shop-floor exploitation and household constraints. It gave them an opportunity to present and create a new self – the educated worker. However, the night was subject to variation for different workers and often constrained in varying degrees for the adult male worker, female workers and children. Long work hours, weak labour laws and limited educational resources meant that the majority of workers could not get an education. And even those who got through various night schools were subject to the visions of the school authorities. The nature of the working-class education that emerges in this period is geared towards making the worker more disciplined, industrious, healthy and docile. It is a trend that continues into the twentieth century with employers taking a keen interest in the nights of workers.