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Employment in Indian IT industry - some concerns

Rumors of financial crisis have been looming around throughout the last year, or is it just rumors? How is it reflected on Indian IT/software industry? Lets see some statistics.

Exports constitute more than three fourth of Indian IT-ITeS industry revenue. Around 70% of India's total export of computer software / services is shared between US and UK, the major share being that of US at around a little more than 50%. That shows the extent to which Indian IT industry depends on these two economies. The US GDP growth had a negative growth of 0.1% during the last quarter of 2012, first time since 2008-09 recession. And it's a negative growth of 0.3% for UK for the same period, the country being in negative growth trajectory for three quarters in the last year. The years 2010 and 2011 had shown signs of recovery from one of the gravest recession we had in our lifetime. The Indian scenario follows this trail with constant downward trend in quarterly growth rate for the past two years. The indications are clear, it's a tough year ahead if not the toughest yet.

Campus hirings

The negative trend is reflected in campus hiring by India IT majors too. Campus recruitments saw a slump in 2012 which is predicted to follow through 2013. Reports confirm reduced campus hiring by all the 10 top technology firm, some by as much as 50%. TCS plans to hire 25,000 freshers in 2013-14 against 60,000 freshers in 2012-13. Deferring of joining dates even by companies like Infosys did not come unexpected. Together with this we have to read the tendency in attrition rate among software professionals. May be for first time firms have registered a single digit attrition rate, which has been inclined downwards for the past few quarters. Lower attrition leads to lesser need for additional staff by the companies. And now Industry requires around half the number of employees required as in 2003 for every additional billion revenue, which justifies the fact that growth in employment generated lags behind the growth of the industry. This is one part of the story which makes the job market dull.

Higher education - number and quality

According to AICTE statistics there are around 3.5 million yearly intake seats currently for UG, PG and diploma. By 2011 statistics India has 3393 engineering colleges with around 1.5 million seats of which nearly two lakhs remains unfilled. On graduating 70% remain jobless and further, 30% remain jobless even after one year. Computer Science and IT has lost preference among the engineering aspirants. Considering the fact that more than 30% of allotted seats were in Computer Science / IT in the last decade, the number of computer/IT engineering entrants into job market will be good in between 3 to 4 lakhs. Coupled to this is the fact that 75% of technical graduates and more than 85% of general graduates are found to be unemployable in the industry. According to Aspiring Mind's National Employability Report 2011 'employability decreases logarithmically with the number of colleges in the state'. The illogical and indiscriminate opening of engineering institutions has affected the quality of education. It is also normal now that one third of engineering seats are lying vacant in various states. When education is a business, lesser profit means search for other greener pastures. 180 of the B-schools were closed in the year 2012 and another 160 are in line. This is in store for the engineering colleges too. Succumbing the control of education to commercial interests has taken a toll already. The above statistics just shows the alarming unemployment prevailing among the engineering graduates and one of its reason. It shows irreparable gap between supply and demand in the job market.

Layoffs

Compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) for IT industry is 14% for the period 2008-2013 against 33% growth between 2003 and 2008. While it was expected to generate 230000 jobs by the industry in FY2012 the figure

is 2 lakhs for FY2013, which is a far lower number compared to the aspirants entering the job market. 2012 also saw the steps for huge lay-offs in IT firms, globally as well as in India. HP's move to reduce the work by 27000, Yahoo's 2000, T-Mobile's 1900, Nokia's 4000, Microsoft's 200, Cisco 1250, TI 1000, Google 4000 (in Motorola Mobility division), IBM 9000, AMD 2300, Alcatel-Lucent (ALU) 1000, Nokia Siemens 17000 – 2012 was not a good year. 60% of Motorola Mobility employees were affected in India. Infosys's 5000 also came as a shock. When we talk about layoffs we seldom consider the contract employees. Some companies have reported up to 30% of their employees belong to contract category. A good average can be anywhere between 10 and 20%. Usually contract employees get paid less than half of what a normal employee gets, which is a violation of the law. And they don't get counted during a layoff. All these present before us not a so rosy picture of the industry.

Some serious questions need to be addressed. What is the role of government in addressing the issue of unemployment and underemployment among graduates? When the employees are at the receiving end due to excess supply of labour what would be the measures taken by government to protect the interests of employees? How to ensure betterment of contract employees? It is in this context the need to implement Standing Orders Act and enforcement of other labour laws in IT industry becomes more imperative. We have seen IT firms reducing their payroll strength during the time of recession, even when the firm were not in loss; not that the firms were in loss but even they had a growth in profit and the concern were decrease in the rate of growth of profit. The interests of employees being neglected cannot be the case moving forward. On the other side, for each job lost in IT industry three indirect jobs are lost. An industry which makes a significant contribution to Indian economy cannot be allowed to downsize employee strength only for the reason of profit maximisation. The time to think aloud about protecting employee interests is not too far away.

EWS Quarters Evictions, Bangalore- Notes on the Struggle Kaveri

People's protests have seen an increase in number and intensity in the recent years. Majority of these are related to land acquisition for developmental projects. More often the entire state – including judiciary give more priority to these projects than the livelihoods of thousands. Recently we saw an inhumane eviction at EWS quarters, Bangalore.

A little history

In 1996, BBMP built houses for 1512 families belonging to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) on 15.22 acres in Ejipura, Bangalore. The buildings were poorly constructed and soon began crumbling, and there were hardly any basic facilities like water, electricity, toilets etc. The people who were originally allotted these houses began leaving for other housing, covering their expenses by renting out these allotted homes.

Many of these, were rented out to poor dalits and other minorities by relatively "well off" allottees. In 2003, some of the buildings collapsed- 3 persons died and several were injured. Instead of rebuilding portion by portion, the entire quarters were demolished; and families had to live in tin sheds for

over 8 years, having to fight for basic facilities. Recently before the demolitions there were only 5 toilets for about 3000 people. The nights were extremely cold and the days were extremely hot. Sewage canals to the back of the quarters posed a serious health hazard to the people. The lightheadedness of the women there in the face of all this difficulty and their will to struggle has been amazing to see.

What happened now?

Samatha Sainik Dal and Dalit and Minorities Land Rights Forum called for a public programme along with the residents of EWS. While mobilizing for the programme, going slum to slum talking to people, the bulldozers came in EWS quarters. The forced demolitions began on the 18th of January 2013. There was complete chaos after this. Workers were employed by BBMP to break the tin sheds which were in small gullies with poles and sticks. The first day of evictions, 4 local women residents and two men were detained in the police station. Meanwhile the leadership of the area called for a protest in front of the BBMP office and half the people went

there. The other half stayed behind to get their belonging out of the sheds as the demolitions continued. People begged with the men breaking the houses, saying, "Look, we are just like you, dalit, working class with young kids". We could see that the casual workers who were employed to break the sheds with poles were the only ones who would sympathise with the plight of the people. They, for a certain period of time, slowed the work, giving people more time to get their things out. The police, builders, BBMP were unmoving. We pleaded, argued to be shown a copy of the high court order, begged on compassionate grounds. But once in khakhi and once in the official white uniforms, the cops and the officials seem to be inhuman monsters who are indifferent to human suffering. Finally, many women from the area and a few supporters sat in front of the only five functional women's toilets for the entire slum of 1512 families, shouting slogans, "we won't let you break our homes and toilets". The bulldozers backed off from the toilets when they saw the crowd of 50 women adamantly sitting in front of it, refusing to move.



When the protestors from BBMP came back, they were shocked to see the extent of damage that had happened in their absence. There were heated arguments and finally some sort of consensus was made that women and children would come early the next day i.e the 19th with pictures of Ambedkar. The idea was to have all the school kids in uniform forming the front line asking for the demolitions to be delayed by 2 months till the end of their academic year. The High Court order was there, we had only the constitutional right to housing to make a claim for, not the "legal" right! From day one, none of the "leaders" who had been involved before, were on the spot. Community meetings had not been held

to plan about what they would collectively do if the evictions happened, the people were not even informed that the court order, ignoring the irregularities in handing over the contract to Maverick builders, had ordered for the demolitions to start by the 18th of October 2012!

Whom do they rule for?

Maverick Holdings Private Limited is owned by the son of ex DGP of Karnataka. Uday Garudachar. The Garuda Mall contract [an existing mall by the same builders] itself is being investigated for huge corruption and discrepancies by Lokayukta. The site for parking which was supposed to be 4 floors is now a sprawling mall in a prime location with 7 stories and BBMP land which was not included in the contract has been changed into a parking lot. This is the track record of this ruthless and very powerful builder with political connections in high up places.

On the 19th, by 7 AM, police arrived on the scene and started threatening the people who were just standing outside their homes, asking them to disperse. People argued that they have the right to be in our place of residence and were not doing anything "illegal". The bulldozers started moving in by 8 am and the police extremely violently dragged off everyone voicing protest or even pleading with them to stop, into the police van. They detained 21 women including 4 young babies. When produced before the Magistrate he took one look and said, "When there are men in society, why are women coming out of homes and doing these things?" That afternoon, after this show of force, the BBMP demolition crew started to demolish houses with more force, not even waiting for people to vacate. By the evening the site had been demolished to a large extent. The next day demolitions were stopped temporarily for half a day due to the protest on the site by civil society groups following the arrests. But they did not stay on the site for longer, and the bulldozers came back in the late afternoon to completely destroy the homes, lives and livelihoods of all the people.

Relief work

Neither Garuda mall builders, nor BBMP has given alternative housing or compensation to the families living there. "Original allottees have been given Rs 30,000 and assurances for flats in 40% of land while the rest of the 60% will be commercial space. But

the poor dalits and minorities living there on rented houses of the original allottees are now homeless, without money to pay as advance for another house and on the footpath. A lot of them have lost their jobs as domestic workers, coolie workers, drivers, mechanics etc because of the fact that they have been unable to go for work for 2 weeks, leaving all their belongings behind. Relief work was quickly planned and undertaken and we have managed to provide food, water, blankets and medical support to the people living there. But this is not for charity through NGOs but a group of individuals who want to keep alive the amazing spirit of struggle that all marginalized communities have. The odds against the community are huge- the cold, homelessness, apathetic state, irresponsible leadership, vote bank politics etc. But, efforts are on to keep the will of the people strong. Dalit Mathe Mahila Chalaveli, a dalit cultural group and some other individuals organized a cultural programme on the footpath recently. The only thing that will keep us going is the stubborn will of the people to struggle and survive. The occupation of the footpaths and refusal to

move from there is a strong political act that has been made by the people themselves. We salute the spirit of the women with babies in arms who did not hesitate to court arrest when the evictions happened, we salute the spirit of the people braving the cold and fighting for their right to life and dignity. Constitutional rights that were drafted by Dr Ambedkar are routinely denied to dalits , adivasis and other oppressed groups in India.

It is vital for those of us who have benefited from the caste and class privilege that our families have garnered for themselves, at the cost of denying education and violently suppressing empowerment of the dalit and working class people of India, participate in this struggle for justice that is led by the oppressed. Everyone has equal right over land.

Cartoon by Shammi



Industrial Relations and Labour Laws around the World – 3

Secki P Jose

Continuing with our travels, in this third edition, we take a look at the labour laws and industrial relations in China and Japan. China with its one-union system and Japan with its world-renowned management style are unique in their own ways.

5. CHINA

Total Population (2012) - 1353 million

Above 15 years – 1100 million (approx.)

Active Labour force – 800 million (2012 approx.)

Informal Sector Economy – Around 19%

Unemployment Rate (2011) – 4.1 %

The People's Republic of China has now grown to become the second largest economy in the world after the United States. It also has the world's largest labour force. China's political and work landscape is significantly influenced by the presence of the Communist Party of China because it follows a one-party system. The system of labour laws and industrial relations therefore is dominated and involves Government intervention at regular intervals.

China is similar to India in the fact that a large section of its workforce is engaged in agriculture. Just like India, it is also a country in transition moving from an agricultural workforce to a non-agricultural one. Due to the sheer size of the workforce, it has had to follow a path of very large-scale industrialisation. This has resulted in its own set of problems ranging from environment issues to poor working conditions. A controversy that many would be familiar with are the suicides of workers in Foxconn factories supplying to Apple.

Running parallel to its one-party system in the Centre, China also has only one trade-union confederation and this is the official All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). International trade unions like the ITUC have more than 150 million members, however the ACFTU with over 200 million workers as members would be the largest trade-union in any single country, if not the entire world. With such a large base and government support, it is not difficult to understand why the ACFTU has the ability to exert a tremendous amount

of influence on workplace conditions. A significant example was the unionisation of the employees of Walmart in China - which is notorious in taking a tough stance against employees that try to unionise.

Significant reforms in the economy were undertaken by China to integrate itself into international trade in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Thus, when economists try to compare India and China, they usually check to see what were the indicators in



China 10 years before - in order to get a rough estimation of India's progress post the 1991 reforms. The economic reforms in China were similar to India's – and both resulted in changes to the nature of the work-place. This was followed by a rise in the number of industrial disputes. Reacting to these changes, new labour laws were created and implemented in the 1990s.

Industrial workers in China are usually represented by trade unions who negotiate working conditions with employers. The unions and the employers would then be involved in negotiations concerning wages and other working conditions. This would be done in a 'worker's congress' system. This system not only discusses collective agreements but also conducts safety audits as well as produce corporate transparency reports. There are also tripartite committees (comprising of the Government, employers and workers representatives) set up at the state and district level throughout the country.

China also implements a minimum wage policy, though this is mainly implemented for its urban areas. There are significant variations in the minimum wages from state to state. For example, Shenzhen has the highest minimum wage of 1500

Yuan per month which is roughly equal to INR 12800 (at current exchange rates) while Jiangxi has the lowest at 870 Yuan per month - which is around INR 7500. In the capital Beijing, however, wages are fixed on an hourly basis. In Beijing, the minimum wages are fixed at 14 Yuan per hour. This roughly translates into INR 21000 per month (for 22 days of 8 hours each - at current exchange rates).

6. JAPAN

Total Population – 126.65 million

Above 15 years (2011) – 105.52 million

Active Labour force (2011) – 62.61 million (59.33 % of working age population)

Informal Sector Economy - Around 11 %

Unemployment Rate – 4.1 %

Japan has one of the largest economies in the world. It can perhaps also be called the most industrialised country in Asia. Thus, this also implies that Japan has a long history of industrial and workplace relations. The Japanese had eagerly learnt and embraced technology from the Western countries in the early 20th century. It used to frequently invite foreign engineers and scholars to come to Japan and provide training to the Japanese workers. Following this, it also developed its own style of work-culture and management principles that were in accordance to the Japanese cultural traditions. In fact, seeing the efficiency of the Japanese system, many aspects were studied and incorporated by the Western companies as well. The 'Six Sigma' target is a classic example.

Japanese employment has traditionally revolved around certain principles which set it apart from other countries. It focused on providing lifetime employment to all employees. It combined this with promotions based on merit within seniority. These combined to provide relatively stable careers for workers and therefore fairly peaceful work-environment. This was true for both the blue-collar

and the white-collar workers. The Japanese have very rigorous systems of industrial training and apprenticeship which help students to be skilled in their chosen profession by the time they complete their graduate studies.

Japanese unions are mostly formed at the enterprise level and as a result there is a degree of differentiation between companies. Thus, there is a very large participation of workers in unions at their company level but industry-level or national-level federations are not as strong. While, the workers unions are mostly conciliatory, it is due to the fact that the Japanese management style is also conciliatory. This is due to the early recognition of the fact that peaceful industrial relations was an important key to improving efficiency at the workplace.

Japan has very strong employment protection laws and so workers cannot be easily terminated. This is combined with significant increments in salaries with seniority which by itself provides a disincentive for



workers to leave. The labour laws provide coverage of employment protection to all types of workers. For example, workers cannot be employed on contract for more than 3 years. In addition to this, the focus is on providing a minimum wage that can provide more than the minimum necessities to

workers. The minimum wages in Japan vary according to region and industry. It ranges from 850 yen per hour in Tokyo (which roughly translates into Rs 87,300 – at current exchange rates) to 652 Yen in Shimane.

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In the next and final part of the series, we will take a look at the industrial relations and labour law framework in India.

ITEC in last 3 months

ITEC had an eventful last three months where we as an organisation were involved in various social and IT related events and issues.

The whole country was in a shock over the Delhi rape incident and wide amount of protest happened in different parts of country. ITEC organised campaigns, candle light vigils and protests at Koramangala, ITPL, BTM Layout, Electronics city and Brigade road with large amount of participation of people from different walks of life. During the protest at ITPL Cultural team of ITEC performed a street play on discrimination and violence faced by Women. On New Year eve ITEC continued the campaign in Brigade road which is the center of New Year celebrations in Bangalore. When the government of India constituted a jurists' committee headed by Justice J. S. Verma to look into possible amendments to the criminal law regarding sexual assault of extreme nature against women, ITEC drafted a proposal of amendments after a series of discussions and sent it to Justice J. S. Verma committee.

On Feb 10th ITEC film club screened the documentary "The Holy Wives" and three small videos at Marathahalli addressing Women issues which were well received and appreciated.

ITEC conducted blood donation drive at BTM layout on January 6th with a good amount of participation from IT employees. It was a joint effort with Lions club of Bangalore and was a great success.

Sessions on "Standing Orders" were conducted in BTM Layout and in Electronics city in the month of December which saw active discussions by the attendees. Similar sessions are planned in different areas of Bangalore in the coming months.

ITEC got involved in relief work at EWS quarters at Ejipura when the poorest in Bangalore where displaced from their shelter. The land which was allotted economically weaker section will be now used to build a shopping mall. Around 1500 families were affected. ITEC could collect an amount of Rs. 57300 for the relief.



Protest at Brookefield



Protest at BTM



From Ejipura EWS Quarters demolition site

The air is clearing out slowly

Brinoj

The air is clearing out slowly, with the myriad feelings of the mass- those who protested, those who pitied and sat back after letting out a long sigh of engulfed sadness, and even those who blamed it on the victim- which were enveloped in a single cloud of 'the reaction' against the brutal rape and murder of the 23 year old girl in Delhi.

It was unusual for the usually indifferent social psyche of the Indian middle-class to unify and create a huge wave of support to the girl. The shameful and savage incident could trigger the people of this huge country to wake up from the comfort of their slumber and join hands with others for a social cause, though the united people had only a couple of things in agreement, that the incident was a barbarous act, and the girl deserved a feeling of compassion and support. When it came down to the analyses of the incident and the ways of going forward, there were different opinions and arguments, rightly so in a democratic country, but the majority of the reasons and actions required, as pointed out by some of them, correctly reflected the wretchedness of the culture, civility and intellection of people of this so called largest secular, democratic republic.

It is not hard to imagine the initial reaction of a majority of those who came to know the incident, including women. "What the hell was she doing there so late in the evening?" or "Go out late with revealing clothes to provoke the guys and you are inviting the trouble." This is not a casual statement of people trying to analyze the cause of an incident. It is indeed, a statement prompted by the outlook of a society, where men are superior and have more rights than the women, to go out late, to rape any women in sight during the unusual times, and to show off their so perverted masculinity. For those who straight away put this argument had no brains to at least think that the probability of wearing a revealing clothe in December, when the temperature would definitely be lower even to pinch through the normal jackets. They are also not aware of the fact that kids and even infants are molested and raped and it could be because a diaper is a revealing dress to them, who justify and simplify everything with such stupid statements. Then came

the other one: "The class of people, the auto, taxi and bus drivers are rapists and goons." We have an exceptional knack of 'blame it on others' and 'me and those who surround me are perfect, all others are sh*t' attitude.

So what's the solution? death sentence? castration? Fast track courts? Are these things going to prevent more rapes? Definitely not, as there could be many unreported rapes happening and there are certain



cases when 'compromises' are made before it reaches the police (the chances of these are more, since we know how things work here). The definition of rape itself is misleading, if we look into the numerous workplaces, especially where women are employed in manual labour and get sexually exploited and assaulted by the superiors, co-workers etc. No voice will ever come out, the strength to resist will never overcome the fear of losing a job, and the calls of hungry stomachs would make the victims to concede to the same forces of awkward patriarchal masculine sexuality. There are another group of victims, who might not understand what happened to them, children, mentally challenged and even the so called invalids.

The real problem cannot get any simpler than the truth that "Equality" is a word that is as unreal as "Utopia" in our dictionaries and our actions justify that. We are a society having well defined strata and the orders of superiority make people to have an associated feeling of "being on the top" and behave in adherence to it. Gender, Caste, sub-caste, Creed, Religion, Economy are all on the same page, where those who are supposedly in the higher layer treat those in the lower layers as inferior and feel a false

sense of right to oppress. It is a group of overlapping circles, where some, while getting persecuted by one of the upper layers try to retaliate and find the enjoyment in oppressing those who are in the lower layers. Whoever formed the patriarchal society has shrewdly and absurdly put women in the bottom of each layer and gradually the 'fairer sex' has become an 'object' owned by the men. Most of the religions, rituals, customs and laws, all owned and maintained by men, have become the tools of men to continue making the inequality grow. Unless the mentality changes and we embrace the views of equality and work for it, similar incidents will repeat.

So the change has to come from within us. The solidarity and conscience we showed today should be a springboard to break the boundaries in our minds, created by age old practices and prejudices. We need to learn to respect not only women, but all those who are supposedly lying in the lower layers of the society. Educate the next generation to respect their sisters, mothers, the house maids, the



street vendors, and even the environment. Break the megalomania of believing that "our culture is perfect and it needs no repair". It isn't wrong to be proud of one's culture, but it becomes fruitful to the society when we try to think and imbibe the ability to condemn whatever wrong as wrong. Throw away the male worshipping rituals, rethink about the conventional 'marrying off' (what a word!) ceremonies and learn from the past. (Remember, 'Sati' (was there a more nasty practice anywhere in the world?) was an accepted practice and the right way of culture once). Discard the decrees based on the antique social orders, and last but not the least, keep this unanimity without a single drop of it

drained, till we reach the place where the mind is free and head is held high.

But, if the evidence is to be taken in a pessimistic way, we have started to show the volatility of our collective memory, the same fickleness that made us to forget the wounds of our democracy, the emergency period, the sikh massacres, the Bhopal gas tragedy, the demolition of Babri Masjid that would pave way to a large scale social divide, the Gujrat pogrom etc. We always find an easy way to forget the burning issues, even if it comes from another one of the perennial disturbances from the neighbor (a real problem indeed, yet it is not a long lasting one as the internal problems that the women face). The media aids this criminal, selective amnesia by putting in new stories, as if on a blackboard, erasing the older ones. They are the tongues of capitalism, which favours profit over conscience, profit over equality, profit over fraternity and profit over freedom. The government will continue its delaying tactics to make the protests die out and a law would emerge which would be another of those numerous laws that would die out during its infancy if we do not keep our eyes open after such an eye opening brutal event.

It is not an easy task, and it may not reap the rewards in the near future. But if we remember to go back after the protest; not to leave the clothes and plates that we ate to our mothers, wives or sisters to clean them up, not to shout at and curse the house maids, not to think of other peoples' caste, colour, origin, features, inabilities or religion with irreverence or contempt, and not to lose the new sense of civility, social responsibility and humanity; the destination will not be distant. The real onus is on us, especially the educated, well earning youths to be the torch bearers to respond and keep the vigil, continue the discussions, agitations and importantly ameliorate our own thoughts and outlooks.

Let the girl live through the hearts of a changed society.

The Great Dictate-er of Satire

Arun

An urban legend goes like this: A patient visits a psychiatrist to cure his depression. And the doctor asks the patient to watch a Charlie Chaplin film every day. To which the patient replies, "I am Charlie Chaplin". We do not know the authenticity of this piece of trivia, but all we know is that Chaplin has been through several ups and downs in his illustrious career. At one time Chaplin was one of the most influential American actors with his picture appearing in the Time Magazine's cover page twice. And the same Chaplin was bundled out of America during the McCarthy era.

A difficult childhood marked by poverty, Chaplin was housed in a school for paupers in London, when he was around 9 years old. A few years later, his mother developed mental illness and had to be admitted to a mental asylum. And with a father who was abusive and severely alcoholic, Chaplin's childhood was nothing short of a tragedy. From this background arose the greatest comedian of history.



The birth of The Tramp

We know the Charlie Chaplin from his oscillating walk, holding a walking stick, a derby hat that seems an extension of his body, an untidy coat over baggy pants, just the sight of which would tickle a nerve or two of ours. This character also called as The Tramp was Chaplin's most popular on-screen character that debuted in Kid Auto Races at Venice in 1914, by when he had already moved to the US. So says Chaplin about this character:

I had no idea what makeup to put on.... However on the way to the wardrobe I thought I would dress in baggy pants, big shoes, a cane and a derby hat. I

wanted everything to be a contradiction: the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small and the shoes large. I was undecided whether to look old or young, but remembering Sennett had expected me to be a much older man, I added a small moustache, which I reasoned, would add age without hiding my expression. I had no idea of the character. But the moment I was dressed, the clothes and the makeup made me feel the person he was. I began to know him, and by the time I walked on stage he was fully born.

Thereafter, there was no looking back for Charles Spencer Chaplin who was not only acclaimed for his direction and acting, but also received an Academy Award for 'Best Original Score' for Limelight in 1973.

Immortal themes

Chaplin did not hide his political inclinations. He spoke about them through his movies both subtly and overtly. And he did speak loudly through his silent movies!

With the accelerating assembly lines and the automatic 'feeding' machine which reduces lunch time, Chaplin takes a dig at the profit motive of the capitalist which drives him/her to farcical extents. In Modern Times, which is a satire on the industrialised world, the movie opens to show an assembly line with workers tightening screws one after the other. The condition of most of the industrial workers is not very different today. If we strip down the hype and euphoria of white collared workers in IT and ITeS sectors, the work nature is almost as monotonous and as distanced from the end products that these workers contribute in making, as is shown in the movie.

In The Great Dictator, Chaplin takes on Hitler and Mussolini. Though this was Chaplin's first attempt at a talking picture, his use of sound has been extremely appreciated. When Adenoid Hynkel, the ruthless dictator of Tomainia speaks through the public audio systems installed at street corners, you do not feel like laughing. A fear runs through your spine. Because, you are reminded that your country can very well be ruled by a Fascist like Hynkel, one of these days.

And it is in this movie that Chaplin delivers one of the best movie speeches of all time - "Look up,

Hannah":

The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress: the hate of men will pass and dictators die and the power they took from the people, will return to the people and so long as men die [now] liberty will never perish...

Chaplin & The Big Bully

1950's was the period of McCarthyism, when thousands of Americans were hounded and accused of being Communists and were subjected to severe investigations with little evidence. This led to loss of jobs and imprisonments. The movie industry was targeted heavily and Chaplin was a victim of this. In 1953, Chaplin was prevented from entering the US, because he was suspected to be a communist party sympathiser. Chaplin decided not to contest the US ban and moved to Switzerland (where he passed away silently on a Christmas day in 1977) though he went back to the US in 1972 for receiving an honorary Oscar.

In February, 2012, MI5, UK's internal counter intelligence and security agency, released details of how FBI had requested them for information which would enable them to ban Charlie Chaplin.

And how does Chaplin react to the bullying? He does what he was best at - satire! A King of New York, a British movie on US politics and society is released in 1957.

The life of Chaplin never ceases to amuse us, like his movies. It's not just because 35 years have passed by since he has left us that we must be reminded of Chaplin. We must remember him because his messages are as much relevant to us as was in the period of the great depression and greater dictators. Neither have we risen above a system based on greed nor have we nailed down blood thirsty rulers.

This article was earlier published in Bodhiccommons.org

ICTs cannot be a techno managerial fix

Haridas

The last two decades have seen an unprecedented growth in the commonly called 'information and communication technologies (ICTs) impelled by the phenomenal proliferation of computers and information devices, closely linked to an explosion of processing and access speeds, ever-lowering costs of memory and other critical components, convergence of images, sounds and writing in one digital medium, and propagated by a worldwide network of satellites and broadband fiber optic cables' (Keniston 2010).

Like all technological revolutions, this one too has inspired optimism, hope and fantasy and generated a celebratory literature (eg Singh 2004) but also skepticism and caution (eg Sreekumar 2008; Gurumurthy 2008). It is argued that ICTs can generate new livelihood opportunities, improve economic returns, reduce risks and empower socially. Efforts by central and state governments are geared towards improving ICT infrastructure in order to bridge the digital divide between urban and

rural areas, followed by various projects in all social sectors in which ICT is a major component to improve service delivery, increase transparency etc. In India, traditionally state and non-governmental organizations are the major actors in social sector and hence it is natural that they are in the frontline in heralding the benefits of ICT based initiatives. Government of India through PPP model (Public Private Partnership) has rolled out around 1,00,000 common service centres conceptualized in May 2006, as front end service delivery outlets to 'enable smooth and transparent governance' at the village level. Most of the international development agencies such as World Bank and DFID are engaged in various ICT based development projects in sectors like health, education, governance etc. There is a substantial body of literature which includes anecdotes and case studies of the success stories of these interventions.

Keeping aside the fantasy and the popular mainstream rhetoric, which envisages ICT as a

liberating tool from miseries associated with the imagining of the 'rural' and of 'development', we need to assess the realistic potential of ICTs as a 'facilitator' in rural development. In each of the success stories, it is important to ask the relationship between ICTs and the specific social context. Also failure is never discussed even though stories of failure are as abundant or in certain contexts far outnumber that of success. We will take 2 examples.

Gyandoot is considered to be the first of its kind initiative with the objective to improve the accessibility and use of ICT services by the rural poor. It was launched in 2000 in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. Gyandoot consisted of a state owned kiosk network. Private partners were engaged with this initiative at various stages of service delivery. The key facilities offered by the kiosks included online registration



of applications for land records, caste, income and domicile certificates; online public grievance redress, and information regarding government programmes; e-mail facilities for social issues and transparency in government.

Meera Tiwari & Uma Sharmistha in their field based study of Gyandoot observes that "...Overall, those with higher levels of income, literacy and landownership are accessing the Gyandoot services more than those with lower literacy, incomes and landownership. Further, there were no female users of Gyandoot services. In its current format of delivery, it was unable to effectively engage the economically and socially disadvantaged groups. Again, despite a strong supply-side market presence underpinned by a robust rationale for inclusive development, the outcome is far from being achieved."

A closer analysis of an another initiative to enable farmers; access to spot prices of agricultural commodities (which is supposed to empower them and improve their lives), shows that it has been useful only to those who never had to pledge their future products to wholesalers or moneylenders for

buying seeds, fertilisers and agricultural implements. Invariably these section of users fall into category of rich and medium farmers.

Our own field-based study of upper primary government schools in Bihar shows that after the introduction of ICTs based learning, more than 82 percent students have a significant difficulty in one subject and in most cases it is either English or Sanskrit which together account for 78 percent of hard spots. Also, in English and Sanskrit, the gender gap in learning is significant. Thus by middle school itself, the gender disparities within pedagogical

approaches in school are leading to gender gaps in knowledge acquisition and learning achievements (these have been noted by others too, see Aslam and Kingdon 2011). The gendered pattern in mathematics accessibility in middle school can be argued to be a clear predictor of gender-biased specializations in later life

(majority of boys will take up science and commerce as specializations at high school and college while majority of girls will take up arts and humanities). Studies based on NCERT data does not show any significant gender gap at Standard V though it does show overall low levels of achievement in both languages and mathematics at the primary school level (World Bank 2009), but we find that in the next three years of middle school (Standard VI-VIII), the gender gap turns significant in the case of Bihar. Thus ICTs can reinforce existing inequalities and in extreme cases can even exacerbate and strengthen these as we found one school in Bihar where the top percentile of students show similar patterns of improved grades in English, Mathematics and Hindi while the bottom percentiles show similar patterns of worsening after the introduction of ICT based learning. All the students in the bottom percentile whose scores had worsened were Dalit students. Before the introduction of ICTs, two Dalit students were among the top scorers. After, there was none. All had moved to the bottom. Sixty percent of responses in the students' questionnaire based interviews revealed that teachers running the CAL

programme in the school offer private lessons (tuition/coaching) outside school hours. Students who avail these tuitions constitute 80 percent of the top half in the class while those who do not are crowded into the bottom half. 90 percent students in the bottom half cannot afford the private lessons. Those who are availing the private lessons are favoured inside the school in terms of learning access. It is only this group of students who have access to the computer aided lessons in terms of access time and teacher supervision. Thus existing caste and class relations mediate access to ICTS. A similar pattern can be seen for the scores pooled across schools in Hindi for both male and female students.

Prof. T.P Rama Rao, in his paper 'ICT and e-Governance for Rural Development' observes that "Many solutions in the project phase have ambitiously packed several services and were launched successfully under the dynamic leadership of project champions. While these projects offered impressive results during the tenure of the project champions, they slipped in performance after their transfers" It was also observed that "In one of the applications, the citizens have abandoned the kiosk as it was located in the area where upper castes live".

Why do initiatives fail?

A techno-managerial approach pre-supposes ICTs have inherent liberating potential to resolve the challenges in rural development, where ICTs are commodities produced by big corporations whose ultimate aim is to increase the profit. Why do big corporations like Intel, HP or Microsoft get into rural development projects? The motive behind this is nothing more than from increasing their profits through expanding the markets. This approach looks at the digital divide between urban and rural social settings and argues on the importance of increasing the access of the people to the information highways by improving connectivity in the rural areas. While connectivity and improved infrastructure remain fundamental necessity for better performance of any ICT initiative, it is not guaranteed that it will ensure that ICTs in themselves become levelers in society. Govindan Parayil calls such endeavours "a modernist tendency to unreflectingly categorise and compartmentalise complex socio-technological changes into one-



dimensional social problems in a bid to resolve them through simple technological fixes".

The projects funded by international agencies have been using the jargon of 'participatory design and development' of programmes as an alternative. This approach often considers 'the rural' as a homogeneous entity which is a binary of 'the urban' and fails to see the contradictions inside the rural society in terms of class, caste and gender etc. Hence while designing an ICT initiative all these aspects need to be taken on board. Unless based on a radical perspective of social transformation, the chances are high that all these initiatives will end up in reinforcing unequal power relations in the society and sometimes create new modes unequal structure like IT rich and IT poor.

Mark Thompson observes, "If developmental discourse is an important topic for study because of the unequal power relations it embodies, then the power relations surrounding the development and use of ICT in developmental contexts can be seen as an important element of such discourse."

Perspectives About Our Economy: A Meeting with Professor C.P Chandrashekar - Part 2

Feddin, Gokul, Sowjanya and Haynes met Prof. C.P Chandrashekar, renowned economist and columnist for the Frontline. During an interactive session over a cup of coffee, Prof. CPC shared his views on the Indian IT sector and the looming clouds over the Indian and global economies. ITEC is publishing excerpts of this interview in two parts.

Q. Our next question is related to the behaviour of the Global economic crisis. The corporate debt was triggering the crisis in US, but in Europe it was the public debt. Your thoughts on this.

Prof. CPC: In a country like Greece, you have the situation where Greece becomes part of the Euro with high rate of unemployment. Germany after unification gets access to cheap labour and therefore increased productivity and was exporting its way to success. Where were the exports going? It was going out to other European countries. So you need this to sustain countries like Germany, but on the other hand you are taking these populations and putting them into a unified Europe with a single currency, they had aspirations of wanting European standards. What are European standards? Some notion of European standards are welfare benefits, pensions. So what happened was that Greece borrowed money to provide some of these. But other than instances like that, which itself is small percentage, this points to the deep problem of actually if you accept the concept of united Europe, there is a duty for Germany to work to reduce regional imbalances because otherwise you are creating problems. But if you look into other countries, Public debt came about because of the crisis. Because governments borrowed to beef up balance sheets of the banks and governments borrowed to pull companies out of the crisis which was created by the banking system. So this public debt is not because of profligacy of governments but because of profligacy



of private sector. The government expanded the debt to rescue an imploding system, it was the private sector which brought this calamity and not the government, the government had no other option but to save the system.

Q. There is huge resentment against the nexus between corporate sector and government as we can see it in movements like Wall Street movement. It was not the same situation 5 years back. Would

this reflect into a continuous political change across globe? Or is it going to be a passing fad?

Prof. CPC: All these movements like Occupy Wall Street and versions of Arab springs have some features that we have to recognize.

First, there is a declaration that there is something fundamentally wrong with capitalism in as much as it has not been able to deliver any benefits to significant portion of the population...

what people realize now is that the so called welfare states which we had after the second world war was an exception rather than the rule under capitalism. In the rule under capitalism, the rich benefits and the rest of the system actually does not benefit much from the growth. So the legitimacy of the capitalism as a system is under challenge, which obviously has some long-term implications.

The second thing of course is the declaration that we are not going to sit back. We are actually going to try and move for some kind of political change.

The only difficulty is that the very nature of capitalism has changed over a period of time, for e.g. the decline of organized working class, the decline in the union membership and so on. The consolidated forces which can be in some sense in the fore front to try and take on this de-legitimization of capitalism and belief that something need to be done about it to take this forward doesn't exist. What you are really ending up is a situation where you have these disparate, not really in terms of scattered, but also ideologically very disparate

movements. Also they don't actually reflect a single ideology. They don't reflect single organizing principle. So let us say the need for change or the recognition that this is not a legitimate system is a big step forward. But we don't know how these two factors will actually concede into the set of forces that would be able to push for a change.

Q: Next question is about intellectual property rights, copy rights and patents or in general something like privatisation of information. The argument to support that this is the fact that it nurtures innovation, by providing monetary benefits to individuals, it has been proven the other way round by the movements in the software industry like the free and open source software that its not really the monetary benefits which always drives innovation or rather it has been done in a better way, so what is your take on it in terms of its economy?

Prof. CPC: I don't go along with this argument that it will actually need generic monopolies, which are stable monopolies for long period of time 14 or 20 years, in order for people to innovate. There is a certain extent that in most sectors will automatically avail the innovative for a reasonable period of time to derive extra benefits and there are a few stray cases where you need some protection to encourage for innovation then that must be limited protection for a much shorter period of time.

But I think the more important thing is just look at the patent wars which are going on. People are just patent drones, you just buy out and hold these patents and then you don't use these patents or try to exercise these patents till such point of time when somebody is making money. Then what you do is go to the court and say that listen! This person is infringing patent XYZ, which I might not even generate it myself. I just go buy patents in bulk. Its a mad market and sort of litigation costs involved. The assets in recent times in the net and so on and you get estimates, there is incredible litigation cost. Why is that efficient? Where people are just spending money, first applying patents, keeping in their cupboards, waiting to find out which is it...is it twitter which is going to be brought now by apple. So twitter prices are going to go up, then let me go and say, I have got this bundle of things which are called patents which says if you actually do what you

are doing then you are infringing some rights I have. This is not innovation. This is speculation of a grand kind where you make small investments and hope that there might be a bang when suddenly they have much value.

Q: You have been an economist and at the same time an educationist, so from that perspective, looking at India's current higher education sector, it's very evident that the cost is really on the rise, students are being charged more. Are we really getting a return of those costs? Or is it just because govt. is shying away from the higher education sector, is that the reason you see an increase in cost? Are we really getting that?

Prof. CPC: Well, its two things. First is the government is investing far too little in both education in general including school education and of course in higher education and this obviously creates a huge gap between the demand for education facilities including in higher education and the availability in the public sector or the public domain as provided by the state.

The second is the state is obviously now convinced itself that the way to deal with that problem is not to actually find the revenues to be able to expand this expenditures. We keep having these 4% GDP, 5% GDP, 3.5% GDP different estimates for different segments, total educational expenditure, educational or health expenditure or whatever. You are not even seeing advance in that direction, even when promises are made in paper. Finally when it comes to putting down money there that much money doesn't go to this sector and therefore it's obviously convinced itself that the way in which this can be resolved is by bringing in private capital. Now, there are two ways in which private capital can come – One thing to say is, look at America, it has private universities, that's philanthropy.

Harvard has its big endowment, it's invested and it gets revenue but the point is even despite all that Harvard education is not a cheap education. It is an expensive education. It's not like the state is providing you free higher education. Even with that, it's not because of the fact that Harvard is a typical profit maker but even then it has its endowment which is a philanthropic endowment, it plans and invests well but yet it has to charge around 40,000USD or 50,000USD a year as institution fee. so

with the government convincing itself, you are getting even that kind of private capital coming which we had in the past, we have the TATA institute, Indian institute of Science and Birla institute of Technology in Pilani, we have institutions which were created with private money and not with the intention of profits. But now what you are saying is because you want private sector in India, you want profit making private entities even though that's not permitted by law as yet in India because in India if you want a degree or a certificate which is recognised by the state then that institution can't be a profit making institution, it can make surpluses but all of the surpluses have to be packed into the same institution, it can't be taken out. Then you find all sorts of outsourcing raised in which you can take out the money from these institutions. And then you want to legalize this profit making activity. That obviously would affect the kind of education provided. These institutions are saying that the government should allow us to operate, government should allow us to charge whatever fee we want, the government should allow us to take out the profits from the entities but the government should not intervene to check and ensure that the education is of quality. So you don't want any regulation of quality, you want some peer review, god knows what it is going to be, and finally there is demand which I think is a really dangerous demand. People say that if you are going to have more and more education provided by private sector you are going to exclude so they say why you should exclude. If there are deserving young people who should be given an education, they will check the marks and give them admission, let the government pay the fee. So you want the government to subsidise profit making higher education, then why shouldn't the government set up higher educational institutions itself? Why should it give the money to the private sector? That's really the last step.

Q: Please give us your perspective on Indian Middle Class, in terms of their economic affiliations and the present status. What are the real factors obstructing the middle class joining the social movements in a very coherent and a big way?

Prof. CPC: Let's take the period, post independence. The middle class largely consisted of that segment of the population which got its employment from

the state. This was a very nationalist middle class who went along with Nehruvian policies and they fought for that kind of a strategy. But, over a period of time, because of the state itself, in some sense, failing together, because of the shrinking of the state, because of its inability to be able to mobilize the resources needed to finance its activities.

What increasingly happens is that you had to find more and more jobs outside the public sector. For a long period of time, this wasn't happening in the private sector, till quite recently, some niche sectors in the private sector started generating even



additional jobs which is paying relatively well. So, you saw therefore the burgeoning of a segment of middle class, which is private sector dependent, and was doing sort of well.

As far as that segment is concerned, obviously, they think that the state should not be an impediment to this sector which is providing jobs and other people now aspire to get the same kinds of jobs. They don't want the state to be built on this whole theory. The state can only do wrong you let the private sector handle it and finally giving us the jobs.

This essentially meant two things because the private sector has its own logic and it wants to collaborate with its own Finance, its own capital, its own investors and so forth. It wants more deregulation, decontrol etc. So, this segment, which is either there or aspiring to be there, actually begins to imbibe the cultures of the institutions from which they see their future emerging. Therefore it's not any more a segment, the educated middle class, that constituted one of the front runners in defending self reliance, defending

nationalist agenda, anti imperialistic agenda etc. that has got diluted over a period of time, and combined with the belief that the state can only do bad, actually generates the separation in which you are seeing a smaller and smaller role for this sort of vanguard section. A section which can play, in an ideological sense an important role, being over a period of time.

Q: Personally I am against new liberal policies, because it is a kind of an open market, no public control anywhere, but IT industry is one such product and people are very happy with it, because at the age of 21, you can be economically independent. So being into this world, and if I talk against globalization, inside my company, no one will take it, because they are enjoying the fruits of it. As an economist, can you counter this?

Prof. CPC: What influences people's ideas and thinking is a complex issue.

We should be clear about something about the IT industry, particularly software and software services, but also including the larger IT and telecommunication. The notion that its success is completely independent of the state is wrong in a double sense. I think that state discriminated against the hardware sector by liberalizing hardware in order to inculcate the growth of software ever since Y2K. We saw a market there.

If you go to the Homi Bhabha committee report, the idea was India should build a hardware sector, not for the big machines, mainframes etc, but for the medium and small machines. The idea was that we should get complete self reliance. It would have been a grand trajectory, because we know what happened to the industry, the hardware industry, we know this has become the dominant sector. As we know mainframes and so on are not any more of that significance. But we dumped all of that.

So firstly we discriminated in favour of the so called IT industry but actually this software IT enabled services industry. Secondly I don't think the industry is not completely independent of the backbone, the hardware resources, which the government would provide and put in place. It needs communication facilities. And not only private but a large part of the resources was actively invested and promoted by the state.

The third point is, what is the effective rate of taxation now after more than 10 years. The industry which generates the most profit, virtually runs on a tax holiday, because of the software technology parks policy. So you can just put up a board and call it a technology park. So if you look at the effective rate of tax taking everything into consideration, as opposed to the 33% or more that should be paid, you have the sector paying effectively 10% to 12%. If you look at the budget papers there is a section which says taxes forgone, but the way in which it is described is called tax expenditures. If you give money to the poor it is called a subsidy. But if you give a transfer, because it is an interest rate transfer, negative 20%, subsidy is a negative tax. They are in a sense by reducing the tax, they are giving a subsidy. So you are subsidizing the sector but because it is not the poor but the richest sectors of India's economic activity areas and you call it a tax expenditure not a subsidy. But that is huge tax expenditure, something like the equivalent of almost 20%.

And finally, there are some sectors which are directly or indirectly related to the software services, particularly telecommunications.

Just look at the telecom sector. What we have done for the private sector. We know that the private sector began by making completely irrational bids to get spectrum, so much so that they had to price themselves at 16 Rupees a minute, and there was a time when it was 16 Rupees both ways. And then obviously the market was expanding and then they said we have losses and we have to close down because of the irrational bids. Those who made irrational bids got huge chunk of licenses and they didn't have money to pay for the licenses. You should have disqualified them. But instead of disqualifying them, you allowed them to choose those licenses which they are going to take and gave it to the second and third bidders for which they didn't want to take. So you basically favoured the irrational against the rational, because the rational bidders were obviously looking at what is the possibility. Then when they started making losses, you allowed them to migrate to a revenue sharing regime, even though they actually got their licenses based on the license fee. So that is another way in which you subsidized them. And then you started the first come first serve policy in which you gave

the 2G spectrum on historic prices.

So if you look at it, there were many ways in which this sector was benefitted by what the government did, what the government did not do, and what the government gave i.e. these subsidies. So these are prime examples of neoliberal areas. If you say there are some other reasons why I don't like the state then maybe. But nobody can argue that they are not for the state because they happen to be the beneficiaries of the industry which grew independently. This industry has got huge gifts from state and it is really a poster child of neoliberalism.

Q: But from a common man's perspective these gifts which the state gave to the industry because of which so much employment generation is happening, people are happy to go with that.

Prof. CPC: Of course it created some employment. But let's see, this sector has contributed 5% plus of GDP. But what is its contribution to employment: 0.2%. So there is no relationship to the revenues it generated and the employment, it is like any other capital intensive sector. So then why not give these subsidies to say power generation? All I am saying is, it's not the number of jobs of the sector. What we are saying is relative to the growth of the revenues of this sector, how many jobs it is generating?

It just so happened that this sector did not exist in any significant measure and then when it generates 1 million jobs you say Aha look 1 million jobs (or 2 million whatever it may be) it has generated. So comparing to the revenue generation, there is a huge disconnect in the employment generation.

Q: Our last question in this session would be related to a famous quote which says technology reveals the active relation of man to oneself. In the present scenario how does the use of social media with its multiple ways of consuming and representing human thoughts and information changing the social relations?

Prof. CPC: That question is best placed to a sociologist or someone who studies the psychologies of a crowd.

Q: But we would like to hear your perspective..

Prof. CPC: Let's say, technology has opened up the space in terms of the convenience and

communication between each other, not only each other as individuals but also each other's groups. At least this is what technology has offered. But this can be for good or can be for bad. At least in terms of circumstances for mobilization for good causes. In other instances this becomes a way in which something that should not exist, should not be allowed, say pornographic material, goes viral. So it can be used for positive and negative ends. So I don't think it's only got 1 social consequence. What it has done is that it has created this space in which people can interact with each other and groups, which can be used for good and can be used for bad. Other factors in society will determine whether it's used dominantly for good or used dominantly for bad. It is not a technology as such that will determine this.

ITEC: Thank you so much on behalf of the ITEC fraternity.

About ITEC

IT and ITeS Employees Centre (ITEC) is a voluntary non-profitable togetherness FOR, BY and OF the IT/ITeS employees and professionals. It is a collaboration of people working in the IT/ITeS industry with a self-assigned objective to work towards the welfare of the employees and for the overall progress of the IT sector in India. ITEC is a platform for the IT fraternity to collectively address various issues and challenges faced by their own peers as well as the industry in general.

ITEC, which brings together an abundance of talent, experience and vision, will strive hard to position itself as an opinion maker and a catalyst for progressive changes in the IT industry and will spearhead campaigns for bringing in appropriate policies and best practices in the industry. ITEC will continuously engage in research studies to understand and analyse the underlying dynamics of various developments in the industry and to suggest ways and means for ensuring the well-being of the very community that brings glories to it. ITEC would be an ally for everyone in the community to collectively address their grievances at work and to muster necessary support and guidance in their effort to find resolution for the same.