9

Skills Training, Migration and Employment

The Case of Raichur in Northern Karnataka*

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Responding to India's continuing employment crisis, despite high rates of economic growth, the Skill India policy enacted in 2009, and re-enacted in 2014 as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), was designed to train both rural and urban youth, who have high school diplomas or college degrees, in vocational skills. Skirting the issue of the lack of growth of jobs in India, the purpose of Skill India was to prepare a young workforce to meet the needs of the emerging urban economy, particularly the service sector, which leads economic growth in the current phase. This paradigm of creating a workforce, rather than work, speaks to several critical debates framing India's development; thus, a central question that has been asked is, can services indeed lead to growth in the context of a labour surplus economy? This question becomes moot given that the growth of jobs in services has been mainly in the lower rungs, or in low-value-added work. Service jobs at lower levels are typically in the informal sector with low salaries and unprotected tenures. Finally, if skills are seen as the

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bridge that will bring unemployed rural youth into the fold of cities, the validity of this vision is deeply challenged given the low quality of jobs and lives that the urban informal sector offers, often compelling young men and women to return to their villages. Youth have turned their backs on agriculture but remain deeply connected to their rural roots, not only as home but as a possible place from where better lives can be built if sustainable work can be found. It is in this space that the Skill India policy falters. Even as skill training institutions possibly create a continuous supply of low-wage service workers, the unavailability of quality jobs in urban settings takes the ground away from the feet of any skills policy.

In the second section, we provide a brief outline of the national, regional and local political economies to set the background for the subsequent sections. In the third section, we outline the major features of the Skill India policy and the debates around it. In the fourth section, we provide a discussion of Raichur district and the three villages from which we draw our trainees' case studies. The fifth section provides a discussion on local training centres and trainers. The sixth section draws on our extensive meetings with youth from Raichur as they undergo training, and beyond. The seventh section concludes the discussion.

Outlining the National, Regional and Local Political Economies

A significant dimension of the Indian economy has been the relatively slow pace of structural transformation. While the contribution of agriculture to gross domestic product (GDP) has steadily declined (it was 20 per cent in 2020–2021), the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture has remained disproportionately high (43.96 per cent in 2021) (Statista 2023a). Why agriculture continues to harbour workers beyond its capacity is a complex problem, but one obviously related to the nature of industrial and urban growth (Hashim 2009; Centre for Economic Data 2021). Historically, the manufacturing sector has been the destination of landless rural communities moving to cities in search of livelihoods. In India, the decline of manufacturing employment has been a cause of concern since the 1990s. Although the manufacturing sector accounts for 17 per cent of the country's GDP, employment in manufacturing fell from 51 million people in 2016–2017 to 27.3 million in 2020–2021, down by 46 per cent. 'This indicates the severity of the employment crisis in India predating the pandemic' (Centre for Economic Data 2021). While the dominant development discourse equates economic development with urbanisation and

industrialisation, the economic trajectory of Indian cities obviously challenges this model.

Although services contribute over 50 per cent of the GDP, the share of services in employment has not risen proportionately, increasing from 23.4 per cent in 2004 to only around 32 per cent in 2019 (Basole et al. 2018: 82; *Economic Survey of India* 2020). Moreover, much of the service sector employment remains in low-value-added services, with high-value-added services (finance, insurance and real estate, information technology [IT]-related services and telecommunications) accounting for only about 7 per cent of the workforce (Saraf 2016: 17).

These national patterns are replicated closely in the state of Karnataka. Karnataka is one of India's fastest growing states, with an average growth rate of 8.5 per cent, which has been ahead of the national average since the 1990s. As a leader in IT and IT-enabled services (ITES), in cutting-edge sectors like biotechnology, and an epicentre of technology-rich start-ups, Karnataka's modern economic growth has been spectacular. Despite this, Karnataka's development pattern shows the preponderance of agricultural employment, with close to 46 per cent of employed people engaged in agriculture and only 19.8 per cent in the industry in 2020. Industry's share in the gross state domestic product (GSDP) declined from 29 per cent in 2009–2010 to 24 per cent in 2013–2014, and in 2022 it was 22 per cent. This decline sets the state apart from other economically advanced states such as Gujarat and Maharashtra. Karnataka's economic development has been acknowledged to have been led by the service sector. However, although the share of services in the GSDP was over 65 per cent in 2019–2020, the share of services in employment has not been commensurately high, at 33.7 per cent in 2020 (Statista 2023b). Much of the employment has occurred in the low-value-added, bottom rungs of the service sector, as in hospitality, entertainment, security, beauty and wellness, tourism and transport. Although much of this employment is in the so-called organised and corporate sector, which comes with a monthly salaried wage and some social security, the reality of these jobs is that even a minimum wage may not be paid, there is no security of tenure and hours of work may be erratic and unregulated. Low rates of employment in industry and services reflect on the nature and growth of urbanisation in the state. The urban population of Bengaluru district accounted for 37 per cent of the state's urban population in 2011. The concentration of urban growth in Bengaluru indicates that the window of urban opportunities has been confined to this single urban space in the state (Pani and Iyer 2013).

Overall, then, employment in the state leans heavily on agriculture, despite the sector's declining share in GSDP and repeated agrarian crises, particularly in the draught-prone northern Karnataka. Regional economic disparity between the northern and southern parts of the state is an enduring and unresolved concern. The Hyderabad–Karnataka region in northern Karnataka comprises the six most backward districts: Bidar, Gulbarga, Bellary, Raichur, Yadgiri and Koppal. State-supported industrialisation has occurred in southern Karnataka (particularly Bengaluru and Mysore), which accounts for almost half of the total employment in the state, while northern districts are severely lacking in economic, social and financial infrastructure. This explains the influx of migrants into Bengaluru city. The total proportion of migrants in Bengaluru who come from within the state of Karnataka increased from 60.68 per cent in 2001 to 65.64 per cent in 2011. The percentage of migrants moving specifically for employment remained around 25 per cent over this 10-year period. A study conducted in Bengaluru found that the majority of the migrants were either agricultural labourers or farmers before migration, who move to cities for a few months of the year and return during sowing and harvesting months. The insecurities of work and income, combined with the associated vulnerabilities of city life, propel many to return home during some months (Sridhar, Reddy and Srinath 2010).

Sectoral growth and employment in Bengaluru city replicate the patterns at the state and national levels, particularly in terms of the decline of industry. From the mid-1990s onwards, there has occurred a steady decrease in the share of the secondary sector (industry) and of registered manufacturing in gross district domestic product (GDDP). Commensurately, the share of the tertiary sector in the GDDP has steadily gone up. In 2004–2005, service industries accounted for 66 per cent of total employment in Bengaluru. This is higher than that for all million-plus cities (62 per cent) or for urban India (57 per cent). By 2011–2012, the share of services in employment had risen to 73.25 per cent (*Economic Survey of Karnataka* 2011–2012). In Bengaluru, the share of salaried employment increased from 48 per cent in 2004–2005 to 55 per cent in 2011–2012. As the service sector constitutes 73 per cent of employment in Bengaluru, one would assume that much of what is described as regular/salaried employment is to be found in the service sector.

Bengaluru has witnessed a vastly increased volume of services in hospitality, entertainment, transportation, retail selling, luxury accommodations, corporate colonies, medical services, and so on. A new class of service sector workers has emerged – those with education levels up to class 10 or 12, working in these service domains. Recent studies of the workforce and nature of work in these sectors

indicate a high degree of variation in compensation and employment conditions, marked by insecurity of tenure and the extractive role of contracting agencies (RoyChowdhury and Vani 2015; Upadhya and RoyChowdhury 2021, 2022a). This section has laid out the political economy context in which both at the national and state levels large numbers of people remain tied to agriculture, even as both manufacturing and service sectors fail to generate jobs for the unskilled and the semi-skilled. At the same time, informal and unregulated employment in the lower rungs of the service sector in cities holds out little promise of security or mobility to youth with 12th class or even with a bachelor's level of education.

The Policy Framework on Skills

With youth unemployment becoming an object of deep policy concern, the National Policy on Skill Development was introduced in 2009, with a target of skilling 500 million workers by 2022. This has been reflected in numerous initiatives at the central and state levels – including the creation of a separate ministry for skill development and parastatal organisations such as the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), set up as a public–private body to tap corporate funds – and a series of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) comprised mainly of industry representatives whose mandate is to guide policymaking and create skill standards and training programmes. The Skill India Mission was replaced by the National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2015 which aimed to develop comprehensive skill training programmes to meet the target of skilling 402 million workers by 2022. This target is distributed across more than 20 ministries and organisations.

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) was set up in 2014 to coordinate and manage all skill development activities across these various agencies. The MSDE directly manages four skill development schemes – Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), STAR (National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward), Udaan and Vocationalisation of School Education – which are implemented by MSDE nodal agencies. The PMKVY is the flagship scheme of the ministry, started in 2015 with an outlay of INR 15,000 million. The government has also tried to standardise vocational and technical training and align it with industry requirements and international standards by developing the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). Apart from these initiatives, the central government has set up new agencies such as the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF). All these initiatives have created a highly complex

institutional structure at the central level for the governance and implementation of skill training and vocational programmes (Maithreyi et al. 2017). Despite these changes, the policy framework has remained largely the same since 2008 – for instance, the PMKVY is implemented through the NSDC, which essentially promotes skill training delivery through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and for-profit agencies.

The National Policy on Skill Development, 2009, represented a significant shift away from the earlier emphasis on vocational training through government-managed industrial training institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics, towards the promotion of skilling through a plethora of third-party private sector organisations, which were tasked with training and finding jobs for young people. Under these schemes, private entities receive investments and soft loans from the government and are responsible for meeting skill targets. The NSDC is supposed to manage the entire system, but the NSDC itself was largely controlled by the Ministry of Finance, which provided most of the funds (Ruthven 2018: 316).

In Karnataka state, successive governments have been concerned over rising numbers of youth, with secondary, pre-university or even college degrees, who are seemingly unemployable. Between 2009 and 2013, there occurred a 30 per cent increase in enrolment in government high schools (325 per cent increase in enrolment in private schools) (Public Affairs Centre 2022; GOK 2022). In 2001, out of 100 children entering class 1, only 43 reached class 8. This scenario had considerably improved in 2011. Out of 100 children entering class 1, 77 children reached class 8 and 64 reach class 10. Around 50 passed out of class 10. Out of them, 43 entered pre-university college (PUC), 23 passed out of PUC and 16 entered higher education (GOK 2022).

The Government of Karnataka enacted a policy on skill development in 2008. The objective was to provide suitable skill training for 15 lakh job seekers by 2020 and to provide them with placement. In Karnataka, skill development takes place through a convergence of the PMKVY and the state's Chief Minister's Kaushalya Karnataka Yojane (CMKKY). Bengaluru skill training centres primarily concentrate on preparing youth to fill service sector jobs such as retail sales, back-office support services, personal services such as beauty and wellness, and home health care and driving. Some centres also train workers in construction and allied skills such as electrician and plumbing and industrial skills such as welding. The focus on service sector jobs reflects the structure of the state economy, and particularly Bengaluru's service-heavy economy.

Skill training centres in Karnataka run the gamut from for-profit firms to not-for-profit charitable organisations, or NGOs, to those that combine for-profit

and not-for-profit models. While many NGOs receive funds from the NSDC or other central skill programmes such as the PMKVY to support their training programmes, a major source of funding is from the corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of private companies, as also from private donations. As of 2017, Karnataka had a total of 98 skill training centres registered with the NSDC, of which 59 are located in Bengaluru.

Beyond creating a skilled workforce, the objective of the skill mission is also to encourage entrepreneurship. In the National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship document (2015), Prime Minister Narendra Modi is quoted as saying:

> Millions and millions of Indian youth should acquire the skills which could contribute towards making India a modern country. I also want to create a pool of young people who are able to create jobs.

This statement reflects the government's implicit recognition that there are not enough jobs, and hence the increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship, which can create jobs in the future.

The document notes the need to 'raise the aspirations' of youth – a view that was echoed by skill training practitioners in our study. Thus, in the dominant policy discourse, youth lack not only skills but also aspirations, at least of the right kind (that is, aspirations to fill the kinds of jobs that are available). Our study revealed that the skill policy and training institutions failed to meet the expectations and aspirations of their trainees. This chapter highlights, particularly, that in small-town Raichur, young men and women aspired for a better life and were prepared to invest time and resources in learning English and gaining computer skills in order to achieve the dignity of a job which would induct them into an urban life. In reality, faced with long hours, low wages and uncertain tenures in malls, beauty parlours and supermarkets, many returned to their rural settings in order to carve out some sort of livelihood.

Insofar as a central thrust of many skill training programmes is to incorporate rural youth into urban employment as a means of poverty alleviation, rural–urban migration is central to the new skill script. But this study demonstrates that the migration process is much more complex than what many actors in the skill universe imagine: the fragility of life and livelihood within the framework of informal work defines the parameters within which youth may aspire to move to cities and seek urban jobs, but often they are compelled to turn back due to the paucity of decent and well-paid work as well as high cost of sustaining themselves in the city on the salaries that are available. Moreover, we found that while

training institutions play a significant role in shaping the aspirations of educated rural youth for migration, mentoring or hand-holding mechanisms that could facilitate their transition into the urban service workforce are ill-designed and often dysfunctional.

Raichur

The Raichur district is traditionally considered to be one of the backward districts of the state, characterised by high population growth, high mortality rates, low levels of literacy and poor natural resource base, leading to slow and stagnant industrial growth. The two Karnataka human development reports, prepared in 1999 and 2005, rank Raichur as the least developed district and three of its *taluk*s fall in the 10 least developed *taluk*s in Karnataka. With urbanisation at 25 per cent, the district is one of the least urbanised districts in the state. According to the last census (2011), while the literacy rate was 75 per cent in Karnataka, in Raichur it was 59 per cent (GOK 2014).

The percentage of workers engaged in agricultural activities as cultivators and agricultural labourers was 70 per cent in 2011, whereas for the state it was 49 per cent. Thus, the district is predominantly agricultural with very low and slow diversification towards non-agricultural activities. Historically drought-prone, in recent years the situation has been considerably more aggravated, with successive years of rainfall shortage since 2012–2013, resulting in agrarian distress and massive out-migration.[1]

In this context of acute agrarian distress, the question of access to employment in the secondary (industrial) sector is obviously significance. Raichur district is in fact industrially one of the most backward districts in Karnataka. For the state government, the focus has been less on generating employment by promoting large or medium industries and more on self-employment through small and micro enterprises. Given the overall lack of economic development and prosperity in the district, there is a limited market for such products, leading many such enterprises to falter and fail. Most of the larger industrial enterprises are owned by out-of-state entrepreneurs, from Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, who have brought in labourers from their own states. The presence of industries has not yielded much benefit for local residents in terms of employment.[2]

Village Sites

The three villages that were selected for field research – Medikinhal, Balaganur and Bettadur Thanda – are marked by seasonal and circular forms of migration.

Agriculture is the main livelihood, although with average household holdings being 1–3 acres, most are small cultivators or agricultural labourers. Small shops selling tea or groceries, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, provide an alternative or supplementary means of earning. Other occupations in the village are attendant in hotels in nearby Manvi town, drivers, government employees such as sub-division assistants in courts, bus conductors, teachers, bank officers and police sub-inspectors. Consecutive years (since 2012–2013) of drought have led to out-migration to cities to find work in the construction sector. The migrants take up such work during the off-agricultural season and return during the season to resume cultivation. Most migration in the village is circular. The preferred destinations for work are Bengaluru, Pune and Hyderabad, in that order.

Within this framework, as the village studies revealed, there was a great deal of effort by parents to educate their children. These efforts had led many in the present generation to complete at least 10 years of schooling and to look towards some kind of skill training and employment opportunities outside agriculture, in some cases outside the village. Given the recurring agricultural crises and the instability of incomes from agriculture due to droughts, village youth have increasingly turned away from agriculture and seek alternate means of livelihood. For those who have some years of school education, and with the changing social context, construction work is no longer a choice.

Village youth from relatively well-off families or who have steady incomes usually complete their bachelor's degrees and some even go on to do postgraduation. Bachelor of Education (BEd), Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) are popular undergraduate courses; the students who complete such degrees take up jobs in schools and private companies such as the local solar and windmill company or start their own ventures – typically small businesses such as in printing and photocopying, textiles and clothing, and mobile shops. Young men from poorer backgrounds go to Raichur town or to Bengaluru to 'work in factories or offices'. 'Some just board a bus to Bangalore after completing PUC or degree', according to a villager. Those who decide to stay back in the village typically work in the quarrying or construction sector in nearby towns or become security guards at construction sites.

Amongst the village youth, there is much demand for office jobs and work related to computers. Thus, many young people from villages like Balaganur have sought computer training from a church organisation in Maski (the nearest town). Most of the youths here are educated and are pursuing graduation. However, a high school diploma or an undergraduate degree, even with a few months of skill

training, offers little scope for regular employment in large cities like Bengaluru or Pune. Many youths had the vision of migrating towards well-paying city jobs. But in a context where city life was unsustainable due to low salaries, most remained confined to the smaller towns or to Raichur city in service jobs without security of tenure or social insurance. Thus, the faltering industrial development of the district, as well as the unregulated nature of service jobs, set the limits within which rural youth, no longer interested in agriculture, could hope to find livelihoods. What role did skilling and skill centres play in this complex process, where the political economy structure, at multiple levels, seemed to go against the interests of trainee youth? A profile of the skill centres is given as follows.

Training Centres in Raichur

Skill Training for Women Empowerment

Sumalatha Fashion Centre, located in the district headquarters and established in 2010 with funding from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, works for the empowerment of women in Raichur and provides training in skills such as beauty and tailoring. After the training, the NGO also helps some trainees to set up their own enterprises. With time, government funding was reduced; a fee had to be charged for the course, which led to declining numbers of students; and, finally, the programme was withdrawn, despite the fact that the NGO had helped several young women start beauty parlours and tailoring shops in Raichur town. Reshmi, the founder, is of the view that the new skill training 'yojana' has grabbed all the government funding and this has had an adverse impact on existing training programmes. They are only now planning to look into the guidelines of the PMKVY to relaunch the courses as part of the NSDC and the PMKVY.[3]

Skill Training for Rural Employment

The Youth Charitable Society (YCS), in Maski village, is attached to the local Roman Catholic church and is around 30 years old. The church receives international funding from countries like Germany and Canada for providing skill training, free education and free tuition in villages. The YCS mainly focus on the underprivileged Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST)/Other Backward Classes (OBC) families and children of Devadasis and migrant labourers. Skill training is provided for courses like computers and tailoring for a duration of three–six months. Computer training seen as an inevitable part of work today is the obvious choice of college-going girls and boys. Most of the students get

enrolled during their semester breaks. With coaching for tally, the trainees aspire to work as village accountant in the *panchayat* (village council) and related jobs. Only a few of the students wished to migrate out for a job. While in the initial years, a placement programme was in place, the organisation has gradually withdrawn from the placement responsibility,[4] reflecting the deep challenges that training centres face in a context where economically viable jobs are scarce even for college graduates with some minimal training in technical skills.

Skill Training for Urban Employment

Excelus Learning Solutions Private Limited is a private training centre, located in Raichur town. The centre is owned and managed by a private firm in Bengaluru. This centre seeks funding from the government through the NSDC and is implemented through the PMKVY. It offers free training for courses like CCTV (closed-circuit television) installation, counter sales executive, plumber (general), warehouse picker, and other home appliances' mechanic. In addition, all the courses include classes for basic IT and soft skills. The centre offers placement in malls, call centres and business process outsourcing (BPO) in big cities like Bengaluru and small towns including Raichur.[5]

Pragati Skill Centre has multiple branches across India, providing courses in various fields. They receive funding from the NSDC and from corporate houses as part of their CSR initiatives. The centre in Raichur provides training for only one course – vocational skill training – comprising computer skills, tally, goods and services tax (GST), spoken English, values and life skills. Placement assistance is provided for students to find positions in Bengaluru, Hyderabad as well and Raichur. Fluency in English communication, computer usage and assured job placements are the key factors that attract youth to take up this training. The trainees are expected to pay INR 3,000 as fees and an additional refundable deposit of INR 1,000 if they do not submit their original Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) marks sheet. After graduation, the trainees are expected to submit their three months' salary slip, following which their marks sheet or the security deposit of INR 1,000 is returned. The insistence on the three months' salary slips stems from the fact that the organisation's continued support from different sources is contingent on demonstrating placement and minimum retention of workers.

Need-Based Skill Training

The Association for Vocational Needs (AVN) is an NGO set up in 1986 that provides need-based skill training courses. Based on an analysis of local needs,

the most suitable course for the village was selected, such as auto repair or motor winding. Candidates were selected from Gram Sabhas by the AVN, and free residential training, supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), was provided to the students. After the course was over, the organisation helped them with loan facilities for setting up their enterprise. Due to changes in governance and skill schemes, the AVN was no longer receiving funding for the courses; hence, skill training on a larger scale was on hold. The AVN is now running a pre-university college for students of underprivileged backgrounds and with lower scores.[6]

In addition, the Hope Trust in Mooranpur, Raichur, provides industrial training institute (ITI)-type skill training courses. They run courses such as carpentry, fitter and electrical repair, all of six months of duration, alongside a two-year electrical diploma course approved by the central government. The organisation was, however, unable to attract youth for the courses and has been operating with only a handful of trainees.[7]

It would be clear from the discussion thus far that training organisations faced multiple challenges within the small-town context. Local organisations, predating the 2009 skill policy, had been funded through traditional philanthropy and/or state government support. Many of these lost out to newer training outfits in the new model of competitive bidding for funding from public–private sources introduced by the Skill India policy. While more tuned to local needs, their technical and infrastructural capacities may have been of a bygone era. On the other hand, newer organisations, which were more successful in obtaining the necessary funding from the NSDC and other agencies, found themselves faltering in a situation where continued funding depended on their placement success, and there were obviously few jobs to go around and few takers for jobs which did not meet the trainees' aspirations. According to our trainer respondents, youth from Raichur are attracted by any advertisement that mentions '100 per cent assured job', as an escape route from farming and construction work.[8] While expecting 'end-to-end' solutions from training to job, they lack a realistic conception of the hardships of working in a city at a relatively low salary. This leads to the acute problem of retention in jobs. The vision of an air-conditioned office, with a computer on the table, is shattered by the reality of retail selling experience in malls and supermarkets.

According to local NGOs, the PMKVY has been a failure in small rural districts like Raichur, where the job market is very different from that in cities like Bengaluru. For example, according to Kumar, the founder of the AVN, the tailoring course is to train basic sewing machine operators. Between 2014

and 2018, around 600 candidates were trained in institutes in Raichur, with approximately INR 10,000 from the PMKVY spent on each student. As there are no garment factories in Raichur, there would be no scope for employment locally for these trainees, who would also not be able to migrate due to cultural and familial reasons. Similarly, sales management courses appear attractive to trainees. However, retail jobs are scarce in an economically backward district, where there is only one small mall in Raichur city. In this context, the district administration has not played a proactive role in leading what could have been a more locally grounded training ecosystem. An assessment of local needs must precede the shaping of training programmes. For example, Raichur has around 44 rice mills and each rice mill requires around six boiler operators. These vacancies have not been filled. Thus, a training course for boiler operator would have greatly benefitted job seekers, as well as the mills.[9]

Training and Beyond

We draw here on interviews with close to 50 trainees from three training centres: in addition to the church-based organisation in Maski and Pragati Skill Centre which has a branch in Raichur, the respondents had also trained in Move-Up, a skill centre in Bengaluru.

The young men and women in the respondents' group were members of households which had some assets and some land. Such households could afford to send at least one child for a period of training without having to use their labour for the household's immediate economic needs. Most of the students in the church-run skill programme, for example, had done this training in between semesters or after finishing high school; follow-up queries showed that almost all had returned to their studies after the training. The training was thus seen by the students and their parents as something to do during the break, which would provide additional skills to the student's profile.

While it is true that the households were in a position to support their children to go to school/college/vocational training, it is important to highlight the rough edge of struggle for economic survival that many of the households had undergone or were still undergoing. Given the constraints of making a living out of agriculture, the parents of most of the trainees had transitioned to the construction sector, where they worked at least part of the year. This background highlights that for households at low levels of earnings, with minimal assets, education of children had emerged as a matter of prime importance, and parents were instrumental in pushing their children to study more or to get vocational training. Interestingly, this was true across both genders. Parents of girls clearly

did not want to see their daughters going to live alone in a big city; nevertheless, they were willing to have them attend vocational courses while staying in a hostel. Parental aspirations for their children were not only to get them educated in the abstract but frequently had a specific vision. Anitha, whose parents were not educated and were working as farmers and agricultural wage earners, said she wanted to become a bank manager because 'my mother wants to see me as a bank manager'. Baskar, a former construction worker whose father and brother remain construction workers, said: 'I joined the course only because my parents asked me to.' Umesh had been a construction worker in Raichur, Bengaluru and Kerala. His description of his experience in Kerala was as follows:

> It was tough work there as they had to work in heavy rain. Due to heavy rains, there were no machines used to send concrete up the floors, we had to transport the concrete up the floors with our bare hands. Our hands used to bleed [*he shows his veins and scars*].

Since his parents 'could not see him' do 'hard work', he left the job, and eventually with the support of his parents, he joined the Move-Up course. These and several other examples demonstrate that woven into the struggles of families who had very few resources to fall back upon and were managing to sustain themselves through manual labour (mostly in construction) was a very purposeful desire to see their children lead a better life. To what extent did skill policies, programmes and institutions provide the necessary support to enable rural youth to transition to a higher order of earnings and life chances?

The educational profile of the trainees indicated that they were much ahead of their parents. While most of the parents were reported to be uneducated (most had not been to school or had not studied beyond class 4), in the group of 49 trainees, almost all had at least 10 years of schooling, and most had studied beyond, with about seven graduates in the group.

Almost every student believed that after completing the training (particularly at Pragati and Move-Up, which were Bengaluru-based skills training organisations), they would be able to find a job. Only a very few spoke of independent entrepreneurship, typically around setting up a computer or mobile shop. The common vision was to get a position in an office, preferably as a computer operator, which would provide an income of INR 10,000–15,000 per month. The dream of moving to the city appeared to be part of an overall desire to leave farming behind. Most of the youths, however, were aware that with a salary of around INR 10,000 per month, it would be more practical to stay put in Raichur, where they need not pay house rent and can contribute to their family's income.

It was obvious that employment in the government sector, in banks or in the police were the most favoured dreams. However, of the 49 respondents, leaving aside the 20 students who returned to their studies, about 15 found positions as salespersons and as drivers, two remained unemployed and, remarkably, one person returned to construction work.

Of the three training centres, the stated objective of one, Move-Up, was to facilitate the movement of rural youth to urban areas. The Move-Up mobilisation team was quoted as having said: 'Ooralli khaali odadtira; sumne banni Bangalore ge' (You people just loaf around in the village; come with us to Bangalore). Amongst students and staff of the Pragati centre in Raichur as well, the possibility of moving to Bengaluru was construed as a positive option. Of the 49 respondents, however, as many as 23 stated that they would like to work in Raichur, while only 14 expressed a clear wish to work in Bengaluru. The rest appeared ambivalent on this question, but even amongst these, several stated that they would work in Bengaluru for some years and then return to Raichur to build their lives there. There was, therefore, a clear disjuncture between the training centres' vision and the trainees' imagination of a future in the city.

Trainers' views on urban migration reflected both a lack of understanding of the perspectives of rural households and youth in particular and an unwillingness to address the question as to what opportunities for employment and living are actually available to migrant, semi-skilled youth in the city. The trajectories of some of the respondents reveal that rural folk may have a strong desire to stay back in their place of origin, and what feeds into this pull-back is that what is available in the city may be unattractive and unacceptable. The dynamics of rural-to-urban migration in the context of skill programmes thus threw up many complex issues.

Despite the attractions of promised jobs in the city, the trainees were part of households that were deeply invested in the so-called native place, and an important part of the family's as well as the individual's aspiration was to be able to buy land in the village of origin. Parents' desire to educate their children was etched with the ambition to see them in a government job, which would enhance the family's economic position in terms of being able to buy agricultural land, build or extend a house, and so on. While the literature on migration has presented the desire to move to the city as universal and unilateral, our limited findings suggested that perhaps this understanding needs to be modified or fine-tuned. Our discussions with rural youth showed that the attractions for the city were seriously dimmed not only by the knowledge that opportunities for earnings would be limited due to a higher cost of living in the urban context but also by

a strong desire to make a life for themselves in Raichur from the opportunities available there. Thus, out of 49 respondents, only four were actually working in Bengaluru.

For many youths, the desire to stay back in Raichur was inextricably linked to the issue of land and building a future for the family on the basis of creating a stable and viable economic unit. Baskar said:

> I want to build a house and buy a car in my village. I want to come to Bangalore and stay here for a job. But I wish to own a house and live well in my village.

Das, who returned to the village disappointed after quitting his job at a call centre in Bengaluru, similarly said:

> I want to build a house. I want to make my parents rest and stay away from agricultural work. I also want to buy a bike.

Eshwar worked as an agricultural labourer and as a construction worker intermittently in his village in Manvi. He then enrolled in the Pragati course in Raichur, and through his own contacts, he got a job as a cashier in a Big Bazaar outlet in Bengaluru for a monthly wage of INR 10,000. He lives in a shared PG (paying guest) accommodation, for which he spends INR 4,500 per month. His family is now pressurising him to return to the village, and he is inclined to do so:

> I want to earn and look after my family. I would also like to get a house constructed and buy a bigger piece of agricultural land when I have enough savings.

Part of the inclination to stay back or return to Raichur was linked to the experience of the trainees with the training centre, as well as with the overall environment in Bengaluru for a migrant seeking work. Baskar is a former construction worker who worked in both Raichur and Bengaluru. He joined the Move-Up training centre, where he trained as a driver. However, the placement team was unable to provide him with a job, and so he went back to his village. Over the course of the next six months, Baskar found himself successively in two driver jobs paying around INR 11,000 per month, but as salary was infrequently paid, he quit these jobs. He finally found a position as a driver in the nursery in his own village, at INR 10,000 per month, and is happy with this. However, he has still not received his driving licence from the training centre as promised.

Umesh, another ex-construction worker, had worked on construction sites in Raichur, Bengaluru and Kerala, where he had earned between INR 350 and INR 450 per day. He later trained as a driver at the Move-Up centre, but he could not afford to stay and wait for his driving licence in Bengaluru, so he decided to return to his village. According to him, even if he had opted to stay and find a job in Bengaluru after the course, he would only have been able to get a job to pick and drop vehicles for servicing in an auto-servicing centre.

Umesh's case is interesting, as he returned to working on his family's divided agricultural land, from where income was very limited. Thereafter, he worked for some months for a trucking agency to deliver cement from Salem to Bengaluru. Although this job promised an income of INR 15,000 per month, he had to quit as the payment was very irregular. He returned to construction work, in a quarrying unit run by a relative who supplies stones to villagers who are building houses. The unit employs three other workmen. Umesh gets a daily wage of Rs 500 and a lot of free time as his working hours are only in the morning to early afternoon, and he is happy with this job. He admitted, however, that in case the unit closes, there would be very little by way of options for him as there is no work in the village. Although he finally received his driving licence, he is no longer interested in going to work in the city.

Sanjay is an arts graduate. After working sporadically in medical shops in his village, he joined Move-Up in the sales management course. Through the placement service, he received an offer from a call centre in Bengaluru. He worked there for just three days and then left because he heard stories from colleagues about delayed payments. He was staying at the Move-Up residential centre, but 'they told us to go out soon and find other places to stay … no food, only accommodation was provided for INR 50 per day'. He thought the training centre would offer some help to stay in Bengaluru, but they did not. Expressing extreme disappointment, he said:

> They haven't even called us after that. After graduation, they won't care for us. None of my friends I know are working. All have left jobs due to high-paying guest accommodation rates. During training if the salary is so low, how to survive? Move-Up says no need to pay in advance. But we can't even pay the rent with our salary.

Thus, he was forced to quit the job and return to the village, where he does a bit of agricultural work on the land owned by his family but spends most of his time 'roaming around'. There is no employment in the village, according to him.

Ramesh, who worked as a construction labourer and then in a CCTV company where he got paid INR 9,000 per month, quit his job as the owner was abusive and he did not get paid for night shift. He went back to his village and eventually joined and completed the Move-Up driving course. However, he was not able to get any placement after his training and again returned to the village. His dream now is to 'work in the village, … start a business and to make money'. He also wants to fulfil his parents' wish that he should study further.

As we followed these students after the completion of the training, the varied trajectory of their occupational lives highlighted not only the unpredictability and instability of the job market but also – and importantly – that the training they had received placed them on a fragile footing vis-à-vis the job market. The placement services of the training centres offered only very partial support in terms of providing information, networks or post-placement mentoring. In sharp contrast to dreams of an office job involving computers, placement was typically in stores like Big Bazaar in Bengaluru with a salary of INR 10,000 per month and with no additional benefits, as a part-time employee in a hotel in Raichur with INR 7,500 per month as wages, or at a Honda showroom, helping clients, at INR 4,500 per month. A few were fortunate to get positions at showrooms of Girias or Panasonic with a package of INR 10,000–11,000; only one was placed at a call centre with a monthly salary of INR 18,000.

Conclusions

Most skill development programmes are designed from the perspective of businesses and employers, with little attention to the needs of the youth themselves or the realities of local economies. For instance, responsibility for creating skill training curricula and accreditation standards has been given to the SSCs, which represent the industry. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the establishment of the NSDC in 2008 to provide government funding for skill training led to the proliferation of private skill training organisations (which sprouted up to take advantage of the funding that was made available) and many uncoordinated interventions, whose impacts are rarely assessed. Nandini Gooptu points to a contradiction at the heart of the national skill policy, which aims to 'reconcile a scheme for private sector profit by supplying trained labour to employers, on the one hand, with a welfare measure for employment and livelihood generation, on the other' (Gooptu 2018: 243).

The 2016 review of the flagship government programme, the PMKVY, and the SSCs by the Sharada Prasad Committee is critical of the promotion of short-term skilling and certification programmes at the expense of vocational

education through ITIs and polytechnics, which offer longer-term diploma courses – an approach that may not deliver marketable skills. 'Expenditure on PMKVY appears to be a wastage of public resources without achieving the desired goals of providing employment to youth at decent wages and meeting the skill needs of the industry' (Government of India 2016: 22). The committee has therefore recommended that short-term courses be replaced with long-term ones enabling trainees to acquire a National Competency Standard Certificate (Government of India 2016: 170). The committee was also highly critical of the governance structure and funding model of the NSDC, which has led to multiple issues with the functioning of the SSC. A particular gap was the absence of any kind of labour market analysis, without which projection of labour demand and framing skill programmes lacked credibility and effectiveness (Government of India 2016: 55).

In this context, skill training appears to have gained a commercial edge, as witnessed in the establishment of new 'skill universities' such as TeamLease Skills University in Vadodara, which offers diploma courses in domains such as hospitality, financial services, banking, tourism, IT, mechatronics and pharmaceuticals, and a bachelor's degree in vocation. The World Skill Center in Bhubaneswar was set up by the state government, on the lines of a private institution charging fees for courses offered. But a few studies have attempted to assess the implications of this 'highly privatised, demand-driven skills economy' (Maithreyi et al. n.d.: 7). The push towards 'vocationalisation of education' is another outcome of the new emphasis on skills: vocational courses are sought to be integrated into mainstream education institutions and curricula without any real reform in the education space itself – a turn that has received critical attention from education scholars and practitioners (Maithreyi et al. 2017; Sadagopal 2016; Saraf 2016).

To take one example, Odisha has emerged as the skill capital of the country where hotel management is an attractive, professional course that draws a large number of youths with 10–12 years of schooling from rural/semi-urban areas. At the top end, expensive hotel management courses – which are part of college undergraduate programmes – can place students in five-star or boutique hotels and exclusive restaurants with decent salaries and career prospects. Less expensive or even free courses with the same tag provide only some basic training in hospitality over a few months. With this certificate, youths from Odisha are given jobs in places such as the Bengaluru airport, where they might be found working as waiters or behind counters in the cheaper staff canteens, earning INR 5,000–6,000 per month and housed in dormitory-like conditions in

nearby hostels. Thus, under the banner of 'skills', we find a wide range of courses that channel the youth into varied 'career' paths, depending on the type of training and socio-economic location of the students.

Orlanda Ruthven (2018) argues that the national skill policy has been unsuccessful in part because of its 'supply-led and target-driven orientation', which has created a bias towards short-term 'top-up' courses for youth who already have secondary or ITI qualifications (Ruthven 2018: 316). Training centres have no incentive to offer longer-term courses because trainees would have to be placed in jobs that pay a significantly higher wage.

The post-training trajectory of the youth in Raichur thus revealed a complex set of factors at work, where the institutional support from the Bengaluru-based training centre was inadequate to sustain them, either to get jobs, to get a driving license or to stay in the city until some employment could be found. While a few found work in their village, these histories revealed that there was no significant impact on the lives of these youths due to the training programmes they had undergone or due to their association with the city-based training centre. Irregular work in services (as a driver) or in construction defined the post-training lives of most.

In a context like Raichur where agriculture is a shrinking domain of livelihood, and with faltering development of industry, skills training would appear to be a significant intervention to equip the youth to find work in the emerging services sector. However, our study of the district raises several questions: First, can skills provide the bridge to sustainable livelihoods in a context where much of the employment in services is unregulated? Second, is skills training tuned to local/regional requirements – that is, do skill programmes match local job requirements? Finally, how does one understand the process of urban migration from the viewpoint of skill training in a district like Raichur?

The study has highlighted the disjuncture between skill training and the job market. While training programmes focus on tailoring, sales management, accounting/tally and similar courses, in a city like Raichur there are no garment factories, hardly any malls and very few companies which could recruit young people with basic training in accounting, tally, and so on. The obvious destinations for jobs, cities like Bengaluru or Hyderabad, are fraught with multiple obstacles, such as low salaries, high cost of living, the sense of alienation in a big city, and inadequate mentoring, support and hand-holding from the training centres. For women, the reluctance of families to allow them to migrate is a significant constraint. Beyond this, even though rural–urban migration is widely seen as part of the story of development, a large number of youths and their families in

Raichur visualised a future for themselves within the confines of their villages or towns. Their imaginations were anchored in the purchase of land, building houses and, most importantly, being able to find a suitable job in Raichur. In this vision, the dream of the local youth could be interpreted to be one where Bengaluru could come to Raichur, rather than the other way around. And it is here that policies have faltered, not only in not providing appropriate, more region-specific skill training but also in failing to provide an overall context of robust growth in industries and services such that local youth would not be compelled to look outside for jobs.

Notes

1. Interview with Faizal Mohammed, deputy secretary, Zilla Panchayat, Raichur, 12 November 2018. All names of individuals and organisations have been changed in order to protect privacy. All interviews were conducted with the knowledge and permission of organisations, individuals and relevant authorities at the ISEC and the NIAS in Bengaluru.
2. Meeting with Kumar, social worker and founding member, Association for Vocational Needs (AVN), 11 October 2018.
3. Interview with Reshmi, a social worker in Raichur, 5 September 2018.
4. Interview with head of skill training and focus group discussions with trainees, Youth Charitable Society, 10 April 2018.
5. Interview with trainers, Excelus Learning Solutions Private Limited, Raichur, 11 November 2018.
6. Interviews with Kumar, founding member of AVN, during multiple visits between 2017 and 2018.
7. Interview with Alex, head of Hope Trust, Mooranpur, Raichur, 7 September 2018.
8. Interview with Alex, head of Hope Trust, Mooranpur, Raichur, 7 September 2018.
9. Interviews with Kumar, founding member of AVN, during multiple visits between 2017 and 2018.

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