

ECONOMICS OF INEQUALITY

White Collar Job Drama

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IN BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IT IS AN accepted notion that personal consciousness of a man is product of his role in existing mode of production in evolution to his/her genetic factors& current environment. Every person with adequate purchasing power is a consumer as also a productive unit of human being for earning livelihood, a producer of goods and services. In awareness or even in unawareness, the changing consumer preference and the enormous diversity of consumer goods keeps him/her obsessed with earning more in order to support his/her increasing greed turned into need, the white collar workers today are an individualistic mutation/metamorphosis of its predecessors.

Impact of easy access to diverse consumer goods under one roof in a shopping mall has been aggravating an insatiable thirst for *nouveau lifestyle products* not considering conspicuous consumption as luxury but absolute need. Late Satyajit Ray in his famous film 'Simabaddha' has shown how easy access to a luxurious flat provided as perks by an MNC employer to an aspiring senior executive made him compromising with time honored human values to keep an affectionate care of own old parents under one roof in order to keep constant vigil on their age related vulnerability. Nobel Laureate Sri Rabindranath Tagore in his inimitable song pointed out in asking, –Where is the end of the road of so much desire and greed? (the Bengali lyric '*Pather sesh kothai, sesh kothai, ki achhey seshey, eto kamona eto basona kothay meshey?*'). As a profound creative thinker, Tagore being much familiar with Western Consumerism, his question has its obvious answer within it, –the destruction of socio-economic fabric as now devastating America and Europe shattering the myth that stoking the fire of desire is the engine of growth is a flawed version of growth.

The modern generation claims a change of classical general model of motivation like prominent one of Maslow, when need of job security has been replaced by need for earning more money at higher stake and less security. The ideal is now improving self-employability towards a better organization by job hopping continuously since the motto is, life is a journey, –enjoy it. Even employers implicitly encourage this merry-go-round. It reduces problem of industrial relations among white collar workers' community if practiced judiciously by employers, – strategically in the same token averting the seize within i. e. industrial strife. In not very distant past, the progressive(in favour of the lower depth of the working class) element of white collar job community joined hands with the blue collar job community, gave them leadership sacrificing their own career. Those were days of social proximity intellectually termed as 'Declassed' from higher to lower class e. g. lower income groups for committed politics promising to usher a social change in favour of the oppressed. But reactionary political force does not remain onlooker and uses state power to contain the dynamics of social change. Indian state is no exception because according to Political Science, state is an instrument of oppression by the ruling class in the existing mode of production whether it is *Monarchy* or *Democracy*.

This social proximity has decreased over time in the country due to a strategic education policy of the ruling class under strong infusion of capitalist/individualist ideas even though socialistic government by declaration. In West Bengal, the withdrawal of English learning as a subject from government owned or sponsored primary education has compelled relatively affluent parents to send their wards to English medium Convent schools which are much more expensive than traditional native language vernacular medium schools either privately run or under state sponsorship. It is the poor parents whose wards languished under education in local language. So by design or default, from childhood the social difference between different income groups has been poignantly aggravated under the process of education euphemistically called human capital formation but in reality causing deformation of young minds, though it is supposed to enlighten the society and that also implemented by a left front government which is by words not by works pro-people definitely in this case. Upward social mobility being so restrained, dream of joining white collar workforce of larger segment of middle class and all lower income groups is shattered in this state paving way to the decline of Left Front rule after thirty four years, partly for frustration of the alienated middle class who formed their biggest Vote Bank in its initial decades. Hence to be or not to be a White Collar Worker is a serious social contradiction brewing in lower rungs of income groups.

DECEPTIVE IDENTITIES

The most notable phenomenon in Indian subcontinent is recent mushrooming of shopping malls across the country which after covering metro and urban centres, have ventured into sub-urban and nearly rural areas. These retailers having direct purchase from the producers in agriculture and industry are raking in the small towns enjoying a broad market margin otherwise earmarked for traditional market intermediaries namely in agriculture Fariah, Arhatdar, transport dealer, wholesaler & finally Distributer; in industry middlemen like sole selling Agent, Dealer, Wholesaler, Distributor in both cases paving way to ultimate user or consumer at retail end coming to *Kinara Shops* in localities or local markets.

The people employed here are white collar incumbent, the aspiring gullible local youth sometimes even with low brand business degrees such as spurious MBAs from the mushrooming management institutes assuring hundred percent campus placement, though Big Bazaars are not big paymasters. The catchword is that 'earn some job experience for getting cushy job appropriate to your educational status'.

In order to bar their access to Labour Tribunals, these mere salespersons standing on their legs daily for twelve hours, are designated as Sales Managers/Executives. While knowing or not knowing incumbents are also allured by big posts in very first job.

When they are fired without notice period or compensation in lieu thereof, they get no labour union support as local politicians are in the pay roll of politically influential mallowners often born in big industrial houses. The owners buy out newspapers opinion in their tacit support by generous spreads/spots of multi-coloured advertisements in newspapers and other audio-visual medias who once served society as conscience keepers but now taking their pounds of flesh.

THE DIVIDES WITHIN

White collar jobs are denominated by money and social ranking. While sixth finance commission has elevated the pay scales of faculty members to a much higher level over the past, now the academic profession is one of the best career options in India.

So one finds amidst the white collar community, there are several layers of status indicated by emoluments and authority. But that is true and universal for any country and economy whether it is developed, developing or underdeveloped.

Even within the same white collar job, there are several distinguishable diversity of status (a composite indicator of income and authority). An Engineer who is in core area like Civil, Mechanical or Electrical Engineering draws a much lower emolument as compared to Information Technology sector Engineer. It has caused a havoc maldistribution of talents across the same profession of Engineering.

In a number of cases, the freshly graduated Civil Engineer has joined IT sector in lure of higher salary in a competitive environment. But when the IT sector was sinking, there is a downsizing of organization, the nut in a round hole i.e. the Civil Engineer in IT sector on losing job, cannot go back to own core sector due to mismatch of qualification and experience. Employers also like employees whose career is properly focused. Thus one sees super specialized white collar professions are equally rewarding and vulnerable.

This distinguishes them from white collar employees who have three or five years' degree in general line i.e. the popular term referring age-old Science, (Arts) Humanities and Commerce streams. General line degree holders who are abused of being dropouts of the celebrated Joint Entrance Examinations, are trained by their employers where they join like mostly in Banks, Insurance, railways, post, tele-communication (boosted by Cell phone craze) or different govt. departments under heterogeneous ministries. India's so-called socialistic pattern of government normally does not downsize since most of their activities are directly linked to infrastructure and welfare of the people, which are yet to grow much more in order to cover the Indian community, the larger component of who are villagers.

Here one gets the happiest section of white collar Indian workers euphemistically called 'Babu' who have no accountability to organization, having secured safety net of large political party affiliation. So less the work, more they earn by strategic delaying. The 'Sarkari Babus' work only when they are bribed which is an icing sugar on cake (bribe plus high salary). Hence 'Transparency International' has declared India in most years ranking lowest less one from last in honesty by nature of Govt. service rendered by staff to top officials. It is no surprise that monopolistic

utility service concern in Kolkata providing electricity also have white collar 'Babus' who are activated by 'Speed Money', -the nickname of bribe.

The colonial legacy of Indian White Collar Babu culture has profound role to play in India's distinguished deplorable high degree and wide expanse of corruption making India infamous worldwide. Gunnar Myrdal in his celebrated book 'Asian Drama' explained in his inimitable language the 'Economics of Bribe' and its dense network across the Indian economy and the labyrinth of bribe when both Indian and multinational organizations had to make budget for bribe in a compulsive mode in order to move files through the concerned ministry officials to reach upto Minister through 'proper' channel for approval in the License Raj economy.

Since educational status is the prime determinant of obtaining the White Collar jobs, access to and achievement in higher education is the career building blocks as one is capable and positively ambitious to ride over the ladder of success, want to reach the commanding height, capability of continuous formal and informal learning is a desired psychological trait of a deserving white collar employee.

But as world famous Director Satyajit Ray has pointed out in several films like "Simabaddha" and 'Jana Aranya' that educated persons use their academic pedigree initially to enter a plum job but soon he/she is desperate to attain promotion/elevation of their post, mercenary values prevail on the conflict and compromise-dispositions subverting the ethical values that education upholds. Ironically Swami Vivekananda told in his inimitable words 'Education is manifestation of perfection already in man'. Swamiji who had seen middle class (the repository of White Collar employees) as the most dynamic element of any community from which best thinkers and achievers in science, Humanities and other disciplines have come out.

Since nothing is unfair in love and war so where education inspired ethics ends, war begins for white collar black gains.

The advanced mode of production reduces physical work transforming them into cybavage computer-controlled mental work. Thus many blue collar jobs metamorphose into white collar jobs through advancement of technology like Robotics, semi or fully automated computer control such as Enterprise Resource Planning(ERP) and Artificial Intelligence.

But since white collar jobs are higher paid, when it evolves qualitatively, it manifests within itself a quantitative self-reducing trend in order to make business more profitable by further reduction of salary bill eg. cost of most expensive human resource.

Hence operation strategy moves in two directions:

- 1st More capital intensive computerization in order to reduce white collar job further;
- 2nd Outsource production of goods and services to other regions or other countries where same white collar job is available but at much a lower cost.

While colonial capital has mystified itself into Multinational Corporations (MNCs), -once who exploited material resources of the third world, are now exploiting its mental resources by outsourcing for underpayment on skilled labour. It is a time tested ploy in order to retain international comparative cost advantage of first vis-a-vis third world. Big is cheating small in their own coin in white collar expertise without relocation of white collar labourer. Thus outsourcing is an advanced version of Brain Drain in global business with higher rate of exploitation.

White collar job naturally creates an elite cadre of favoured workers who is distancing itself from the blue collar toiling mass of motherland who now-a-days suffer from a jobless growth of high tech. production economy being placed just at polar opposite position by vicious circle of high technology by digital divide as poor being deprived of higher education becomes poorer by onslaught of MNCs armed with most advanced technology for mass production.

But in same token, it creates a self contradiction of increase of mass consumption commodities but decrease in effective demand for mass products for stagnating and/or even further reducing industrial employment opportunity of blue collar jobs. Thus 77 percent of urban Indian labour works in Informal sector with very low purchasing power and hence mass poverty takes its own toll on mass product demand which takes in turn cause loss of white collar jobs and/or worsening terms of employment in pay and perks like contract or permanently casual appointment for the erstwhile elite employees.

In a democratic state, the compulsion of electoral politics, insists on the ruling political party to intervene in open market contradiction of capitalist economy, by series of incentives and concessions to capitalists and welfare measures for the working class.

In a way, white collar jobs are a historical evolution of capitalist production and employment which cannot avert the nemesis of business cycles. For discerning observers, it is an interesting episode where the capitalist lobby is always declaring the non-essentiality of state power to intervene into *Leissez Faire* or independent state of market as a sacred place having own 'Invisible Hand' with a magic wand for ensuring equilibrium, succumbing the government to provide taxpayers' resources to refill their coffers on the plea of labour welfare for reducing unemployment. 'Head I win, Tail you lose' is the funny logic amidst massive human tragedy. So white collar job has come to stay. □□