



## 1. Why Being a Member of EASAS Is an Excellent Idea

This note is mostly addressed to new members, but also to current members who wish to know more about the objectives of EASAS.

In the process of submission to the next ECSAS, we noticed that some (new) members want to resign their membership after their proposed panel for ECSAS 2018 was rejected. According to the EASAS constitution, they are free to resign by the end of the year. However, we would like to point out why being an EASAS member is worthwhile – irrespective of whether a proposed panel or paper was accepted for next year's event.

EASAS promotes South Asian Studies in all countries of Europe, and in fact EASAS connects scholars on South Asian Studies at an interdisciplinary level from all over Europe. Most academic associations tend to be organized at the national level, although almost all of them will have foreign members, and many explicitly think of themselves as international associations. Members of the EASAS board and council are based in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and UK, and members of EASAS hail from a much larger number of countries: we truly are an international association!

Our association runs on the labour of volunteers. We believe that for scholars, who are part of the academic world or are independently engaged in research on South Asia, it is crucial to build a community, and to support research and teaching concerning South Asia with regard to all periods and fields of study.

Academic organizations serve many purposes. They are conduits for information and provide networking opportunities for their members. Some are important lobbying organizations. There are benefits to being a member of a group. Members participate in the decision-making of the constitution, have the possibility to participate in the two-yearly conferences, including the Paris conference in 2018, and can contribute ideas to other planned activities. Attending an EASAS conference is an ideal way to meet fellow members of EASAS, and offers invaluable networking opportunities. You never know, but perhaps the people you meet may one day be in a position to offer you a job. Even if that does not happen, being known to colleagues in your field might come in handy when decisions about careers, scholarship applications or grants are being made.

Above all, associations are communities whose conferences and other events are gatherings of people with common interests. This point is the one we wish to emphasize: Joining an academic association is joining a **community**. A member of EASAS, at whichever stage of their career, is part of the "club", "one of us". That's why being a member of EASAS is such an excellent idea, even if your panel or paper proposal has not been accepted at this particular occasion. You can always propose a panel or paper for the next conference or one of our other events, such as the PhD or the academic workshops, in the future. And in any case, you will remain part of this wonderful community!

## 2. New Administrator at the EASAS Office in Bonn

We welcome Christoph Blumert as the new administrator at the EASAS office in Bonn, Germany. He will help EASAS members with any kind of enquiry and assist with issues regarding the administrative aspect of EASAS.

## 3. New Membership Administration by WITAGO

Since January 2017 the membership administration is handled by WITAGO, a company based in Bremen (Quintschlag 37, 28207 Bremen, [www.witago.com](http://www.witago.com)). The contact person for EASAS is Ms. Kerstin Biegemann, e-mail: [easas@witago.com](mailto:easas@witago.com). As the previous membership administrator, NomadIT, resigned with effect of 31 December 2016, this change had become necessary.

For members, the change has only minimal consequences. The membership fees remain unchanged and can be paid to the same account in Bonn as before. In addition, a new option for payment has been made available for members outside the SEPA: it is now possible to pay the fees by credit card. At the same time, the option of paying by PAYPAL has been discontinued. The best way of payment is by Direct Debit (in the SEPA area), as you will only have to make a transaction once.

In order to allow for a smooth management, all members were asked to opt for one of the three modes. Of course, it is possible to make changes in the mode of payment at any time by contacting WITAGO.

Membership payments are made for a two-year period. If you do not resign before the end of this period, it is assumed that you continue your membership. In case you do not want to continue your membership, make sure that your letter of resignation, addressed to the Council, reaches EASAS (Bonn Office, Adolfstr. 39, 53111 Bonn, Germany) before the end of the year (see Constitution § 3, section 2 a).

In case of general queries, contact the EASAS Administrator, Christoph Blumert, e-mail: [office@easas.eu](mailto:office@easas.eu).

## 4. 2017 EASAS Academic Workshop/ SOAS South Asia Institute Graduate Conference

The 2017 EASAS Academic Workshop/ SOAS South Asia Institute Graduate Conference took place on 7 July 2017 at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, with the support of EASAS.

The one-day symposium, titled **Worker-Contractors: Refiguring low-level labour market intermediaries in contemporary India**, examined the role of low-level labour contractors in contemporary India. Contributions focused on the formation and working practices of contractors to consider the following topics and questions:

- What kinds of insights does a focus on the widespread use of labour contractors yield in relation to the (changing) nature of subcontracting and outsourcing in contemporary South Asia?
- What new forms of labour recruitment and mediation have emerged in the context of Indian economic liberalisation?
- What do low-level labour contractors contribute to global supply chains?
- In what ways do labour contractors allow companies to avoid legal obligations to workers?
- What role is played by kinship and other social relations in the recruitment of labour?
- How does the position of contract labour differ from that of permanent workers?
- What is the role of labour contractors in linking informal and formal production processes?

The professional labour contractor is a key mediator in India's informal economy (Bremen et al 2009). The concept of the labour contractor is generally associated with what the International Labour Organisation terms a 'triangular employment relationship' in which the legal employer is separated from the person for whom work is carried out (Barrientos 2013). This definition covers a range of possibilities: beyond the initial act of recruitment, a contractor's responsibilities may extend to providing advances, arranging travel, paying costs of transport, food and shelter, negotiating wages and directly paying their workers for the work they do for someone else. The contractor's role may end with the delivery of labourers to an employer or they may take on a supervisory role while working alongside the workers they recruit. This diversity of activities is reflected in the range of names by which they are known in India: third-party recruitment agent, labour intermediary, gang-leader, jobber, mukkadam, kangani, sardar, arkati, maistri. Located between employers and workers, mediating the divergent needs of both while attempting to extract rents from one or the other, the contractor's position is often precarious and ambivalent. Emblematic of the porosity of boundaries between class positions, many contractors at the tail end of value chains that extend into volatile global markets start out as workers and "keep 'falling back' into the position of wage labourer" (De Neve 2014: 1303-4). Despite a growing recognition of the significance of labour contractors in India and beyond, there remains a paucity of studies revealing the social identities and personal trajectories of these kinds of contractors and the intimate processes of exploitation to which they contribute (Picherit 2009: 262-264; Mosse 2007: 43-44). Extending debates on this topic would make a valuable contribution to understandings of India's economy and global value chains beyond the subcontinent. Moreover, such work also has the potential to contribute to debates around the kind of "figurations of labour...needed to tell effective stories about contemporary capitalism" (Tsing 2009: 154), providing material for a rethinking of the role of diversity in the global economy and a reappraisal of theoretical narratives based on abstract, generic figures of capitalist and wage labourer. This one-day symposium responds to this gap in the literature by bringing together scholars using ethnographic methods to examine the role of low-level labour contractors in contemporary India.

The following papers were selected for presentation and discussion at the symposium.

- *The Thekedar as Translator: Mediating Labour in the Construction Industry*. Adam Sargent (The University of Chicago)
- *Low-level labour market intermediaries in the construction sector: a case study in Delhi*. Valentina Proserpi
- *Social knots and individual trajectories: low-level regulation of Indian labour market. Empirical case studies: Palanpur and Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh)*. Floriane Bolazzi (Université Paris Diderot (CESSMA) Università degli Studi di Milano (Nasp))
- *The Missing Link: exploring the role of middlemen agents and social networks in the migration and debt bondage of low wage Indian labour*. Laavanya Kathiravelu (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)
- *Thēkēdārs, Dosto aur Mohalla (Contractors, Friends and Neighbourhood) in the Global Supply Chain*. Thomas Chambers (University of Sussex)
- *Female friendships in India's new service economy: survival or solidarity?* Akanksha Awal (St. John's College, Oxford)
- *"Amma (Mother) Contractor" and her competitors: Becoming a labour contractor in an industrial estate in rural Tamil Nadu*. Brendan Donegan (LSE)
- *The changing role and features of labour intermediaries in organised migration: A case study from Tamil Nadu (India)*. Sébastien Michiels (IRD, DIAL and IFP, India) and G. Venkatasubramanian (IFP, India)
- *From Labour Contractor to Worker-agents: Transformations in the Recruitment of Migrant Labour in India*. Jayaseelan Raj (CDS Kerala) and Richard Axelby (SOAS)

## **5. 11<sup>th</sup> EASAS PhD workshop**

From 22 to 24 September 2017 the 11th EASAS PhD workshop took place at the Centre for Higher Learning of the "Orientale" University of Naples (Italy).

The workshop was jointly organized by Stefania Cavaliere ("L'Orientale" University of Naples) and Alessandra Consolaro (University of Torino). As per the EASAS PhD workshop tradition, young scholars had a unique opportunity to work for a whole weekend with senior scholars discussing their research work in the wonderful setting of "Scuola di Procida - Centro di Alta Formazione dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale," which is situated on the island of Procida ([www.isoladiprocida.it/unior/](http://www.isoladiprocida.it/unior/)). The workshop was attended by 16 graduate students from Oxford University, UK; Heidelberg University, Germany; Jawaharlal Nehru University, India; Lund University, Sweden; SOAS, UK; University of Zurich, Switzerland; Aarhus University and the National Museum of Denmark; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain; London School of Economics, UK; University of Warsaw, Poland; University of Manchester, UK; King's College, UK; National University of Singapore.

Martin Fuchs and Georg Berkemer were the EASAS senior scholars. Anne-Sophie Bentz, Lecturer in contemporary history at Paris-Diderot University, participated as a guest senior scholar thanks to an Erasmus exchange grant. This edition of the workshop was held in collaboration with SASNET–Swedish South Asian Studies Network. SASNET generously funded the participation of a student from the Nordic countries and of a senior scholar, Maria Tonini, lecturer at the department of Gender Studies at Lund University. The academic exchange in an informal setting was very fruitful, and all the participants gave a very positive feedback.

## **6. SAMAJ-EASAS Special Issues**

The 2017 SAMAJ-EASAS special issue number 5 is entitled 'Changing Family Realities in South Asia' and was published in autumn 2017. Guest editors are Fritzi-Marie Titzmann and Parul Bhandari. It can be read at <https://samaj.revues.org>.

The 2018 SAMAJ-EASAS special issue number 6 on 'Wayside Shrines in South Asia' is scheduled to be published before the next ECSAS conference (Paris 2018).

## **7. ECSAS 2018 in Paris**

The organization of the 25<sup>th</sup> ECSAS in Paris is in full swing. The conference will take place from 24 to 27 July 2018 at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, (54 and 105, Blvd. Raspail, 75006 Paris). It is organized by the Centre d'Etudes de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud (UMR 8564, CNRS-EHESS).

The call for papers is now closed and the decisions will be communicated to authors by mid-January 2018.

Here are some important dates in the run-up to the conference you might wish to save:

Early registration 5 February 2018 – 4 May 2018

Standard registration 5 May 2018 – 30 June 2018

## **8. EASAS PhD Workshop 2018**

The call for Proposals for EASAS PhD Workshops 2018/2019 is now open. Submission deadline is 31 January 2018. You can find more information on our website [easas.eu](http://easas.eu).

Last, but not least, the EASAS Board and Council wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Martin Gaenzle, President

Alessandra Consolaro, Vice-President