Labour in 
Contemporary India

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Labour in India has been authored by Prof. Praveen Jha, an expert on Labour Economics. It explores an important issue of the economy and covers development process in regards to labour and related issues since independence. It looks comprehensively at labour market of the pre-liberalisation and post-liberalisation period. It further traces the possible changes that have occurred during the entire period till today and exemplifies the work on labour in contemporary India. The book provides rich statistics and places strong arguments covering all possible dimensions of labour and their relationship in the past and present form of market.

From the security points of view, the book highlights that the condition of labour in India as miserable largely in the post-liberalisation period. The public expenditure on labour security measures shows the already low expenditure in the pre-liberalization period has further reduced drastically in the neo-liberal regime. Hence, the post-liberalisation period has transformed the labour market into a degenerated and insecure one.

The author argues that considering 90% labour is employed in the unorganised sector, they have neither been covered by any protective measures nor by any opportunity of promotion (pg 180). Liberal thinkers emphasize on liberalisation arguing that this is the key to success in providing prospective employment opportunity with an efficient economic system. However, the fact is far distant and the result writes a different story, as the growth performance in liberalisation period has not been found bringing commensurate employment opportunity in the country. The author further adds that India’s GDP growth is jobless growth. It is only the construction industry which brings, to some extent, new work opportunity for the skilled and unskilled labour in the country. However, in both these sectors, low paid jobs and gender discrimination have been found substantially. Thus, the neoliberal idea of employment generation is weak and liberalisation is not a single viable option to achieve an effective employment generation in the country.

Looking at state policy regarding labour rights and recognition, the book reports multiple issues related to Indian labour market. Market segmentation has lead to discrimination between male and female, discrimination and differentiation based on caste and social groups, the presence of a large number of low and unskilled labour, lack of work opportunities, victims of climatic and seasonal variations without any compensation, biased state policy, ignorance of state and lack of political will. Labourers are mostly unsecured, unorganised and the given employment opportunities are of informal nature which is due to the increasing privatisation and expansion of informalisation (pg 40, pg 60). These outcomes in a way indicate the failure of the welfarist state. Workers’ rights to access basic amenities, decent work and livelihood should be given the prime importance by the state. However, the process of deregulation of the labour market, feminisation of labour demand as the wages per piece are the common feature of the current labour market. This shows that state is in denial mode of recognising the very natural rights of labourers of the country and consequently the widespread of poverty remains an intact feature of Indian economy.

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