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Track 2
Voice and Representation in the
New World of Work China and India
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Competitive pressure is growing on fast growing economies of China and India. Labour markets are particularly facing new realities.

What is the picture in these two fast growing countries? Portents appears hardly encouraging. First, the comparative feature of the two would be presented. Secondly, the impact of these on the labour markets would be discussed. Thirdly, the status of voice and representative would be examined, Lastly possible sources of social security ahead, future of voice and new patterns of representation would be indicated with certain conceptual and theoretical aspects.

2. China and India

Both these countries are enjoying a state of virtuous cycle of high rate of investment, savings and growing size of market China with 750 million labour force and India with 450 million followed a command economy, as it were. India enjoyed a liberal democracy with multiple parties and a mix of public and private players. This has implications on labour market. Liberalization has led to withdrawal of state from the economic arena with a growing role for private players and market forces. Export orientations found appeal in China. Indian economy has been domestic market driven. China has been growing at an average rate of 9.8 per cent for two and half decades. India on the other hand, has moved initially from 3 per cent to 5 per cent, and recently to over 8 per cent per annum. Investment in China has been between 34 to 44 per cent for other four decades compared to India at 20 to 26 per cent but recently moving to the 30 per cent. Both countries of reaping the benefit of growth of domestic market.

China has moved from primary to secondary and then to tertiary sector. India, on the other, has moved directly to the tertiary sector. Consequent shift of labour and employment across sectors has been different. Employment in manufacturing in

China has doubled, while in India it is overwhelmingly confined to primarily agriculture sector.

3. Labour Market Features

Structural and regional imbalance, most employment with low productivity, labour force addition in excess of net job creation are serious problems. New forms of job are casual, contractual or self employment variety. Decent work deficit is growing

With reform in SOEs in China and public enterprises in India, problems of workers are getting worse. Labour markets in both countries are characterized by dualism: formal and informal as well as urban and rural. China has the advantage town and village enterprises some with good efficiency. Surplus generated by SOE reform, and workers moving out of rural and agriculture sector are also absorbed here. Small and medium enterprises sector in India is very large, well spread and with a long existence. It has enjoyed protection from competition. Now protection is being reduced and incidence of closure & sickness is growing.

India always had a national labour market with free migration. Cross national movement of workers is facing resistance and immigration is a major combustible political issue in developed economies. Immigrant workers get only raw deal in labour market. China imposed exit on well an entry barrier in movement of worker across sub section of its labour market, some relaxation is now evident.

Majority of the workers are in the informal sector. New additions to job also are in this sector. The paramount question is how to improve efficiency in the functioning of units, enterprises and workers here. But technology is becoming increasingly labour saving. But question is how to bring more flexibility through reform in the formal segment of labour market vs how to promote decent work in the informal one.

4. Labour laws and trade unions are established institution, in the formal labour market. They have virtually no presence or only minimal in the informal sector. Where to look to protective umbrella for the vulnerable, women, uneducated, unskilled, children, elderly and handicapped, retrenched laid - off etc?

Numerical base labour union is falling, they are losing their bargaining power, their nexus with political parties is getting weaker and they are politically divided in India. They are also facing a turf war with NGO and civic society agencies. Can there be an alliance between them? In China trade union is an offshoot of the one practical party. It has monopoly as a labour market player. Unions are supposed to assist in restoring production activity in their units in disputed situations. Only recently they are being encouraged to handle workers' grievances in foreign owned enterprises.

Vulnerable workers need support and protection from trade unions, civic society organization and of course the government. What is the likely outlook ahead?

5. New Initiatives

Given relatively jobless growth, rising income social insecurity and poor quality of new jobs, new initiatives have been overdue. China is better placed in this regard. Workers get health, education and housing facility by the government.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has been launched on a statutory basis in India. It ensures minimum number of days of employment to poor workers on a fixed wage. Contractors have no place and only local government agencies and Panchayat Raj initiatives are to implement it. The accompanying Right to Information Act provisions can be used to demand accountability and transparency. New Rural Health Mission is devoted to health care, while agencies like Employee State Insurance Scheme is now providing several facilities. A contributory, universal and tiered scheme is being considered for all workers in the informal sector.

Sarv Siksha Abhiyan (Total Literacy Mission) and Mid-meal in school are directed to attack illiteracy and dropout rates in school. Expansion in intake and reservation for certain socially handicapped in other levels of educational institutions would empower them.

6. Women Questions

Half the population of women in both countries are yet to get their share in power, representation, schooling and employment. They dominate in the vulnerable category of workers. Discrimination, retrenchment and violations of labour law in their case are

rampant. Several new empowerment steps are being thought through and even implemented.

7. Protest and Strike

Strike is illegal in China, but man lays lost due to worker protest is growing. In India its intensity is now low. They are fewer, shorter and on less demanding issues. New forms of protest, with help from NGOs and other social agencies are shaping up. International agencies, consumer group, big chain buyers are all joining hand in this regard. Social Responsibility of Business being canvassed by employers association, too.

In China, local agencies of the party are being encouraged to take up workers problems. International pressure is growing for human rights and other abuses in labour market there.

Silence of the suffering masses and their restiveness speaks lauder than any other voice. In India it get part outlet in elections, But other symptom of tension are visible in both countries.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, the balance of reality would be presented alongwith certain conceptual and theoretical questions

Emerging policies initiatives from government and other social partners would be covered. Development along with sustained redistributive steps by the government and supported by social forces can bring a more just and stable society.

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