

Strike of Uber and Ola Drivers in Mumbai

Ola and Uber- the foreign on-line taxi companies entered India with their app technology and pricing attracting customers and the same time the taxi market in India. It is the same story in whichever country they entered.

Very often the drivers of these companies have been protesting and agitating against their exploitation in the countries where their operations are conducted.

Now it is the turn of Uber and Ola drivers in Mumbai to go into strike in protest against their exploitation in various forms. Most of these drivers are called to be driver-partners who are being exploited by the companies. While the two companies with the use technology are making profits by collecting 20 to 25 per cent service fee on the fares collected, the income of the driver-partners is decreasing day by day making them unable to sustain. While the companies have been lowering the fares to customers and expanding the business, the driver-partners are getting lesser income and they are facing the brunt of ever escalating fuel prices and maintenance charges of the vehicles.

While the Uber is present in 31 cities in India, Ola operates with 9000,000 vehicles and a million driver partners. These drivers are car owners who leased out their cars to the company and work as drivers with the hope of getting more business. They have purchased the cars through bank finance and have to repay through EMIs.

The two companies initially, to attract more drivers into their net, promised them an earning of Rs. 50 to 90 thousands a month. But subsequently the promised incomes of drivers have been dwindling, unable them to sustain as owner-drivers, where as the companies have been consistently deducting their 20 to 25 per cent as service fee and thriving on the increasing number of customers and business. Moreover the companies have been diverting their business or customers in favour of company owned cabs instead of those owned by drivers. These drivers are forced to accept underserved areas.

Thus the companies are using thee-commerce platform to their benefit at the cost of owner-drivers.

Such an unequal method of business triggered the just anger of the Uber and Ola drivers of Mumbai leading to a strike from 18-3-2018 calling the companies as "*Ola and Uber chor hai*", under the leadership of Maharashtra Nav Nirman samiti of Raj Thackeray.

Initially the companies tried to blame the strike as politically motivated and only involving the participation of black-listed drivers. But later the companies negotiated with the leadership of striking workers and entered into a written commitment on meeting various demands. While the strike of Uber was called off after four days, the strike Ola called off after three days.

According to the statement of MNS, the written commitments of the companies include a re-look at black list of drivers and putting up stickers in Marathi language on the Uber cabs. The full particulars of the commitments are not available yet.

This strike of Ola and Uber driver-owners exposes us how the foreign companies with the projection of technology based business are exploiting the drivers of India, not only their labour power, but also wooing the unemployed into false promises and hopes making them lenders from financial institutions for owning the taxis.

This is how the free trade and new technology pushes the people into bankruptcy and misery.
