Labour Research Methodology

A Report on Poona Seminar

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Labour research has extended over many fields. In order that there may not be unnecessary duplication and that the results of such research may not be vitiated by faulty methodology, it has now become necessary to channel these activities.

Research workers in various labour fields met in Poona at a seminar to discuss their problems and to exchange experience.

Both research aims and methods figured at the discussions and the important issue was raised how such research should be problem-oriented and conducted with an eye on the possible utilisation of the findings.

Research is fast gaining in importance. A technical sub-committee on labour has been set up by the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission, a Central Committee on Labour Research has been constituted by the Ministry of Labour and the proposal put forward by the Indian Labour Conference at its last session held in Chandigarh, to establish a full-fledged Labour Relations Research Institute, has also been accepted. Research in labour problems undertaken by the Central and State Governments, employers' and workers' organisations, Universities, research institutions and social work schools, has been growing in volume and also improving in quality.

The stage has, therefore, come for properly channelling these expanding research activities so that maximum advantage may be derived from them. If this is not done, there is likelihood of avoidable duplication and waste of funds and faulty methodology vitiating the research. For this purpose, it appears desirable first to take stock of the labour research being conducted at present and then to find out ways and means of co-ordinating it.

The Objects of the Seminar

As a first step in this direction, the Indian Society of Labour Economics decided to hold a seminar on "Labour Research Methodology" with the cooperation of the Central Ministry of Labour and the Ford Foundation. The Seminar was to discuss the various problems of labour research such as methodology, priorities in research problems, review of labour surveys which were currently being conducted, difficulties experienced by labour researchers and steps to be taken for furtherance of labour research.

The Seminar was held in the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, on June 13-18, 1961. As on all such occasions, the main purpose was to bring together labour researchers to exchange ideas and information on their methodology, their aims and their common needs. It was intended:

(a) to focus attention on some of the more important methodological problems involved in carrying out research in labour in India;
(b) to give the participants a better understanding of some of the more effective tools for research;
(c) to acquaint participants in detail with one another's research activities and plans, with special attention to interdisciplinary research;
(d) to identify some possible measures to increase the amount of quality research on Indian labour problems; and
(e) to stimulate the writing of some working papers on labour research with a view to publishing these where the maximum number of potential researchers might see them.

With these objectives in view, about 25 labour researchers from various parts of the country gathered in Poona, deliberated on various problems of research, pooled their experiences and suggested measures for promotion of labour research.

Professor D R Gadgil, Director of the Gokhale Institute, welcomed the delegates to "this first seminar of professional labour economists.

As a researcher of long standing, he appreciated the need for and importance of labour research, which has taken great strides during recent years. Professor C N Vakil who presided over the inaugural function, observed that rapid industrialisation, which was one of the main objectives of our plans, had made labour problems more important, more complex and larger in number. Labour for industry is drawn largely from the rural area and its adjustment to the factory and city life is perhaps the most important problem facing labour researchers. Efficiency and productivity should increase with rapid industrialisation and for this purpose, research in the working and living conditions of Indian labour appears necessary. As the problems cut across many disciplines - economics, sociology, psychology, etc an inter-disciplinary approach is needed. It is scientific research alone which enables us to study problems of labour in a competent and systematic manner.

Maharashtra's Labour Minister, Shri Shantilal Shah, inaugurating the Seminar, emphasised the urgent need for collection of adequate and reliable data. For example, wage statistics, he said, were inadequate and the method of computation of the "consumers' index was out of date. Employers, lawyers, trade unions and others suffer from dearth of labour statistics; even the statistics that are available, are not adequately known. It is the duty of impartial institutions like the Indian Society of Labour Economics to assist in the collection of basic data and to interpret them for the benefit of industry and labour. The industrial face of India was fast changing with the emergence of
they are today because of rapid industrialisation:
(a) any meaningful attack on these problems requires that they be frankly recognized and objectively studied; and
(b) since labour research is related to human problems, is it possible to have an objective and scientific method in the study of labour problems like time and motion study?

The seminar also discussed in detail such problems as "case research methodology and usage" of research tools, and "methodological indications arising out of some investigations in labour economics." Dr Andrew Tow of the Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad, expounded the case study method, while Shri K K Shaikh, Dy Labour Commissioner, Maharashtra, explained, with illustrations, the interview techniques.

On the last day of the seminar, the broad scope of labour research methodology was surveyed and the topics covered during the deliberations were reviewed. Follow-up action was recommended in the form of compilation of report of the proceedings, development of bibliographical and documentary facilities, standardisation and classification of concepts, co-operation with such authorities as the Central and State Labour Ministries and the Research Programmes Committee, encouragement to inter-disciplinary research in labour and all-round promotion of labour research.