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TOUR NOTES

of Member Secretary on observation visit to
Kota on 13.1.1968 and 14.1.1968.

/in the
public
and
private

Kota is situated on the right bank of river Chambal; it has a fertile soil. Annual rainfall averages about 35 inches. During the last 10-12 years there has been a substantial growth of industries also in and around Kota. The Rajasthan Atomic Power Project, Electricity Plants fed by the Jawahar Sagar and Rana Pratap Sagar, the Instrumentation Limited, Shriram Fertilizers and Chemicals, Shriram Vinyls and Chemical Industries, Shriram Rayons, J.K. Synthetics, Oriental Power Cables, are a few of the larger units which have come up/sectors. The total investment on these plants is in the neighbourhood of Rs.250 crores. These have already turned Kota into a major industrial complex not only in Rajasthan but in India also. The area holds great industrial promise.

2. Consequent on this rapid development, new residential colonies for staff and workers are coming up in areas somewhat removed from the city; the old areas are expanding too and in the process are having a new look. There has, however, been no commensurate development of the civic amenities. The civic authorities may take some time to catch up with these rapid developments. Housing has become an acute problem an indication of which can be had from the rents which are going up fast. Schools and colleges, medical and health and sanitation services are lagging far behind the needs. Traffic has increased but city bus service is conspicuous by its absence. Road and street lighting requires to be developed. The local Employers have been generally facing difficulties on this account as their workers are directly affected by lack of normal facilities. They state they are ready to cooperate with the Administration to develop these services but the lead has to come from the latter.. Cases have occurred where as a result of lack of lighting workers were robbed at night. On some occasions, industrial relations have also been strained on this account. For the present however, managements in Kota have not experienced any special difficulties.

13.1.68- Shriram Vinyl and Chemical Industries.

This unit was established in 1963 at a cost of Rs.6 crores in the private sector with Japanese Collaboration for the manufacture of PVC (Poly Vinyl Compound. Vinyl is the raw material for plastics.) Caustic Soda and Carbides with a total production capacity of 40 tons per day for PVC and 50 tons per day each for Caustic Soda and Carbides. Sulphuric Acid, Hydrochloric Acid and Chlorine gas are obtained as by-products. Manufacture of vinyl, etc. is a complex chemical process and requires skilled workers and safety precautions. The unit has modern equipment but as in all chemical plants rapid advancement in technology, make it difficult to predict when any new unit will become obsolete and outdated. Though due precautions with an eye on the future have been taken and the management are optimistic about a fair run for the plant it was explained that the risk involved had to be taken.

2. The unit employs about 1000 workers in 3 shifts. Women as a policy, are not preferred for employment except as receptionists and sweepers. Chemicals are costly, and there may be temptations to use them privately to the disadvantage of the company. Thorough search also will not be feasible, particularly in the case of women.
3. Because of the absence of industrial traditions in Kota workers were brought from outside as skilled workers in the initial stages at Kota. Gradually, local employees were given on-the-job training to which the response was extremely favourable. The result is that most of the labour is now local. Many trades are common between Shriram Vinyl and Chemical Industries and the sister concern; the Fertilizers Plant; Shriram Fertilizers and Chemicals and Shriram Vinyl Chemical Industries propose to start a joint training school for workers of the present plants and other plants that are proposed to be started in near future.
4. This will make it possible to give preference to local people/ It is expected that over the next five years labour employed in the more skilled occupations will be mostly local. /in matters
of employ-
ment.
5. As in all chemical plants of this size, the plant has a separate research section for development of new techniques and processes.
6. In the course of discussion, Mr. Mittal explained that construction of houses for workers is a major problem for the management. It is not the funds which will stand in the way but in an area like Kota, which is now developing industrially, management of the estate is a more serious problem. As far as possible housing should be the responsibility of the local bodies or Government. If there is some element of tax for the purpose, the employers should not mind. According to him, the employers will not mind being taxed or asked to subsidise the construction of houses but either the Government or some other body should take the responsibility of their management.
7. Shriram Vinyl & Chemical Industries seems to have tackled the problems of absenteeism, accidents and safety successfully. The incidence of absenteeism and accidents is not high. Mr. Mittal has promised to furnish detailed information on Absenteeism, Accidents and Safety on being requested by the Commission.
8. There are two trade unions in Shriram Vinyl & Chemical Industries but industrial relations on the whole appear to be good although there have been one or two strikes during the last 4 years. The employer did not seem to be overexercised by such stoppages as they consider it to be a part of the game. In a chemical plant however stoppages can be more disadvantages to the employer than in other plants.
9. The representatives of workers who came for a discussion later did not seem to have any serious grievance. Their wages are satisfactory as compared to prevalent rates and the minimum fixed by the Government.

10. Shriram Vinyl & Chemical Industries gives a 'cycle allowance' to all those workers who come by bicycles. This is perhaps an incentive to reach in time in the absence of bus service.

12. About 20% of the workers have been provided with quarters. Shriram Vinyl and Chemical Industries, Shriram Fertilizers and Chemicals and Shriram Rayons propose to have a combined housing scheme for their workers.

13.1.68 - J.K. Synthetics, Kota

This unit went into production in 1962. Constructed at a cost of Rs.11.5 crores, the plant manufactures Nylon fabrics from a chemical called Caprolactum which is imported and forms 33% of the cost of production. Here again there is a series of complex chemical processes from Caprolactum to nylon fabric all taking place in large containers and unseen, most of them. The workers engaged are mostly skilled workers; they have to react to the indication at various places to control the unseen processes.

2. Most of the 1250 workers are locally recruited, 80-85% of them are educated upto V-VI standard. Raw hands are put under training with skilled mistries for 3-4 months. When they are trained and are capable to handle work independently, they are given independent charge.

3. One of the processes is polymerisation. This section of the plant employes about 100 workers. The conditions of work here are more difficult than anywhere else in the plant; with no special monetary advantage commensurate with the disagreeableness of work, the workers clamour to be transferred from this section. Lot of heat is generated during this process and this keeps the room hot in summer months and in a place like Kota working could be unusually difficult. Desertions from this section are quite high in spite of comparatively high wages in a chemical plant.

4. Absenteeism in the entire unit is of the order of 9%. 25-30% workers have been provided with quarters. Safety precautions and wages are adequate.

13.1.68 - Rajasthan Atomic Power Project

The Atomic Plant is being installed with Canadian collaboration at a cost of Rs. 98 crores. This will generate 400 megawatts of electricity. There will be two reactors of 200 megawatt capacity each. The first reactor is expected to go into production in 1970 and the other in 1972.

2. The Project is still in the construction stage. Kota was selected for this project for three reasons (i) availability of water from Rana Pratap Sagar, (ii) distance of the site from the populated area and (iii) firm foundations required for the project.

3. The project at present employs about 1700 workers - 500 departmental and 1200 contract labour.

4. Pucca houses have been provided to the departmental workers near the project temporarily. When the reactors start working, this colony will be demolished and another colony with 188 houses at a distant place will be developed. This is because the population is kept away from the reactors once the project starts functioning to safeguard against accidental radio-active exposure.

5. Huge machines for the plant are arriving at Kandla Port which will be transported to Kota by road on special types of trucks. For that purpose, the road from Kandla to Kota was being renovated, trial runs were made between the two places with dummy machines in order to ensure the safety of the delicate machine when it actually arrived the speed of the carrier had to be adjusted also to avoid serious jerks to the machine.

6. Departmental labour is paid wages according to the rates fixed by the State Government but contract labour is generally low paid. There is, therefore, dissatisfaction among contract labour when their counterparts under the department are being paid more. Project authorities do not exercise much control over the wages of contract labour.

7. On the way back, a crowd of contract labour stopped us to present their grievances. They were the former workers of Hindustan Construction Co. who have major contracts on the project.

8. The workers about 200 in number were dismissed from service for trying to organise themselves into union.

9. Their wages for some period were withheld.

10. No compensation of any kind was given to them.

11. Hindustan Construction Co. is preventing their employment with other contractors by speaking against them to the contractors concerned.

12. Many of the workers are from outside places and have no money to go back.

13. There was a hunger strike by their representatives for the last 67 days by rotation.

14. They have been evicted from the houses provided by the contractor.

15. Member Secretary promised to look into the matter and write to a representative of Hindustan Construction in this connection.

13.1.68 and 14.1.68 - Rana Pratap Sagar and Jawahar Sagar

River Chambal which flows through Madhya Pradesh Rajasthan mainly from South towards the North before joining Jamuna is being harnessed at four places in these two states viz. at Gandhi Sagar Dam in Madhya Pradesh, Rana Pratap Sagar Dam (Rajasthan), Jawahar Sagar Dam (Rajasthan) and Kota Barrage (Rajasthan). Distance between Gandhi Sagar Dam and Rana Pratap Sagar Dam is about 40 miles and about 20 miles between each of the other dams.

2. The two dams viz. Rana Pratap Sagar and Jawahar Sagar are under construction but in charge of the same organisation of Rana Pratap Sagar and Jawahar Sagar Dams. The work of Rana Pratap Sagar is nearing completion and that of Jawahar Sagar Dam is under progress. The bulk of labour is being employed by contractors, who are entrusted with the job of construction of dams. In case of R.P.S. Dam, some work was taken up departmentally. The work of erection of the power units has been taken up departmentally. The total number of departmental labour engaged at present at R.P.S. and J.S. Dam sites is about 3600 out of which 1600 are skilled and 2000 unskilled. The details are as under:

R.P.S. Dam site Skilled 1300; unskilled 1500.

J.S. Dam site Skilled 274; unskilled 516

3. The departmental payment monthly for labour at R.P.S. Dam is 3,60,000/- and at J.S. Dam is Rs.1,00,000/-.

4. In addition to above at R.P.S. Dam about 100 skilled and 300 unskilled labour is engaged by contractors. At J.S. Dam site 300 skilled and 262 unskilled labour has been engaged by the contractor.

5. Due to completion of the work at R.P.S. Dam departmental labour will have to be retrenched. The department has tried to get surplus staff of ~~absorbed~~ R.P.S. Dam ~~and~~ in certain categories of works, they have been transferred wherever their services are needed. But in most of the cases, they are retrenched because suitable jobs for them are not available. While effecting the retrenchment of these workers, formalities as per rules are observed and the retrenchment compensation is paid. According to the existing work-charged rules, sub-division was treated as a unit but after lot of discussions and considerations, it has been agreed that the seniority list of the workers for effecting retrenchment is to be maintained as per jurisdiction of the appointing authorities. This is one of the common problems at all work sites. It is often suggested by management that towards the end of the construction stage workers - in the junior technical categories start looking for outside openings. Some of them lose interest in their work. This slows down work if done on departmental basis. This is used very often as a ground for engaging contractors.

6. As regards, J.S.Dam, most of the work is entrusted to the contractor and the departmental work is practically negligible. For the supervision of the contractor's work, some of the skilled work charged staff is being engaged. At present, there is no possibility of retrenchment of this staff since the work has yet to go into full swing. Problems will start about two years hence.

7. The contractor pays statutory wages to his workers fixed under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 by the State Government. The contractor has not agreed for the payment of minimum wages as per recommendation of the Mathur Committee. The discrepancy in the wages of the contractor's labour and that of departmental labour is naturally causing heart burning among the contractor's labour. However, M/s Hind Construction & Engg.Co., who have been entrusted the job of construction of J.S.Dam, have agreed to increase minimum wages from Rs.60/- to Rs.75/-p.m. and to pay Rs.7.50 and Rs.5/- to the other categories of the workers who are drawing pay of more than Rs.75/- at J.S.Dam. M/s H.C.C. is providing residential and medical facilities to their employees free of cost. They are giving 18 days privilege leave to all of its workers in a year and 10 days paid National and Festival holidays. In addition to above, contractor is paying 8% bonus to its workmen for the last two years.

8. There are two labour officers posted each at R.P.S. Dam and J.S. Dam to look after the labour working conditions and welfare activities. Free residential and medical facilities are provided to labour. Other facilities like welfare centre, Canteen Creches, etc. are provided to departmental as well as to contractor's labour.

9. The construction work on the dams goes round the clock in 3 shifts. Employment of woman workers in the night shift was quite common although the law prohibits that. The reason given for this by the Superintending Engineer was that workers prefer to work in the same shift in which their spouses work. This, to them, was a matter of convenience. A male working in one shift and his wife in another dislocated family life. Cases of their working in different shifts were not rare either. This makes the reason given by the Superintending Engineer somewhat weak.

10. Management was critical of the general discipline of workers. They felt that proper education should infuse a sense of responsibility and dedication, but provision of such education was a serious difficulty.

11. Rate of fatal accidents at the R.P.S. work-site was low - 42 deaths during 6 years where 10,000 workers were working at the peak period.

12. Industrial relations were on the whole satisfactory but the management complained that outsiders sometimes incite workers to create trouble.

14.1.68 - Discussions with Shri N.K. Joshi,
Labour Commissioner and other officers
of the Labour Department, Rajasthan.

1. Shri Joshi was of the opinion that Factory Inspectorate and Labour Commissioner's Organisations in Rajasthan should be bifurcated.

2. Factory Inspectors should concentrate more on the smaller establishments where the labour is generally unorganised and more vulnerable than the organised labour in bigger establishments who would/care to abide by labour /normally take laws.

3. Name of the Labour Department should be changed to 'Industrial Relations Department'.

4. Transport is a major hurdle in the inspection of quarries and mines located in far-flung areas.

5. There being no rest house facilities for non-gazetted staff, inspectors find it difficult to go to distant places for inspection. In quarries, small industries located in out of the way places, there are no rest houses at all for the inspection staff. Even where there are some facilities of the kind, the inspection staff is considered somewhat junior to utilise them. This adds another dimension to the implementation of labour laws.

14.1.68 - Discussion with representatives of workers.

Union office bearers cannot devote much time to their union duties as they are required to be present on work in the factory. For attending court cases, meetings of the federation, etc. also there is no provision of special casual leave.

2. The relations with management are cordial though cases do come up where differences arise.

3. Most of the difficulties are because of high prices or for some reasons which are not within the reach of employers.

4. Representations jointly made by the unions and the management to civic authorities, on many occasions do not yield results.

14.1.68 - Discussions with Mr. Das General Manager, Shriram Vinyl & Chemical Industries and Mr. T.G. Kriplani, General Manager, Shriram Rayons.

It was pointed out by Mr. Kriplani that workers who work on the same machine in two consecutive shifts, by mutual agreement, absent themselves alternately, thus giving a chance to earn overtime wages at double the rates to each other and cheating the industry.

14.1.68 - Stone Quarries at Dhaneshwar and Budhpura

Kota has a large number of stone quarries employing

thousands of workers. The exact number of quarries or workers is not known as almost none of them is registered under the Mines Act (Mining and Quarrying is under central jurisdiction). According to a rough estimate about 15 - 20 thousand workers are employed in quarries around Kota.

2. Mining Department, Rajasthan give leases every year or for a number of years for excavation of stone. The lessee engages workers for excavation of stone on a piece rate wage system. There is no intermediary contractor in Kotah. The excavated stone is cut into specified sizes by workers and transported to Kotah Station from where it is exported to other parts of the country.

3. Excavation requires a certain skill. In a thick rock there are horizontal layers and also layers of stone. The cutter's trained eyes find out the layer which should be separated from the thicker piece. With hammers and chisels the cutter strikes the layer at the proper places. This results in separation of layer from the slab. Each layer constitutes a slab of stone. This slab is further dressed up with the chisels and hammers by the cutter making the slab according to required specifications. Thick slabs are also extracted for use as girders in roofing of houses. Quarry pits are cleaned of small pieces of stones and are removed by male/female workers to enable further excavations. Slabs are then loaded in trucks by loaders and transported.

4. An interview with workers revealed the following points:-

(i) Cutter's wages are Rs. 6/- for 100 sq.ft. of stone excavated and dressed;

(ii) cleaners of quarries and loaders are paid on piece rate of Rs. 3-4/- per truck or about 200 sq.ft. of stone:

(iii) Workers have to bring their own tools e.g. hammers, chisels, crow-bars, spades, etc. ;

(iv) Workers have to make their own arrangements for sharpening of chisels and other tools.

(v) Workers have to give 5% extra stone to employer for which no wages are paid.

(vi) The lessee calls the piece rated workers 'contractors' and not employees to avoid his responsibility for them.

(vii) Workers are not paid wages at the work-site. They have to go to Kota - a distance of about 40 miles to take payment.

(viii) payment is not made on the same day. Workers have to wait for 2-3 days at the city for which no wages are paid to them.

(ix) Lessee's munshi or nunim remains at work-site and gives the account of workers on a simple piece of paper. At times this chit is lost by worker and difficulties arise in claiming money. This is a serious handicap to workers. In any case payments are made by lessees on the basis of entries in his registers at Kota which are generally less than the account given to workers by munshi. The chit given by the munshi has no useful purpose except to deny the worker his due if it gets lost.

(x) A truck carries about 1500 sq.ft. of stone. But the royalty paid to the Government at the barrier generally is on the basis of smaller load (for about 800-1000 sq.ft. only). Very often the slabs are inspected at the godown. ~~of~~ some are damaged in transit the loss on that account has to be borne by the workers.

(xi) There is no arrangement for drinking water at the work-site. Rain water accumulated in deserted quarry pits is used for drinking and washing etc. by the workers. When that dries up in summer, the lessee makes arrangement through trucks.

(xii) There are no houses provided by lessee. However, workers make their own houses by erecting stone slabs for walls and putting wood stone slabs for roof.

(xiii) Quite a good proportion of workers (25-30%) are educated upto VII - VIII standard. This was a revelation.

(xiv) There is no trade union worth the name. Those workers who talk of trade union, etc. are harassed in every way and they are asked to quit the place by the lessee. Though the rest of the workers are in sympathy with the organisers who are victimised, they cannot openly side with him.

(xv) There is no scope of employment of children. However, women and adolescents are employed for loading unloading or cleaning the quarries of broken pieces.

(xvi) Lessees try to do away with their old workers and recruit afresh. This is, perhaps, to avoid legal complications. Also after short breaks the same workers are employed. If two or more lessees get together they can swap labour and deny benefits which accrue to it by long and continues service.

(xvii) There are no fixed working hours. But generally the work does not go beyond 8 hours.

(xviii) Rate of fatal accidents is not high. However, minor injuries are quite common for which no compensation is paid nor the usual first aid attention.

(xix) Generally there is no provision of firstaid. Some lessees do have that arrangement on payment basis.

(xx) DA/Bonus/Leave with pay etc. are not given.

(xxi) Work goes on round the year but slows down during harvesting and rains when the rugged kutcha roads become unfit for trucks.

(xxii) Absenteeism is high during festivals and harvesting.

(xxiii) Workers draw advances also sometimes for which they have to pay interest.

(xxiv) Leases are obtained in different names by the same persons/perhaps to avoid income tax.

(xxv) Workers are threatened of dire consequences and sometimes beaten if they talk against the lessee to officials.

(xxvi) Workers seemed to be well clothed and earning good wages. Some of them had transistors also. According to their own statement they have no complaint so far as wages are concerned.

(xxvii) Liquor shops seem to be frequently visited by workers. One of the workers was drunk on the day of our visit. This happened to be a festival holiday and perhaps this relaxation may be understandable. The interesting part was that there was only one person whom we noticed in a well behaved large group).

5. An interview with one of the lessees (S. Jagjit Singh, who appeared to have smelt of our visit and reached there to control the situation from going against him, revealed the following points:-

- (i) Rate of lease for one year is Rs.1980/- for a plot of 60 meters x 120 metres.
- (ii) All labour is from outside Kota.
- (iii) There is hardly a margin of Rs.1-2/- as profits over every 100 sq.ft. of stone. (This obviously was unconvincing).

6. Discussions with lessee and workers have been very educative. At certain places in Rajasthan, the stone quarry labour has organised into trade unions and had been successful in improving its lot. One trade unionist is trying to organise Kota workers also and a union 'Kota Kashetriya Patthar Khan Kamgar Sangh' is the result. But it will naturally take time to come of age.

Comments by the Member-Secretary

Apart from the points which have been recorded above, it does appear strange that even though the contractor has his inspector on the work, the distribution of wages is not done there. The difference in the work which is recorded by the contractor and the work which is actually done is, at times, disturbing. It is quite possible for the contractor to give each person who works for him a book in which the work turned out could be measured and recorded. The contractor's agent on the spot could initial this book and on this basis payments could be made. The present arrangements by which a worker is given a loose slip which he is likely to lose is to the disadvantage of the quarry workers. /a

2. The interesting part of this visit was the presence of one of the contractors in another quarry visited by us since he knew about our visit. In his presence there was so much of silence on the part of workers that one could not help feeling that the person under whom they worked could be having an efficient secret service as also an efficient way of dealing with workers who failed to do his bidding. When workers met us privately away from the pale of contractor's influence, a number of points made were corroborated and in addition, the coercive arrangements made by the contractor to get adequate return for the money he pays came out. The contractor also runs trucks for transporting the slabs. This integrated operation makes it possible for him to explain his accounts in such a way (if he has to explain) to the quarry workers and transport workers that the workers are given the feeling that the individual operations do not yield the contractor adequate return.