

THE NEED FOR BUILDING A SECURE SOCIETY

– Guy Standing

Indians emerging from university or college in 2013 onwards will be facing a profoundly different labour market and economic system than were faced by their predecessors. They will enter a world full of uncertainty, with a global class structure in which they will be expected to be more entrepreneurial than at any time in history.

As such, they will need to understand the structural realities and to appreciate the need to avoid smugness and disrespect for principles of social solidarity. You may need help at some time, and you should accept the need for mechanisms for security for everybody around you.

Consider the emerging class structure in our globalising market system, in which India is fast becoming a major component. At the top is a plutocracy, it consists of a few fabulously rich household names, living in an objectionable opulence. They reflect a winner-takes-all market system. Some readers may dream of joining this elite. But there is no economic or moral justification for the degree of their affluence, especially given what is happening to hundreds of millions of people deprived of the very basics of humanity.

In terms of income, way below the plutocracy are industrious businessmen and women and below them a sizeable salariat, those in long-term salaried employment, in the public sector and corporations. Around the world, not just in India, the salariat is not growing, and many in it are finding that the benefits and protection their predecessors had are under strain. Even large firms can be taken over, sold or cut up, while much of the public sector is subject to outsourcing or restructuring. But many will continue to aspire to join its ranks. Beware. That could be a gilded cage, providing labour security but a life of limitations to human development.

Alongside the salariat is a growing group I call proficians. This consists of people with education, with energy and ambition, who are "self-entrepreneurs". They may earn a lot and live in the fast lane. They must beware too. Constant uncertainty goes with feverish intensity of labour. They risk burn out at age 31-and-a-half. A few of the successful may join the plutocracy; more will drift into the salariat. Many will drift downwards.

Before considering where they may drift, recall that the next group down the socio-economic scale is one where graduates are least likely to go. This is the old core, variously called 'the organised' or 'formal' sector, the working-class, the proletariat. Globally, this was long expected to become the majority. It consists of workers in stable full-time manual jobs, work-

ing for wages set by collective bargaining, with the prospect of modest pensions. Their numbers are not growing anywhere now, and will never reach 10% of the Indian workforce.

Ironically, the welfare states of the rich countries were built by and for this working class and mode of labour. For decades, Indian social policy planners tried to build a social security system and a set of labour regulations suited to this type of worker. But a contributory social insurance system will never work in India and is dying in every country where it was once a defining feature of society.

It is below the old core where a growing number of relatively educated Indians will find themselves. This is the global precariat. It consists of people faced by many forms of insecurity, with short-term jobs, fluctuating incomes, tenuous benefits and, above all, a sense of having no secure occupational identity or narrative to give their lives. They will be expected to be mobile, flitting between jobs, taking on much work that is not labour, in that they will feel they must do it but without assurance of remuneration.

This emerging class is described elsewhere. For the first time in history, millions of young people, and many not so young, face a life of systemic uncertainty. On leaving university, students will fear joining the precariat. But there is also an upside, since around the world millions are realising they have a detachment from the drudgery of constant labour, and can realise the potential value of other forms of work and leisure that can be creative, productive and fulfilling in ways that could not be said of full-time labour in a job stretching ahead for thirty years or more.

The trouble is that the price is too high at the moment. Insecurity preys on the mind. It wrecks plans to build a family. It induces stress and distress. Too many people are faced by years of uncertainty. Unlike risk, for which one can take out insurance, with uncertainty one cannot work out the probability of an adverse event or work out the likely cost or difficulty of recovering from it. To use a phrase from another context, it is about "unknown unknowns". This will be the reality for a growing number of people, even when they make a choice of occupation. Will it last? Will it change? Will I be able to adapt to the changes that will occur?

This is a moment for honesty, a moment when one should try to envisage the sort of society one would wish to encourage, when one cannot be sure where one will end up. As many readers will know, this is called "the veil of ignorance" principle, asking what you think would be fair if you would not know where you would end up

in the distribution of outcomes.

Those who ask themselves that question may conclude that the ideal would be a society in which everybody has basic social and economic security, the assurance of enough income on which to survive in times of uncertainty and insecurity. In a way, that is what the evolving debate about direct cash transfers or benefits is about. For university graduates, that may seem strange. Perhaps they have not even noticed that there is a debate about cash transfers. But if they want basic security for themselves and their friends and relations, think how much more desirable that would be for the hundreds of millions in the slums and villages of this rapidly growing economy.

At the time of writing, a pilot scheme has been operationalized in several parts of the country. In selected villages, thousands of men, women and children have been receiving each month an unconditional basic income cash transfer. It is a modest amount. But it has given discretionary spending power. And the results are inspiring, since even though uneducated and surviving in deprived circumstances, people are rational and spend on food, healthcare, schooling for their children and basic sanitation.

Now the government has been drawn to support cash transfers, and are rolling out experiments. We should encourage the reformers, and hope they will not lose their nerve in the face of opposition. It is not true that cash benefits are a threat to public social services, or will undermine a 'right to food'. The bureaucratic raj, dishing out subsidised items and telling people how to live, is paternalistic, patronising, inefficient and prone to deep corruption. We know that most public money spent on social policy for those deemed to be 'poor' never reaches the intended beneficiaries. Reform is needed.

Most ironically of all, in the future those in the precariat will also need a cushion of basic security. The state should be used to provide that, for secure people are more altruistic, more productive and more socially responsible. They make better citizens, and in society that is what is most important. We all need basic security in which to grow as human beings and as working people.

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15,000 Himayat-trained J&K youth to get jobs in 2013 : Jairam



Launched in the face of hostile conditions created by Kashmiri separatists over a year ago at the University of Kashmir campuses in Srinagar, the Union Rural Development Minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh's Himayat initiative will have nearly 15,000 youth trained and placed in different jobs in the public and the private sectors in the current financial year.

Mr. Ramesh promised for capacity building, training and placement of the conflict-riddled State's youth, besides the upliftment of women. In his keynote address in the Jammu University recently he revealed to an enthusiastic gathering that 5,000 youth from J&K had been trained and helped to get jobs under the Himayat scheme since the day it was introduced by him in 2011. As many as 15,000 more were being trained and helped to get jobs, primarily in the country's corporate sector, which had already offered a remarkable placement drive.

For its initial life of five years, Himayat, among others supported by the Jammu and Kashmir Bank Ltd, would benefit 100,000 unemployed youth from J&K, Mr. Ramesh said.

While claiming that 76.42 per cent of the trained youth had proved their mettle and had been retained by the companies, Mr. Ramesh declared the enhancement of the monthly stipend in favour of the youth under training. As against the existing monthly of Rs. 1000 for two months, the Himayat youth will now be paid Rs. 2000 a month for six months.

Mr. Ramesh disclosed that the Government of India, in coordination with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, was also launching a special scheme for socio-economic welfare and the upliftment of the State's women. It would be part of the Centrally-sponsored Mahila Swyam Sahayata Samooh for which an outlay of Rs. 800 Crore had been earmarked. He expressed satisfaction over the interest more than 30,000 Panchs and Sarpanchs were showing in these developmental initiatives in the State.

The State Chief Minister Mr. Omar Abdullah said that the special capacity building and employment schemes like Himayat, Udaan and the State government's Sher-e-Kashmir Employment and Welfare Scheme for the unemployed youth had gone a long way to train and absorb the youth in different sectors.

Mr. Abdullah said that over four lakh youth were currently unemployed in the State. Of them, 70,000 were being taken into government services this year. He said that the Centre's support would be significant in expanding the job market for over three lakh youth.

(excerpts from The Hindu)

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Correction

1 Ref article Job opportunities based on Intellectual Property Rights published in the issue dated 27 April-3 May 2013 on page two. Please read the name of authors as Dr. Kirti Joshi and Nasreen Jeelani instead as rendered in the article.

WEN 7/A

2 The author of the article "Converting waste by product to livelihood opportunities" (in EN issue 4-10.May 2013) Arun Kumar is Project Manager, New Business Development, Husk Power Systems and not its CEO.

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