

Book Review

Globalization Lived Locally-A Labor Geography Perspective

Neethi P., New Delhi, Oxford University Press India, 2016

The book deals with globalization and labor with the perspective of labor (particularly female labor) geography approach to examine contemporary forms of labor control, conflict and response under the globalization regime in Kerala. This is attempted to be achieved with the help of four empirical case studies.

The first is a case study of an Apparel Park in which the proprietorship changed, triggered by the demand for wage increase by the workers, from 'local money' to a 'giant' with international business. The workers in this study were made to work for almost seven days a week, paid low wages with absence of overtime time and denial of leave. There was total erosion of legal rights of the workers. The local as well as the multinational management did little to change this picture. The narrative provides the familiar picture of management exploitation in apparel industry. The industry does not allow trade union activity and where one exists, the management's response to the union activity is always clumsy (for the workers).

The second case study is of an electronics firm and the involvement of Church. The Church acted as an intermediary between the firm's top management and the workers as well as played the role of the recruiter and the manager. The Church recruited female workforce to promote flexibility in the labor force. However, the management's consideration was more to avoid unionization. The women worked under the strict supervision of nuns and priests. They had no contact with the firm's management. The Church's management ensured that work went on smoothly without much of a discontent. Some of workers' basic needs (loan for a cycle, marriage fund etc) were taken care of while also inculcating values not only with regard to their role in the family but in the workforce as well. The case study brings out that work norms were very stringent and seven day work schedule was the norm and those who could not follow it because of other roles left the work. The payment was on piece rates and it is not clear from the case study if the relationship between the worker and the firm was 'legal'

The third case study is of a food processing firm (mainly making pickles) which made mandatory the membership of a Kudumbashree, (a women empowerment and poverty eradication program of the Kerala Government) to obtain employment in the firm. The self help groups formed under Kudumbashree facilitated employment of women, gave them training and made them part bread earners. The women worked in groups within or close to their villages. Only a few amongst the firm knew of the locations of the home based groups working for the company. The day to day management was with the head women of the program, (called managers) who would interact with the management. The payment was on piece rates and there was no worker employer relationship.

The fourth case study is of the Cochin Port and details the experiences of its workers affiliated to private labor pools and engaged in lashing and unlashings works that were laid off during privatization. The case study highlights the processes through which workers and their unions responded to the management endeavors of making one section of the workforce redundant as well as the role with the solidarity of unions supported by outsiders.

To begin with, the study of globalization and labor in Kerala draws eyebrows. The state has been perceived as one of the most labor friendly and therefore dubbed as anti-investment by the industry. However, according to the government's reports that is not true anymore. The Economic Review 2012 de-

clared Kerala as the 'most globalized state' of India.

The case studies follow forms of management, their control, conflict and response. The striking finding is the managements' highhandedness in dealing with labor irrespective of whether local or multinational firm. Even the Church was indulging in tactics of spying on workers and not always taking care of or passing on the genuine grievances of the workers to the top management. The same was the case with the workers employed under the Kudumbashree membership criteria and the Apparel Park.

The case of Church's involvement is, however, novel and adds a new dimension to the ongoing debates and studies on globalization. The study shows that local labor markets develop their own ways and means of labor control measures, which are not, at times, perceptible through conventional lenses. The food processing firm's case study is also educative and it did help in the government's endeavors of women empowerment and poverty eradication by utilizing the available social capital in a controlled environment. The Cochin Port study highlights that workers organized at different levels forming geographical scales of bargaining thus brings out the territorial scope of power relations. The case studies, however, do fall short on their in-depth holistic investigation.

The literature review in the book is rich and exhaustive and the study should trigger a larger debate on the experiences of globalization lived locally. Finally, one

would agree with the author when she says that it is one of the initial attempts to studying Kerala's workforce and its experiences through the lens of labor geography.

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