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Globalization, ICT Revolution in India and Socio-cultural Changes: Sociological Explorations

Abstract: This paper tries to articulate some of the socio-cultural impacts of the globalization induced ICT [Information and Communication Technology] *revolution* in India from sociological view points. Having perceived the phenomenon within the framework of social stratification, the paper tries to deal with the, (i) emergence of a new class of capitalists and a new class of elite workforce that has come to be known as ICT/ knowledge workers, (along with its own sub-culture). (ii) Further, the paper tries to sociologically analyze the phenomenon of growing class consciousness among the knowledge workers in terms of being class in itself / class for itself as they displayed conscious resistance to unionize themselves. (iii) The paper also analyzes the phenomenon of embourgeoisement among the knowledge workers in terms of their cultural and social capitals. Thus, based on primary as well as secondary source observations, the paper is a study of India's Techno-Coolie and Cyber-Coolie, as a new class of elite technical workforce, the basis of its identity formation and its emerging sub-culture.

Keywords: new class of capitalists, new class of elite workers, class consciousness, embourgeoisement, social capital, techno coolie and cyber coolie.

Introduction

The rise of ICT (including software) industry in countries like China, India, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Philippines, etc has become synonymous with globalization because of the timely arrival of these digital technologies and its inherent capabilities for the faster proliferation. Most conducive in this regard has been the new global economic order. The application of these new technologies in the changed global economic order has also changed the global business by promoting international sub-contracting and subsequently international out-sourcing. The rise of Indian IT industry during the 1990s has been the most spectacular achievement of Indian Industry. This industry in India grew at an incredible rate of 50% per annum during the whole of the 1990s. Being export oriented it has earned 75% of its revenue from exports alone. Subsequently the ICT revolution in India and in other developing countries (including NICs) has not merely earned enough foreign currencies, but also more significantly, has brought in wide spread socio-cultural changes. Apart from what I am going to analyze here in this paper, there are other ICT impact areas that have thrown new challenges to sociologists. Following are some of the socio-cultural areas where the ICT impact changes oscillate between utopian to nightmare types: (i) Building social capital through the use of internet (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc): It

has been observed to be highly useful for professionals in general and academicians in particular who build up their social capital internationally and realize the benefits in the long run. (ii) Ethnocization through internet: Apart from reinforcing ethnic ties among lose community members and facilitating the resurrection of ethnic beliefs and practices, internet helps ethnic groups to publicize their cultural/ religious ideals and reach out to potential new recruits. (iii) Internet pushing for a sexual revolution: Internet contains abundance of pornographic sites/ materials, access to which is of course universal and not restricted by any law. Starting from a mere commercialization of human body (sexually) internet is now offering experiences of virtual sex, interactive sex, through its sites. Hence as a big source of cultural pollution it is now posing serious cultural threats to tradition bound cultures. (iv) Emergence of a new class of transnational capitalists: The IT revolution gave rise to a new class of capitalists who were in fact engineering professionals. This was true of both India and China. (v) Emergence of a new class of workers as well as a new subculture of theirs in India: The second phase of the this revolution known as the ICT revolution in India and in other developing countries (including NICs) more significantly, has created a new class of workers/ professionals. Based on knowledge based technologies (being fully R&D based), it has given rise to a new class of workers/ professionals and consequently a subculture of their own. The first phase of the said revolution in India known as IT revolution took place in the last decade of the 20th century, i.e. 1990s and its second phase known as the ICT revolution followed in the early years of the next decade, i.e. 2010s. This paper is to deal with these later aspects of the socio-cultural changes engendered by the ICT revolution in India with a concern for social equality.

Objectives: The paper tries to articulate some of the socio-cultural impacts of the ICT revolution in India from sociological view points. Having perceived the phenomenon within the framework of social stratification, the author tries to deal with the: (i) issues of social stratification that perpetuates itself through the use of new technologies of ICT and (ii) the emergence of a new class of occupations and corresponding class of a new workforce that has come to be known as ICT/knowledge workers, along with its own sub-culture. Thus, based on secondary source observations, the paper is a study of India's Techno-Coolie and Cyber-Coolie, as a new class of elite technical workforce, the basis of its identity formation (class consciousness) and its emerging sub-culture. (iii) Further the paper also tries to examines the knowledge workers' perceived identity of being professionals/ executives in the frame work of Goldthorpe's *'Embougeoisement'* thesis.

The Indian IT Revolution

India's IT revolution has been attributed to a number of socio-cultural factors including the popular propensity toward its never-ending argumentative nature, the logical structure of its generic language called Sanskrit, and the deep popular use of numbers and rudimentary arithmetic used off hand. These cultural factors were reinforced by social factors like availability of young educated manpower with English tongues.

Further India had been the house of the second largest pool of English speaking engineers in the world. The brilliant IIT engineers who had migrated to USA and the large number of competitive Indian young engineers at home, provided the ideal ground for an IT revolution. By now it is well known that the phenomenal growth of the Indian IT and subsequently the ITES industry has been greatly shaped by the liberalization of policies. By the year 2002 India had acquired 24% of the global IT/ITES services. And in the year 2009 it had acquired 66% of the global IT/ITES revenues (NASSCOM, 2009: 2).

Foreign capital began to flow into the Indian industry after the government introduced, the then mini scale liberalization of policies in 1984, that alllowed100% foreign subsidiaries (of MNC) to operate in India. That apart the pro-IT policy initiative of the then Govt. of India is worth mentioning. For example, the STPI (Software Technology Parks of India) had been one of the most successful initiatives of the government and it has now offices in more than 30 cities in India. It not only functioned as a 'single window', simplifying and cutting short all bureaucratic procedures and protocols, but also provided for infrastructures. Government also in partnership with private enterprise had set up a number of science parks (with all infrastructure provided) within which cyber cities grew.

The first foreign owned export oriented offshore software firm to be set up in India was the Citicorp Oversea Ltd at SEEPZ Bombay in 1985 followed by the Texas Instruments setting up at Bangalore in 1986 to do some chip designing. But to Friedman (2006, 128) the real IT revolution in India had started with the arrival of the General Electric in 1989. Following Texas Instruments many MNCs entered into India and the indigenous software industry was inspired. Through 1990s government continued to provide subsidies through STPI, when the Indian IT industries acquired foreign collaborations to experience growth. The 'body shopping' model based on labour contract services got a boost through which Indian engineers (low paid) were hired by foreign companies abroad to deliver their services 'on-site.' But by then 'body shopping' was already a known practice of contractual hiring of Indian techies by firms abroad. Way back in the 1970s having realized shortage of IT labour in the west, the Indian companies had capitalized on it and had began to send hired technical staff to work oversea on particular projects in the USA or in Europe. This practice came to be known as body shopping. This was the 1st instance of globalizing Indian IT industry. Body shopping was a contractual arrangement to work on site for a specific period with less salary, on the employer's conditions. These were all programmers who were sent on short stay visas. The practice became wide spread and the industry grew around this for a while. Asma Lateef (1996–97) in her study software Industry in Bangalore noted that by 1990 over 95% of Indian software firms were involved in Body shopping activities. But it turned out to be an unstable system as there was no commitment either from the employer (only gives short term employment) or the employee who was constantly looking out for a better deal. It did no value additions and offered them no better career path. However it gave good exposure and a reputation to Indian techies. Some of them broke the contracts and got better placements in USA.

However body shopping began to decline by mid 1990s and latter got replaced with off-shore outsourcing of services. Global firms began to set up export-oriented development centers close to the programmers' home. And for most global firms it meant India. By the turn of the millennium more than 185 Fortune 500 companies, i.e. two out of every five global giants—were outsourcing some of their IT requirements to India. In the early years of 2000 almost every software company in the world including Microsoft, Oracle, Sun, Adobe, etc had set up their offshore software development centers in India. With this turn the ground was already set by some MNCs for the revolution.

By mid 1990s the Indian IT companies began to shift away from body shopping towards the offshore model with the proportion of revenue falling from 90% in 1988 to only 56%in 1999–2000 (Kumar 2001, 4279) and to 41% in 2003. The larger Indian IT companies "moved up in the value chain" to offer value added services even at times turnkey projects. Those large Indian IT companies were born in 1980s. But the 1990s witnessed the mushrooming growth of IT SMEs (Small and Medium scale Enterprises) in Indian metros like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi as many ambitious techies left the large companies to start their own SMEs. This is something akin to what happened then in Silicon Valley as 'start-up trend'. The easy availability of "Venture Capital" funds after 1995 contributed handsomely to the growth of SMEs in IT sector.

The Indian IT industry then had 3 strong links to the global economy, such as: (i) dependence on foreign contracts (order), (ii) dependence on MNC FDI as wholly—owned subsidiaries to develop software development centres and (iii) the dependence on foreign venture capital (mid 1990s onwards).

After the legalization of the venture capital (VC) in India in 1988, VC funds came into existence and the most successful one was the Technology Development and Information Company of India (TDICI), at Bangalore as joint venture of the ICICI and UTI (two financial institutions). Several of the early software firms like Mastek, Microland, Wipro, etc were benefited from this. Note worthy that in the year 1995 the unfolding liberalization policy allowed the entry of foreign VC funds and institutional capital to India. Further noteworthy that a bulk (80% by 1999) of these funds came from NRIs (Non Resident Indians) especially the US based Indian techies who had done booming business in the USA. Glaring examples of this were, the Draper International (headed by Kiran Nadkarni) 1995, and the Walden-NIKKO India venture capital company (in late 1990s). The US based VC firms made possible the 'US-India corridor' by which many US based IT/Software firms had acquired development centres in India. In the dotcom boom period of 1999–2000 there were as many as 100 VC firms (including Indians) that were operating in India but it soon dropped. In 2002 there were 60 foreign VC firms operating in India. In the absence of official figures, unofficial figures show that by the year 2000 the investment from foreign VC was over $1 billion (Upadhya 2004). Similarly NRI investment in the IT industry is not exactly available but it is claimed that half of IT companies in Bangalore since 1999 had some NRI investment component. Saxenian (2002: 43) reports of a relevant survey which had found that about 50% of Silicon valley's NRI IT firms had business relations with

Indian firms as partial/ wholly owned subsidiaries (37%), Sub-contractors/ supplier of materials/ parts (28%) or some sort of joint ventures (16%).

Thus three types of VC funds flew to Indian IT industry; such as; (i) Indian (large institutional investors like ICICI, UTI etc and a few private ones), (ii) Exclusively Foreign VC funding and (iii) the ones known as cross-border funding through which the Indian development centres of US based firms have been funded. A good example of this is US-IVCA (US-Indian Venture Capital Association).

Further, the case of 'TiE' (The Indus Entrepreneurs) a consortium type organization of NRI/US based Indian techies, was an example of funding and fostering entrepreneurship among Indians. TiE was founded in 1992 (The Indus Entrepreneur) but soon became successful with 8000 members in 34 chapters spread across US, Canada, Singapore, Dubai, Malaysia, India, etc. TiE became a point of emulation to replicate the Silicon Valley magic in Europe and Asia. In the same decade, pushed by shortage of skilled workers, the USA tripled the number of visa granted to skilled personnel. This new type visa came to be known as H1-B. Nearly half of the H1-B visa granted by the USA was to Indians and most of these technical personnel were in the IT field and a majority of these went to California to participate in the hi-tech gold rush. India's golden diasporas including big achievers like, K B Chandrasekhar (founder of Exodus Communication), Vinod Dhan (father of the Practicum chip), Vinod Khosla (co-founder of Sun-Microsystem), Kanwal Rakhi (co-funder and head of Inventus capital & Excelan co), Gururaj Deshpande (co-founder of Sycomore Network), Rakesh Mathur (founder & CEO, Junglee), etc, looked homeward. Kanwal Rekhi became the president of TiE global. This Indian diasporas in US, like their Chinese counter parts, linked Silicon Valley, the technology hub, with home land market (for cheap labour & business opportunities) and created transnational webs.

Hence, not that the 1990s witnessed an exodus of NRI technical professionals from US to India to start IT firms in India, but they had funded IT industry in India directly as mentors/promoters through VC mode.

Rise of New Class of IT Capitalists in India

It is now well known that a new class of entrepreneurs have emerged out of the IT revolution in India. As noted by Upadhya (2004) most of the founders of software firms have middle class origin who have built on their cultural capital of higher education (usually through engineering education) by acquiring social capital (knowledge and business networks) through their professional careers. Their social capital enabled them to make use of the trust and cooperation of their professional networks, for making innovative business advancements, because their social capital could reduce the transaction costs, bureaucratic procedures and even corruption. Thus the combined virtue of cultural and social capital engendered a class of technological capitalists in Indian IT sector. This class of capitalists is not only driven by high need achievement orientation but also by high level of technological innovations. They could ride innovation driven business that has flattened the technological world, at least in the IT sector

to a great extent. This class of IT capitalists is also distinguished by its global linkages. Not only that many of them had studied / worked in the USA/abroad but also their business were, (i) greatly dependent upon foreign contracts (particularly US) and (ii) most of them acquired foreign funding either directly or through foreign Venture capitals (which were mostly from USA, particularly the Silicon valley). This class of entrepreneurs is distinct from the traditional Indian capitalist class (Seth Jis leading family business) and corporate houses (like, Ambanis, Bajaj, Birlas, Goenkas, Godrej, Kirloskars, Tatas, Singhanias, etc.). These are also first generation entrepreneurs. These IT entrepreneurs of large as well as SMEs themselves made a distinct social category by itself. Most software firms were formed by non –conventional first generation entrepreneurs who were mostly engineers by training and had long experience in IT industry as professionals both in India and USA. 'The middle class origins of many of the entrepreneurs who have drawn upon their cultural capital through higher education and acquired social capital through job experiences have given a distinct culture and orientation to this industry' (Upadhya, 2004). As most of the software entrepreneurs were from middle class families, (without business experiences) they even did not have ready capital back up and hence had to scrape together capital from family savings, loans from friends, etc (e.g. Infosys story).

As the offshoot of liberalization of the Indian policies and globalization of the economy this bourgeoisie is more adaptable to MNCs. Instead of being wary of the presence of the multinationals in the IT sector, this class could find a synergy with MNCs and have learnt to benefit from their presence. Therefore, this class, first being the offshoot and later being part of the transnational IT business is the strongest votary of globalization. By virtue of creating enormous employment and profit this industry has influenced Indian economic and industrial policies greatly during the last two decades. Upadhya (2004) calls them the 'icons of the resurgent India'. Noteworthy that this transnational entrepreneurial class has emerged in tandem with a transnational labour regime which has also generated a new class of IT workforce in India.

Emergent New Class of Elite Workforce

In this context of impact of IT and subsequent ICT revolution in India extremely relevant is the notion of 'techno-coolie' and 'cyber-coolie'. These derogatory terms refer to a new class of elite 'knowledge workers', emerging out of the global out-sourcing and off-shoring of services. This is the direct off-shoot of globalization process. Birth of this new workforce is not confined to India alone, rather is spread over several other developing and even newly industrialized countries like China, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Philippines and Israel. Hence both the words refer to knowledge workers not merely that of India but to all such workers of countries who have become part of the international out-sourcing services. But India has a giant share in this.

Techno Coolie: Software engineers or other IT professionals (otherwise known as techies) of developing countries are seen as a new knowledge workforce that caters

to the global informational economy. The workforce is highly flexible and mobile. These IT professionals called as Techno-coolie are mostly employed in the US and other developed countries or even many of them who are employed in home countries travel abroad very frequently for 'onsite' delivery of their services. The geographically dispersed nature of the software outsourcing business makes physical mobility as one aspect of the migration. The developed form of ICTs even enabled part of the services to be delivered 'virtually'. Software engineers even located in home countries, along with colleagues and mangers spread over distant geographical locations work as 'virtual teams' to communicate among themselves and deliver to the customer abroad through computer networks. In this connection they make short foreign visits too.

Migration of techies from India to Europe although started in late 1970s, it became significant in late 1990s, particularly due to 'Y2K' crisis. The important routes of this migration from India by the techies were three. (1) The first one was through 'Body Shopping' arrangement by which Indian techies were sent on short contracts to work on the customer's site abroad. (2) The other arrangement was through outsourcing by American/European firms through Indian software service providers which had a team of techies working on the project at home and another team working onsite at the customer's venue abroad. Earlier TCS, Infosys, HCL etc. large IT firms were engaged in Body shopping and had offices both in India and US/Europe. (3) The third arrangement was immigration through the Indian subsidiaries of European MNCs like, Philips, R Bosc, Siemens, etc.

1. Body shopping: This arrangement was not so encouraging for the Indian techies as they were engaged on the customer's site on low–end maintenance jobs with low salaries. Their employment conditions, compensations and nature of contract are determined by the consultants (Indian agencies) and their works were managed by the customers. The techies were usually on a contract with the consultant company to be paid on hourly rate other than the travel accommodation and maintenance allowances. The duration of the stay abroad is specified in the contract. Usually the techie cannot break the contract with the consultant for greener pasture abroad as they had to pay back heavily for violating the contracts. The Indian consultants were basically subcontractors suppose to provide mere 'bodies'/engineers with specifications to the MNCs.

2. Outsourcing companies: Those techies travelling abroad by outsourcing arrangements through Indian service providers like TCS, HCL etc. usually have their base jobs in India but are sent abroad to the client's site for a certain period. They are managed by their Indian service providing agency and not the client; mostly they get the Indian salary, with extra money for Europe/USA. The techies could make good money out of this but again carried onerous contracts or bonds with Indian agency not to join the job of the client or anybody in the client's country. Further on return they were bound to work with the Indian agency for a few years, and the like. Violation of the bond invites a hefty fine that may drive the techies bankrupt.

3. MNC subsidiaries: A good number of Indian engineers go abroad to work through their parent subsidiary companies of US/European MNCs like Oracle, Philips, Robert Bosc etc. These are employees of the MNC subsidiaries in India called software development centres and are in fact better placed compared to the earlier two mechanisms. They go on short/long term assignments and are comfortably placed abroad, as employees of the subsidiaries they are provided with housing, good working conditions, allowances, etc. Even they have to make little or fewer adjustments in terms of work culture, etc. Often they are housed with employees of parent MNCs in block apartments abroad.

4. The other category of mechanism for the techies was to get employed directly by US/European companies leaving the Indian agencies' contractual arrangements behind. Although most of them had come under 'body shopping' arrangements for onsite delivery, but have shifted away. Their salary and employment conditions are better than first three types.

Apart from predicaments related to mode of recruitments, these Indian techies are marred by prohibitive immigration laws and regulations. It is well known that for Indian techies, obtaining visas, work permits and residence permits for European countries is much harder than for the USA. Upadhyay (2006) in her study among Indian techies in Netherlands, Germany and Belgium have tried to analyze their plight in terms of work culture differences, as victims of European stereotypes about Indian techies, culturally embedded communication patterns, poor time management, inability to adapt to multiculturalism of virtual teams and dim career prospects in Europe. These apart, these techies are to 'negotiate the quagmire of immigration laws and rules (which are often humiliating) to maintain themselves in Europe and have to chew the common images of immigrant workers, diluted with racism, held by local people (Upadhya 2006). They too struggle for an identity of a professional/ knowledge worker as different from unskilled working class immigrants (from other small poor countries). As if these were not enough the Indian techies have to withstand the anti-outsourcing sentiments in Europe and USA and a consequent fear of loss of job. Their isolation and social seclusion add to their owes. Thus the Indian techie struggles hard not only to acquire the European work culture, multiculturalism, etc but also engages himself in a reconstruction of his identity and self to relate to a foreign society.

ICT Turn of the Revolution

Sometime in late 1994, Health Scribe India, a firm was set up at Bangalore by the Indian-American doctors and hospitals. The Health Scribe had set up a system that turned the American doctors touch tone phone into a dictation machine and a PC would digitize doctor's voice. It would be transmitted to Bangalore, India, which would be transcribed by a student or so in two hours and would zip it back by the satellite as a text file that could be part of the US hospitals' computer system. So where the doctor is sleeping in the night in USA the transcribed file gets ready quickly in India and in the morning doctor finds it there. This was a major breakthrough, as it could safely, legally and securely transcribe medical records, lab reports and doctor's diagnosis from Bangalore. Hence lot of other industries thought about sending some of their back room jobs to be done in India as well. And they did so but in a limited scale as the handling capacity of the satellite was limited (Friedman 2006: 130).

India had reached the peak of IT revolution by late 1990s with the Y2K bug solution and Dot com boom. With the Y2K bug handling Indian techies left their foot prints world over and Indian IT Industry started dating with that of the USA. Outsourcing from US to India as a new form of collaboration almost exploded. By the early 2000, the Y2K work was closed but new business called e-commerce had emerged. The fiber-optic lines turned out to be the magic strings. The laying of the fiber-optic lines across the ocean connected the main frames in USA to Indian IT companies like Wipro, Infosys, TCS, etc managing American E-commerce. With the dot com boom, India had benefited. And the boom laid the cables that connected India with

the world. The fiber optic bubble inflated the business links between the USA/UK and India. More than the boom the dotcom bust brought enormous benefits to India as it reduced the costs of communication drastically and made transfer of voluminous data from US firm to India possible. This allowed many American firms to out-source Indian knowledge (Friedman 2006: 133). The dot com bust further encouraged many Indian engineers to return home, as the techies could find American assignments seating at Bangalore/Bombay/Hyderabad. The big Indian IT firms also came with innovating and value added proposals to sell their own new products in software and consultancies. They had graduated from maintenance to product IT firms. Their interaction with US firms became deeper and deeper and slowly through business process outsourcing they started to run the back room of US firms.

The post Y2K recessionary trends in USA pushed US companies toward outsourcing particularly the offshore type. This outsourcing trend was of course confined to the peripheral tasks of business what is otherwise known as back room office jobs. This too created opportunities for India IT Industry. The Indian IT sector then created within itself a new business sector known as ITES. Thus it seems that recession in US turned out to be a saving grace for Indian IT Industry. Apart from the economic down turn in US the other factors that were responsible for the growth of offshore outsourcing business India were its geographical location by which it stands several hours behind its markets in the west, its telecom liberalization policy during 1990s that reduced the cost of telephones drastically, its English educated and highly motivated manpower and lastly its low cost manpower. The most important of the above was the cheap manpower that allowed the American companies to save 40 to 50 per cent costs (The Economist, 2003, 13 May).

Notwithstanding the backlash in US and UK against off-shoring the companies continued to outsource to India. Not only because of the great cost saving by western firms through outsourcing to India these firms continued to do so but also because of the high quality services received. Better quality services are imparted by Indian agents compared to their American counterparts, because in India the call center employees/agents are not part timers rather full timers, better educated mostly graduates even sometimes post graduates but not college drop outs. The Indian agents will out perform their American counterparts again because Indians treat these as careers. Of course the India BPO industry has a retention problem, it kept the attrition rate below 30%. Of late large BPO companies are offering opportunities both laterally—allowing employees to move off the Call Centre to HR, marketing, accounts and quality control—and horizontally from team leaders to customer, operation and call centre managers (Greenspan 2005: 96). Thus it is not just a temporary job rather a career.

By 2003 the electronic back office had become the booming sector. Apart from the MNCs, big fortune 500 companies entered India's BPO sector, and the Indian IT big players like Infosys, Wipro, Satyam, also launched some form of BPO services (Ibid: 94).

Types of Investment in Indian ITES-BPO sector: The ITES-BPO received investment from various sources and of various nature. The heterogeneity of the Indian BPO sector reveals several types of investment patterns and their corresponding or-

ganizational structures and management systems. Following are the three major types of investments that came through to India:

1. **Captives:** those are essentially in house service providers of global MNCs (e.g. HSBC, Dell, Hewlett Packard, Prudential, GE, etc) that directly own and control their own offshored operations. These continue to dominate the Indian BPO sector. Captives could be of further two types; (i) Branch office: it is a representative office only for software development and not for marketing/selling products and services in India. (ii) 100% subsidiary: it has a local management, but otherwise the parent MNC does everything else. Usually operate from the software technology parks or export processing zones.
2. **Joint Ventures:** in this case the MNC works with an Indian partner in India. It allows both the partner firms to benefit from the collaboration and the MNC retains the option of switching it to a 100% subsidiary if certain conditions are met. It could be of two types, like; (i) Third party MNCs: it means a global MNC operates from India with an Indian partner to provide services to client firms in other countries. (ii) Indian third party service provider: It means the Indian partner only provides for the services to the clients (category called as pure plays) and not anything else.
3. **Domestic Sector:** (i) These are mostly the ITES-BPO arms of Indian IT firms (e.g Wipro and Infosys). These are also service providers to clients abroad. (ii) Of late there developed a new sub-sector within the domestic sector which consists of purely Indian and exclusively ITES-BPO firms (not the arms of any IT firm). The principal location for Indian ITES-BPO industry remains the Tier-1 cities namely, New Delhi & NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. However Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities in India have experienced growth of ITES-BPO business; e.g. Pune (Convergys, WNS, Progeo, EXL & Mphasis), Vishakhapatanam (Satyam, Wipro, TCS, HSBC, etc.), Madurai (Honey Welll), Nagpur (Krishna group), Chandigarh (Infosys, IBM-Daksh), Jaipur (GE), Thiruvananthapuram (Infosys), etc.

Nature of Work in ITES-BPO Industry: Based on available evidence Taylor and Bain (2006: 48–49) maintained that it would be reasonable to conclude that voice services account for 60 to 65% of sectoral employment and the various back office activities for 35 to 40%. Bulk of these offshored services are low-end encompassing voice services and simple transactional business processes which are highly standardized and routinized. The major types of services rendered by Indian ITES-BPO sector are: (A) Finance and accounting (activities such as, general accounting, transaction management, corporate finance, compliance management and statutory reporting), (B) Customer Interaction services (CIS) (all forms of IT enabled customer contacts such as in bound/out bound, voice or non voice based support used to provide customer services), and (C) Human Resource administration services (such as payroll and benefits administration, travel and expense processing, talent acquisition and talent management services, employee and manager self-service delivery services, employee communication design and accounts, etc.). If the finance and accounts services account for 40% of Indian ITES-BPO revenues, the CIS accounts for nearly

46% and HR accounts for 3% of the ITES-BPO revenues. Thus these three types of services account for 89% of the industry revenues. If their services are highly standardized and routinized, the jobs of the KPOs are highly customized (Noronha & D'cruz 2009).

Cyber Coolie: The word 'Cyber-coolie' refers to that growing workforce which comes under the IT enabled services like, call centers, medical transcription and business process outsourcing. This workforce emerged out of the policy of 'off-shore outsourcing' of services followed mainly by a few developed countries like, USA, UK and Japan. European powers like France and Germany do but their scales of outsourcing of services are very limited. And India being an English speaking country is favourably placed to be at the receiving end of this international outsourcing of services from USA and UK. As mentioned earlier 'Techno-Coolie' is a term referring to IT workers in USA, Canada and UK who are essentially immigrants may be Indians, Chinese, Philippinos or Hispanic, engaged in low-end technical jobs (mostly programming). Similarly the word Cyber Coolie is a contemptuous word attributed to the knowledge workers of India in the ITES-BPO sector. Like the Techno-coolies the Cyber-coolies are also a grossly under paid lot. When a 'Cyber coolie' delivers his off-shore services through internet being present in his home country, the 'techno-coolie' delivers his services abroad right on the cite of the client being present there. Usually a techno-coolie is hired through a practice called as *'body shopping'* from the developing countries because of the international subcontracting practices followed by large corporations in these developed countries to keep their costs low.

Both Techno Colies and Cyber Coolies are a class of knowledge workers that has been an off-shoot of international subcontracting by large MNCs to developing countries. If in the 1960s-70s the large MNCs in the manufacturing sector outsourced their raw materials and some times value added products from the developing countries and in the 1970s–80s these again outsourced their components and semi finished products from developing countries (and some times even shifted their manufacturing units to escape rising costs and pollutions), in the 1990s and 21st century the large corporations in the manufacturing as well as service sector in those industrial countries are outsourcing their technical services from the developing countries. This is the consequence of the cut throat competition among MNCs in the west and their drastic efforts to reduce costs.

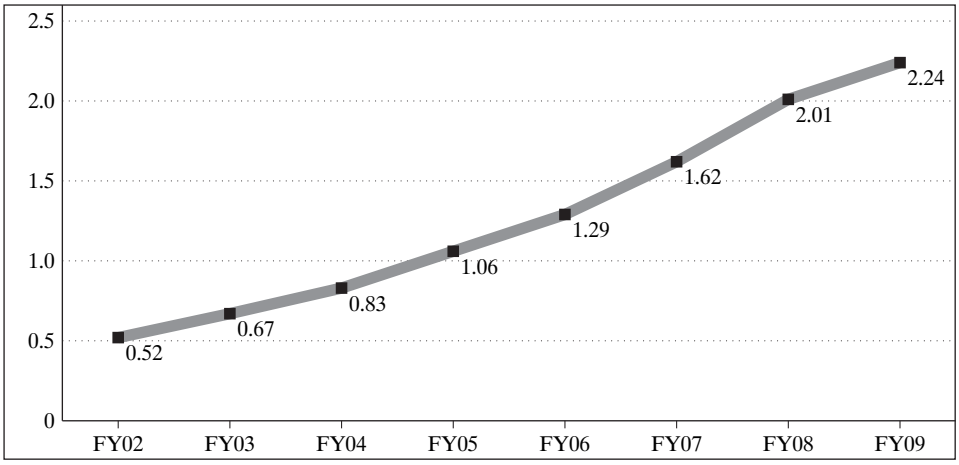
The word 'coolie' (whether techno-coolie or cyber-coolie) has certainly a contemptuous meaning and is used in a derogatory sense. Coolie meaning ***aka***, a poor fellow, dressed in red, scurrying after us carrying our heavy luggage on his head as we board a train, all for a few pennies. It is indeed difficult to trace the exact origin of the word cyber-coolie/techno-coolie. But certainly the words were coined by the Indian left wing intellectuals who have been against free trade. It is also true that the leftist have been trying to trade unionize this growing workforce which the work force itself has not entertained. Hence, this contemptuous attribution. The other source of the word 'cyber-coolie' is the British critics of the phenomenon who are yet to free themselves from the 'Raj' hangover. British economy today being more of a service economy deals more with financing, banking and insurance than with manufacturing

proper. Hence it needs 'back up services' in these areas which they outsource from its ex-colony, India which is also English speaking. And this is also true that Unionists in Britain do consider these outsourced low-end jobs to Indians as job snatching. Therefore, this envious contempt.

These knowledge-workers emerging as a distinct occupational category in India is of very recent origin, may be a direct consequence of India's globalization. As a distinct occupational category it has certain characteristic features and it is fast developing a subculture for itself. Most of my formulations here are based on information/ publications in the internet (secondary data). I also borrow the findings of a study conducted by Babu P. Ramesh (2004: 492–493) on the *BPO workers of India*. The empirical study was conducted among a sample of 277 custom-care agents from six call centers in Noida, New Delhi capital region. The BPO industry in India alone employed little more than 2.23 million according to NASSCOM (2009). (BPO industry includes the employees of the call centers who work over phones and business process offices and who work over webs). Table I, here gives the fact sheet for the growth of manpower in Indian IT industry.

Table I

Indian IT Employment Figures—ITES-BPO Sector*
(in Millions)



* Figures do not include employees in the hardware sector.

(Ccomputed from data, NASSCOM, Indian IT-BPO Industry, Fact Sheet, 2009).

These knowledge workers are all young, educated and mostly convented Indians who work in call centers and outsourced business processing offices to cater to American and British multinationals. They work through the nights, for good reasons that night in India is day time for their clients in USA. Since they work through the nights Harish Trivedi (2004) even calls them a *"Chowkidar"* a derogatory word meaning night guard. They work through cyber phones and cyber webs to deal with their overseas clients. They speak in an American accent which they have painfully cultivated.

As their Indian accent is neutralized, their personality, biological clock and identity also have been neutralized. Because they are to conceal their real names and country of residence while dealing with their oversea clients. Often they have to introduce themselves as Pete/Greg/Jane from Atlanta/Ohio etc. Thus they are faceless workers with pretentious identities (from Hari to Harry or from Shalini to Shelly) who deal with invisible customers/clients located on the other side of the globe.

Table II

Knowledge Workers Employed in Indian ITES-BPO Sector

	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009
IT Exp. & Services Exports.	170,000	205,000	296,000	390,000	513,000	690,000	860,000	946,809
BPO Exports	106,000	180,000	216,000	316,000	415,000	553,000	700,000	789,806
Domestic Market	246,250	285,000	318,000	352,000	365,000	378,000	450,000	500,000
Total	522,250	670,000	830,000	1,058,000	1,293,000	1,621,000	2,010,000	2,236,614

Figures do not include employees in the hardware sector

Source: NASSCOM; Indian BPO Industry, Fact Sheet 2009.

Many of these BPO workers not only work for very long hours but also at odd hours. Many find that they have little social life left, as they work in nights when their families and friends are at homes. Some develop long term sleep disorders, some take so much verbal abuse, day after day, from irate and racist Americans that they actually need psychological help, which now some call centers have learnt to provide for. The sources of their heavy stress that characterize the BPO workers have been identified, as, (i) Absence of job security/ seasonal and contractual nature of jobs for vast number of employees, (ii) monotonous nature of their jobs, (iii) odd working hours (nights), (iv) long duration of work without break, (v) continuous surveillance within the office, (vi) racial abuse by oversea customers, (vii) adherence to stiff and strict performance indicators, (viii) little time for family, (ix) sleeping disorder, (xii) marital discordances emergent of job requirements, and the like.

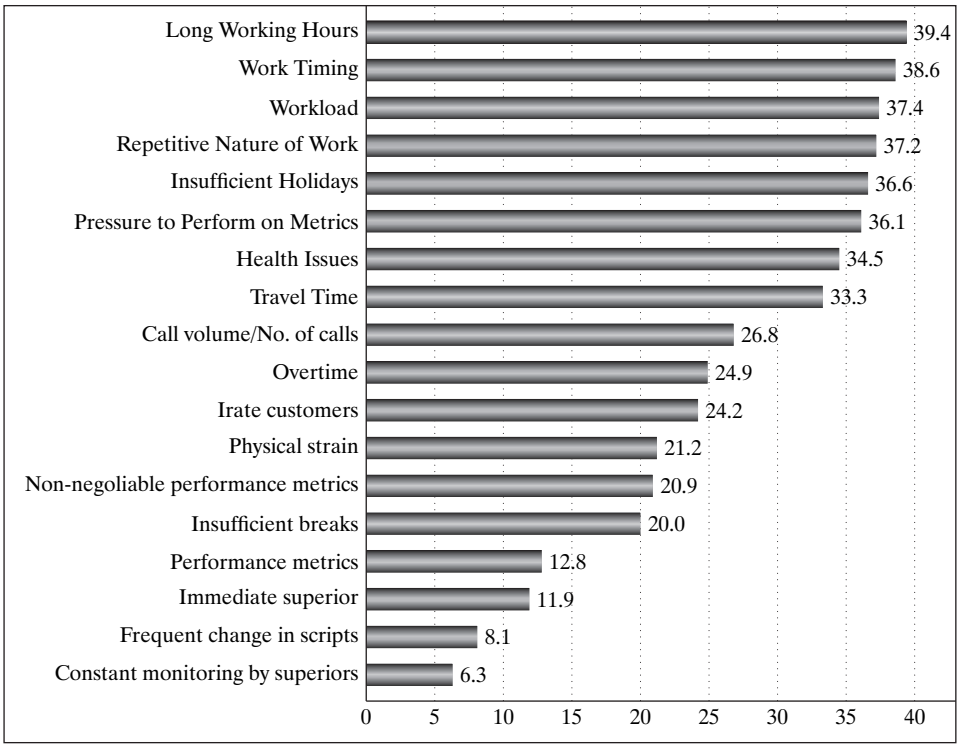
The BPO employee survey (2004) by Data Quest presented here in Table No. II shows that the worst stress factors (as reported by the % of BPO employees) are their long working hours (39.4%), odd working hours (38.6%), heavy workload (37.4%), repetitive nature of the work (37.2%), pressure to perform on matrices (36.1%) and insufficient holidays (36.6%). This of course is indicative of the exploitative nature of the BPO industry. However BPO industry then was in its nascent form in India. Today BPO industry is much better placed in terms of its employee stress.

These young people are the scions of lower middle/ middle class urban parents, mostly graduates, computer savvy, educated in convents or public schools from where they have acquired a fluency in English and some times possess a technical or science degrees but all of them long for an exposure to western popular culture. This workforce in spite of its long hours of work, even in odd hours, also works in the weekends. But this is a grossly under paid lot. This is why India is seen as an outsourcing threat.

Table III

Stress: Indian BPO Industry Stress Factors

Percentage employees who named these as the most important reasons for workplace stress. Multi-coded responses so total will be greater than 100%



(Source: BPO Employee Survey 2004; DATAQUEST)

The cost of an Indian BPO employee is seven to ten times lesser than his American counter part in ITES business. It is true that in India there exists a large pool of English speaking low-skilled manpower. And this makes India a western corporate attraction. The key is low wages.

The organizational structure of call centers is basically dualistic, consisting of a core/permanent set of employees and the periphery/temporary workers. All call center agents are periphery workers, who are substitutable, while team leaders and managers make the core group. The long term career prospects are bleak/ not so attractive. The dualistic work force model allows the firm to regulate the work force and nip in bud any sign of trade unionism. Trade union is a strange word for this workforce. The labour practices that call centers follow are even much older. Because work is monitored on the spot and even after working hours with the help of specially designed software, computer network and closed circuit cameras. All interactions of these employees in office are continuously recorded or taped and randomly checked by the manager. The most of surveillance recorded at work is even comparable with situations of 19th century prisons.

Mistakes at work lead to immediate warnings and those are recorded in 'warning cards' that form part of the daily ratings of agents. If an agent commits three errors in a day he/she gets a zero rating. Three consecutive zeros lead to counseling or even dismissal. Availing leave without prior notice/consent is considered unauthorized and could be reason for termination. So the call centers by and large practice a hire and fire policy. As it seems, there is no modicum of Labour Law in this sector. Thus the service conditions of this work force are very poor. But on the contrary its working conditions are extremely congenial and much superior to those in the manufacturing sector. Their office premises are very clean and fully air conditioned. They are provided with free meals, free transport (car pick-up and drop), regular staff entertainment, a concierge service that will book cinema tickets for them, an ambulance waiting at the bottom of the building if they are fallen ill, etc. Apart from less challenging jobs like telesales and customer services they do render more challenging services by providing value added 'back office' support in the area of banking and insurance too. The monotony of the work and stringent service conditions are camouflaged by the projection of 'work as fun'- by introducing cafes, popcorn booths, Ping-Pong tables, internet kiosks, gym, clinic, etc into the office areas. In this comforting working environment, quotas for calls or emails are successfully attended. Besides, this particular working environment, a reasonably good salary (Rs. 10,000/to 20,000/to 25,000/per month, which is of course not higher than skilled workers of the Indian manufacturing sector), use of latest technologies, young and educated peers, all make these knowledge workers believe that the job they are doing is of an executive/professional.

Emerging New Sub-Culture: Employment in the BPO sector made a bigger impact in India as it turned out to be cultural and social too. It employed graduates from any stream not necessarily graduate engineers. When the engineering and the software sector has predominantly male employees, employment of women come close to 50% in the BPO sector. A culturally reserved Indian society where women lived sheltered lives within the bounds of traditions are bound to experience cultural and economic impact when they went out of home in nights to work place.

This class of knowledge workers is a highly disciplined and young workforce. And because of its education and predominantly lower middle/ middle class origin it turned out to be a docile work force with high level of efficiency. But unfortunately this highly productively docile work force is bereft of labour rights and job security. As a distinct and new occupational category this workforce is fast developing a sub-culture of its own. A recent study by Georgina Thomas, (2008) among the Call Centre employees in the Indian city of Mumbai has referred to the emergence of such a subculture among these young elite workers, of course because of their changing lifestyles. This subculture is said to have two aspects: (i) Consumerism accompanied by other leisure time activities by both male and female employees like, smoking, drinking, frequent partying and movie going, mall shopping, etc. They relish the Mall Culture. The English they write is of a different variety more of American spoken English type (with abbreviated forms of expressions) like the nature and the types of products they market or products they do value addition. They represent a sub-culture that emphasizes traits like, *low cost*, *instant satisfaction*, *use and throw, take it or forget it,*

minimum-quality assured, go cool, chill out, one night stand, etc. They change their jobs as frequently as they change their boyfriends/girlfriends. (ii) The other vital aspect of the subculture refers more gloomy traits like leading a self-centered life, living life in one's own terms and conditions, moving away from community and / family life, indulging in frequent pre-marital sex, extra marital affairs and divorces in the name of what is called as 'one night stand', etc. These traits certainly imply choosing life without commitment/bonds and without certain moral values that augur a free life of primitive type. These are new trends and do make a highly significant component of the sub-culture. This sub-culture emerging among BPO workers is of course anchored on a process of a separate identity formation among them, i. e, (i) different work culture (highly routinized, stressful, odd working hours, etc), leading to → (ii) a different lifestyle, leading to → (iii) acquiring new cultural traits, leading to → (iv) different perception of their social position and culture by others (including family members), leading to → (v) formation of a different self, leading to → (vi) a different cultural identity of the employees.

Conflicting Perceptions of Identity

Left wing politics in India has been desperately trying to penetrate its trade unionism into this sector for last several years. But surprisingly in spite of the poor service conditions, routinized nature of their jobs with emotional hazards, this workforce holds sheer disrespect for the trade unions and the unionists. It is because of the knowledge workers' perceptions of being professionals/ executives that holds back these elite knowledge workers from forming trade unions. Another important reason why these workers are found to be disinterested with trade unionism is that its nearly 30% volatile (attrition) segment do not intend to continue in these jobs as a career, rather they consider this to be a stop gap arrangement to migrate or shift to better jobs. This kind of job perception by the ambitious young workforce finds the notion of unionism incompatible with itself.

A few internet based articles on 'cyber-coolie' by Harish Trivedi (2004), Prafulla Bidwai (2003), and Ranabir Ray Choudhury (2003) and Arundhati Roy, etc. have provoked strong reactions from among this work force. A frustrated Narayan Ram Hegde of Union Network International (a global alliance of 900 unions) when miserably failed in his effort to induct a few of the knowledge workers into their trade union framework, noted that 'these young people have a negative image about unions. But they are more like cyber-coolies. Hopefully they will be convinced over time'. The debate has certainly created some heat in the internet. These young and educated workers claimed themselves to be 'cool professionals' against the attribution of being cyber-coolies. In the debate they too displayed their contempt for left wing trade unionists. Here are some of their responses:

Cyber-Coolies, the term trade unionists and leftist types use condescendingly to describe outsourcing professionals only reveal their contempt for the dignity of labour. And for those claiming to represent the cause of labour that is already a major disqualification.

The cyber-coolies argument is a load of crap, plain and simple. Working conditions as a rule are already better than what exists in other offices… further most of the top software/BPO companies have a very good feedback system in place. Hence what is the need to go on strike, or have a bunch of gangsters speak on your behalf, when you can always just quit and join a competitor? At this point it is an employee's market, not employers and software companies are aware of it. The amount of begging my boss did in an attempt to prevent me from leaving to go do my MBA was almost shameful. There is no difference between unionists and a bunch of gangsters… (TTG on Sept. 26th 05, at 13:09).

The left wing intellectuals who coined the term cyber-coolie were certainly not keen on free trade. But they do not mind selling their silly novels and (*contemptuous*) social analysis of Indian society in western market but have an issue with people making a decent living while performing support work for MNCs. It is widely known what unions have done to slow down economic reforms keeping India in perpetual under performance mode for the past decades. This is just another step in trying to curb the fast growing BPO market (Chandra Dulam on Sept. 27, 05 at 00:50 hrs.).

First of all a 'cyber-coolie' has a job and puts food on the table, so that ain't a bad thing. Secondly, he actually works (gasps!), something that the union idiots have never done their entire lives… (Guru on Oct. 2nd, 2005, at 14:50 hrs.) (The Acron 2005).

In a website entitled 'Dancing with Dogs: Interesting debate' (Aug. 18. 2004) carrying this debate one finds some of these cool young professionals loosing their cool. Not only they did heavy left bashing but also literally lead a counter offensive against these left wing Indian intellectuals for their contemptuous writings. Even a popular columnist like Gurucharan Das noted that 'Trivedi's depictions are truly bizarre. What he sees as exploitation by MNCs, the young people on the contrary see it as an exciting chance to make a career in global economy… The minds of these 'cyber-coolies' seem to be de-colonized whereas poor Trivedi is stuck in a post-colonial past'. Thus there exists a perceptual difference between those of the left wing intellectuals and those of the elite knowledge workers. This workforce with 'professionalism as their lived experience' not only abhorred the terms like 'cyber coolies' and 'slaves on Roman ships' (Ramesh, 2004) attributed to them by the leftwing intellectuals and rebutted back in the internet but also firmly resisted the efforts of leftwing activists to unionize their workforce. The larger story needs to be told here in nutshell.

The early efforts to unionize Indian IT workforce was made by the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET), a founding member of the Union Network International (UNI). Subsequently in Nov, 2000, the Information Technology Professional's Forum (ITFP) was formed at Hyderabad and Bangalore. It was led by Unionists from telecom sector. The offices were opened formally by UNI delegation to India and the financial assistance was extended by the Swedish Union for Technical and Clerical employees (SIF). In the opening ceremony the IT base knowledge workers highlighted that as professionals they collectively wanted to work toward the furtherance of their careers and to fight their employers as victims of work exploitation. They recognized the fact that the interest of Indian IT based knowledge workers need to be protected and the UNI was to act their international guardian. 'Thus a professional association with nuance, very much different from the conventional Indian trade unions, was envisaged' (Noronha and D'Cruz 2009: 113). It was to evolve as a new type of organization like Wash Tech in the USA, Alliance of IT workers in Australia and Syndicate in Switzerland. The

ITPF was to serve as a model for knowledge workers in technology clusters in developing countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Argentina, Brazil and the eastern European countries. Bulk of the IT employees attending the meetings were convinced of forming a trade union with nuance. They chose not to call their organization, ITPF, a trade union but reiterated its position as a forum for furthering IT professionals' goals. In the mean while there was a sudden explosion of employees in the ICT sector as the ITES-BPO sector employed more as a growing sector. It went up from a modest 106,000 in 2001–2002 to 348,000 in 2004–05 (NASSCOM, 2005). Hence left with little choice this workforce, had to engage the ITPF.

Majority of knowledge workers still opined that ITES-BPO sector should keep away from unions, as their presence will cause decline in productivity, resistance to further expansion, drying-up of FDI flow, etc. Being professionals they do not require collective bargainings for their interests. These knowledge workers of course had a sense of 'professionalism as lived experiences' which meant to them; putting organizational interest fist, giving optimum performance at work, their emotions, subjectivity and relationships are accorded secondary to work, keeping personal biases, grudges, favouritism and affective issues away from work situations, being formally dressed, maintaining behavioural etiquettes and mannerisms, collegial informal relationship between superiors and subordinates and the like. These actually may mean nothing more than cultivating a good work culture. Having smelt the mood of the knowledge workers the ITPF responded emphatically saying that it is not an union (Hirschfeld, 2005) and is a knowledge forum of IT and ITES-BPO professionals to facilitate suitable legislation and enforcement of existing legislations for the employees. As it looked, it was a self-styled professional organization and hence in functioning it bore little resemblance to the full-fledged professional association which necessitates an educational criteria for membership, adopts codes of ethics for practitioners, protects members from competition from unqualified quacks, engage in activities to get licensing and educational requirements etc. May be under pressure the ITPF continued to behave like an association and provide information for professional development and networking services. It also had got an understanding with the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia (APESMA) for its services and information. Thus ITPF developed dual identity as a professional forum as well as a trade union with UNI affiliation. The internal conflict manifested as it was pointed out that ITPF is receiving financial support from UNI-Asia Pacific Regional Office (UNI-APRO) as an union but claiming to be a forum of professionals. Because of this emergent rift within a sizable section of its members walked out to establish a separate Union body named Centre for BPO Professionals (CBPOP) under the agies of UNI-APRO in July 2004. It had two service centres, one at Hyderabad and the other at Bangalore. The purpose was to mobilize larger ITES-BPO workforce by convincing them about the need for collective representation through a trade union and finally to consolidate this network of so called professionals into a trade union. Soon it also opened chapters in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. By March 2005 it had got a modest membership of 2000 employees. On the other hand ITPF hardened its stand on not being a trade Union. In 2007 ITPF clarified that it has no relation

with CBPOP and the UNI. It is another professional association like the Bangalore Management Association and it is registered under the Society's Registration Act of India and not under the Trade union Act of India.

Soon CBPOP faced serious challenges of membership as the number of knowledge workers contacted by them expressed dismay at the word trade union and considered it to be strange and alien to them. The employees expressed a professional/managerial class consciousness and pointed out their different social class origins coupled with professional identity. Even they were candid enough to say that unions are for the blue collard factory workers, where working conditions are precarious. The acts of slogan shouting, marching in streets, picketing before their organization is matter of iconoclasm to professionals like them (Nornha and D'Cruz 2009: 118). They turned out to be believers of individualism and merit. Those young knowledge workers feared that the presence of unions would bring in leveling effect on merit and their career progress as the unions would protect the less capables, compress salary differentials and equalize their pay packages. Hence unionization would be a regressive move. Besides reflecting their professional and class consciousness the knowledge workers have spoken the language of their employers, that unionization would threaten the flow of FDI to BPO sector in India and it would be detrimental for a nascent industry. Surprisingly, following the line of the management's thinking these employees also expressed the empathetic concern that the MNCs in USA, UK, etc that are investing in India's BPO sector and those outsourcing from India via offshore arrangements are themselves facing backlash/criticism in their own countries for giving employment opportunities to Indians. Hence it would spell disaster for the ITES-BPO industry in India to unionize it. The other aspect of the story is also equally true that neither the NASSCOM nor the ITES-BPO companies were tolerant about the presence of unions among their knowledge workers. Hence the so called professional consciousness among the employees was coupled with a deep rooted fear factor. Fear of being fired by the management also refrained these knowledge workers from joining any union.

They vindicated the position of NASSCOM that unions are irrelevant to ITES-BPO sector as the employers are providing exceptionally good work environments and salaries. Even the grievances are directly met by their CEOs and these companies have deployed better HRM practices.

To the bad luck of unionist, even after holding the first convention for the formation of a union during 18–19 September 2005 the CBPOP was denied of its registration as a trade union at national level. The unionist had come up with the initial name of the union as UNITES (Union for ITES Employees). But the very word 'Union' was not acceptable to the workforce. Hence CBPOP maintained that unionism and professionalism are not incompatible and produced counter examples of Indian Pilots Association, Bank Officers Association, etc that are functioning like trade unions. But the word 'Professional' was added to UNITES later on to satisfy the knowledge workers. The clever trade unionists even tried to manipulate the young knowledge workers' minds saying that the pseudo-professional hangover of theirs is nothing but an illusion infused by their managements for their own convenience. The unionists underscored that terms like, professionals, executives, etc. are only used to circumvent the law and

strip employees of job security and even their occupational status. By soft-peddling these bourgeoning ideas the managements are taking away many stipulated rights of this workforce. The managements have been cleverly redesigning and redesignating occupations to suit flexibilization programme. Accordingly the earlier 'Office clerk' is now designated as 'Junior management executive', 'Supervisors' as 'Production executives', 'Technical workers/Operators' as 'Knowledge technologists', and so on. But this argument probably could not cut the ice with the ITES-BPO employees.

Again the professionalism and class consciousness among the ITES-BPO employees came on the way as they declined to share the floor with the other ITES-BPO workers (otherwise categorized as Class IV) in the allied/ support services such as, transport, cafeteria, cleaning and the like. It was indicated that the allied supporting staff are not professionals. Thus the idea of Indian ITES-BPO based Trade union was shelved.

The unionists finally understood that the idea of being professionals has already become part of the employees identity. Hence UNITES Professionals felt the need of having dialogue with NASSCOM and were rightly advised to work more like partners to the managements and contribute to good governance of the industry instead of posing as adversaries. But UNITES Professionals' leaders maintained that engaging constructively with industry did not amount to being co-opted by the industry.

Therefore, they would continue to champion the cause of the knowledge workers (rights, justice, fairness, etc.) and would represent their grievances against employers. UNITES Professionals, thereafter emphasized its members' safety (as those are night workers) and even succeeded in negotiating four collective bargaining agreements in SMEs of domestic sector (e.g. Excel Outsourcing Services, e-Merge Business Processing, Info-point and Transact Solutions) (Ibid: 128). But at the same time in view of the preponderance of professionalism among the knowledge workers UNITES Professionals also behaved like a forum and took onboard some of the ethos and orientation of ITPF, e.g. to provide for educational and training services along with information and advices. Apart from envisaging services like, psychiatric support, counseling, yoga/fitness, group health insurance, placement consultation, legal support, etc UNITES Professionals was to establish a core certification programme with leading IT educational institutions like NIIT & APTECH. To enhance its credibility as a professional society UNITES Professionals was interacting with other professional bodies like, HR Fora, The Computer Society of India, The Manufacturing Association of India, etc. Thus the role of a professional association and trade union both seem to be converging with UNITES Professionals.

At the end, I may wrap it up by saying that the so called professionalism of the ITES-BPO workforce is a matter of mere self-perception and conscious identity construction. This identity as so called professionals, partly might have been systematically fomented by their managements during their training period and partly be resultant of their class consciousness. Otherwise their professionalism in the true sense is highly contestable.

Of course there prevails an ambiguity with regard to the objective conditions of work of these knowledge workers. The objective conditions that are goading an intel-

lectual to perceive the knowledge workers as 'coolies' are countered by another set of objective conditions that go neither against the leftwing intellectuals' perception nor in favour of the agents' perception of themselves as 'Cool professionals'. May be it is a new class of elite workforce which by its objective conditions make a class in-itself, but in order to make a class for-itself it needs to possess a subjective consciousness of its being. Thus an objective class is yet to be matched by a subjective consciousness or an objective class is yet to be converted into a subjective class. Therefore unless and until a class in itself becomes a class for itself, it would be difficult to treat them as cyber coolies. On the contrary there exists a hiatus between their objective conditions, (i.e, an elite workforce, with much better working conditions and strong work culture, but routinized low end jobs) and their subjective consciousness, (i.e, being professionals/ executives). Thus the knowledge workers have a class consciousness that does not match their objective conditions or vice versa. Thus it is abundantly clear that the workforce has developed a *'false consciousness'*. As in the early stage of industrialization the sociological problems of industrial workers were, inadequate wages, long hours of work (bringing surplus value), poor work environment, job insecurity, etc and in a later stage the same got changed to alienation (loss of skill and self), technologically deterministic human behavior, industrial accidents/ health hazards, unionization, collective bargaining and subsequently to participatory management and the like, with the advent of post industrial society (part of the economy is knowledge based) the sociological perception of the problems of the knowledge based workers is bound to be different as the very nature of work has undergone change. This new sub-class of new elite workforce is an off-shoot of the India's recent IT-ICT revolution which is still evolving fast. As slowly these knowledge workers are coming under the fold of trade unions, their service conditions and salaries are improving. BPO as a phenomenon in India is going to stay, it is not a very transitory phenomenon. Rather it is fast expanding and once stabilized as a feature of Indian economy the career prospects in BPO industry are going to be brighter like that of their prosperous cousins in the software sector. It must be kept in mind that this Indian workforce is today envied in the USA and UK as job snatchers.

In view of the note worthy finding that there exists a hiatus between the objective conditions of work and the class consciousness of the knowledge workers, it deserves an explanation. Any serious attempt to explain away this phenomenon would fetch J H Goldthorpe's (1963) thesis of *Embougeoisement* as one pertinent concept in this context. As it looks, this class of knowledge workers has undergone a process of embourgeoisement of a slightly different kind. Because this workforce looks to be enriched with capitals of more cultural type (values). To explicate this capital of cultural type, that have resulted in the embougeoisement of knowledge workers, one could readily point out couple of points that these; (i) are college graduates, English educated when English is not the language of Indian working class, (ii) have acquired a distinct consumption habit as they relish the mull culture, (iii) have acquired a dress sense, etiquettes and mannerisms (all anglicized), (iv) have acquired a tremendous sense of self-esteem, (v) have acquired some managerial values, e.g., (a) driven by

a strong work culture they serve their employers first and theirselves later, (b) a sense of competitiveness among the members of the sub-class itself, (c) the practice of informal collegial relationship among the knowledge workers and their bosses (which in fact underplays subordination in office), and (d) optimum performance at work. With a high level of embourgeoisement it is not surprising that these knowledge workers are averse to the idea of trade union.

In fact the more enviable job snatchers are another new budding class of highly paid employees engaged in the knowledge based outsourcing industry of India. These are today known as KPO (Knowledge Process Outsourcing) professionals. These are true professionals like, graduate engineers (in areas of CAD, Biotech./Pharma.), MBAs, Charted Accountants, Economists, etc. They are engaged in off-shoring knowledge intensive business processes that require specialized domain expertise. Their jobs involve high-end processes like, computer aided simulations, valuation research and analysis, data integration, investment research, patent filing, legal/ insurance claims, and management consulting etc. KPO industry is also export oriented like the BPO. But unlike the BPO industry that mainly provides the IT enabled services, the KPO provides domain based processes and business expertise that are more challenging and requires professional as well as technical expertise on the part of employees. The KPO industry in India is slowly growing to reach an export value estimated to be $12 billion by the end of year 2010 (UNI 2005). This industry is making use of the vast pool of highly qualified but un/ under employed Indian manpower. This too is a new and growing sub-class of Indian professionals emergent of the ICT revolution.

Conclusion

In this context the phenomenon of embourgeoisement again reinforces the bourgeois values among the knowledge workers and there-by successfully checked the unionization of the ITES-BPO sector and the spread of working class consciousness and ideology. Embourgeoisement thus has a blinding effect on the knowledge workers. By soft-peddling the managerial values, it has greatly undermined the working class solidarity in the ITES-BPO industry. Having allured the knowledge workers it has allowed them to be co-opted by the managements to a certain extent to work in cooperation with them. It might have denied the knowledge workers certain rights, but on the other hand it has ensured a better future to the knowledge workers by benefitting their nascent industry in a developing economy. At the same time it has kept open the democratic participatory apparatus of the workforce for negotiation and consultation.

To speak from the larger sociological perspective of social stratification these newer technologies (ICT) have created newer sub-classes of workers and added to the existing pattern of social stratifications. If it introduced changes with structural relevance it is bound to bring changes in the culture, as culture too is dependent upon the social structure. The emergent culture is of course to reinforces the given

structural patterns or at least may continue to be structurally evasive, as it found to be the case among the ICT workforce.

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