

**PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN
THE INDIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT**

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Certified that the dissertation entitled "Participation of Women in the Indian Trade Union Movement" submitted by Maitrayee Chaudhuri for the Degree of Master of Philosophy is a bona fide work to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiner for consideration.


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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

SOCIOLOGICAL MATRIX OF THE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGICAL MATRIX OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to clarify the objective and scope of the present study; indicate the nature of data used; present a review, albeit briefly, of Indian sociological research, with special reference to sociology of women and sociology of labour; and finally delineate the theoretical framework and schema of the study.

The Objective of the Study

The year 1975 was observed as the Women's Year the world over. A spate of literature on women cropped up, focussing on their problems and on their achievements. A host of conferences, meetings, seminars were held, innumerable special issues of journals were published, a succession of resolutions on women were passed in international forums. India did not lag behind in any of these performances.

The "Women issue" had come not only to stay but also hold a prominent place. It would be grossly unfair however to locate the emergence and highlighting of the problems of women to either the declaration of International Women's Year or to any of the resultant celebrations.

What has been overlooked is the fact that women themselves have striven to draw attention to their plight. Middle class women, working class women, students, peasant

women, the Indian women, the Western women have come out into the streets with their demands. Ideologically different, the various womens' movements have all proceeded with the professed aim of redressing the grievances of women. The International Women Year has to be seen as a response to the increasing consciousness of the unequal status of women.

The present study, in a way, can be said to be a part contribution to the growing practical, administrative, political, economic cognitive interest in the women issue. The "Participation of Women in the Trade Union Movement in India" is a topic rather unfamiliar to the academic, sociological world, or perhaps unfamiliar to all except those directly involved in mobilizational, organizational or ideological tasks of the movement. To be more accurate, the trade union movement itself has shown very little effort at developing self consciousness as far as the women question is concerned.

The urge to generalize from this void that women have had no role to play in trade unions is strong. But to do so would be quite erroneous, to put it mildly. The task of the study would be to scan through the scanty material at hand, both from the academician and the sporadic production by the movement and to attempt to use sociological concepts and theories to further a better understanding of the issues. Limitations of such an exploratory study are obvious. It is

exploratory both at the empirical (substantive) and the theoretical (cognitive) level. As our study does not involve any field observation or generation of primary data the almost total dependence on secondary sources, whose objective in data gathering were quite different, further constricts the scope of the study.

A recognition that women are not in the condition they should be and that something should be done about it, exists. Indeed, various movements have arisen, focussing on different aspects of the problem. What has been lacking however is a clear, theoretical understanding and consequently an effective practice. An impression has gathered that "rape", "dowry" are obnoxious but peripheral phenomena, isolated from the rest of society. Simultaneously, attempts have been made by some women organizations to pose the issue as being essentially that of men versus women - men the oppressor, women the oppressed. Amidst the confusion, it is necessary to clarify where exactly does trade unions fit in and what their role in organizing women is.

In the last few years, Indian scholars have paid some attention to women studies. But little to nothing exists on the problems of working class women or their relationship with trade unions. This study, apart from questioning this limitation will attempt to probe into the reasons for this lacuna.

The Scope of the Study

The study being essentially selective does not intend to encompass the entire area of trade Union movement and women participation - a task quite beyond the realm of feasibility for this study. It merely attempts with a set of illustrations, to capture the main features of women participation, and relate it to the rest of society. No specific area study is attempted - an overview of the entire Indian situation is sought to be portrayed. The three industries of textiles, plantations and mines are given special references as they represent sectors where women workers have a long tradition of being employed. Three central trade unions, the Indian National Trade Union Congress, the All India Trade Union Congress and the Centre for Indian Trade Unions are compared, albeit briefly, in terms of their stand and relationship with women workers.

Even if firm generalizations are not drawn from the study, certain questions can be raised, certain hypotheses thrown up which later studies can work upon, to confirm or disconfirm or make more definite and precise for further study

Participation of Women in Trade Unions: Limitations of Data Availability

It would be no exaggeration to claim that available information on women in trade unions and their involvement in trade union activities is not only scarce but whatever is available is in total disarray. The complete absence of

documented evidence by both the Government agencies concerned and the trade unions themselves reflect not so much the insignificance of women participation (as will be seen) as the insignificance with which women participation is viewed, consciously or otherwise.

Primary Sources

Visits to the Ministry of Labour, - the Women Cell, the Registrar of Trade Unions, the Labour Commission proved to be of no avail. There is no record of women members of trade unions. This is so primarily because no break up of the work force is given in the records of strikes, gheraos, dharnas, demonstration or for that matter in the accounts of retrenchments or mandays lost. A perusal of the Indian Labour Journal, a monthly publication of the Labour Bureau, would reveal statistical tables of the following nature.

YEAR	NUMBER OF STRIKES	NUMBER OF WORKERS INVOLVED	MANDAYS LOST
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or

STATE/UNION TERRITORIES	NUMBER OF UNITS	NUMBER OF WORKERS
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The blanket category "workers" makes it impossible to have any idea about women workers in specific.

There was no information as to whether or not the state governments did or did not keep a break-up of the work force. This absence of separate categories for men and women workers

is of very serious concern in terms of any comprehensive research work being done and is symptomatic of the neglect of women as a separate category on the part of those whose business it is to maintain records.

The trade union offices too could be of very little help as far as records of membership is concerned. In the absence of regular returns from various factories it became impossible to have a consolidated list. Moreover break ups of the labour force into men and women did not exist here either.

The INTUC had no account of its women membership in the country. An attempt, a few years earlier, was made in this direction but was suspended soon after its commencement for some reason or the other. The AITUC too had no list of membership of women either at the district, the state or all-India level. The BMS expressed a similar inability, stating that now that we had raised the point, they will include a separate column for women in the next returns. The CITU had made a sample survey of its women members, but had no consolidated list.

Secondary Sources

Literature on the Indian Labour Movement is not a rarity. What is a rarity is literature on the role of women in the labour movement. This is a clear reflection not of the lack of active women participation, but of the lack of

concern towards this aspect. Considerable amount of research done do not question the existing and widely prevalent conception of the nature of women workers and their role in society. Research thus done incorporate the dominant assumptions of society and tend to reinforce the restrictive and myopic notions of "woman". The frequent failure to take cognizance of one half of society, in the literature on the labour movement, is sufficient testimony of the consciousness of a male dominated society.¹

Trends in Indian Sociology

Two major trends are discernible in most Indian sociological research: one, an overriding concern with what is termed the "modernisation" process and two, an overemphasis on empirical research to the neglect of theory. Needless to say, the two trends are inextricably intertwined. Women studies have been no exception.² Consequently an examination of sociological research on women must necessarily be pre-saged by a critical review of the major trends in Indian sociological writings.

1. Karnik, V.B., Indian Trade Unions - A Survey (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1978); Sharma, G.N., Labour Movement in India (Sterling, New Delhi, 1971); Ramaswamy, E.A. Worker and his Union: A Study in South India (Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1977).
2. See section on "Trends on Sociology of Women".

The first Indian sociologists emerged during a period of intense nationalist activity. Ironically the Indian sociologist was brought up in the western intellectual tradition.³ The western influence persisted and perhaps increased in the post-independence period. In fact/^adefinite tendency on the part of indigenous scholars to "appraise reality in the light of the theories handed down from the teachers and colleagues abroad"⁴ grew. Thus the needs of a newly independent society were perceived with reference to the western model of development.

Development - technological, economic, social, political - was the keynote of the post-independence period. The Congress leadership adopted the capitalist path of development.⁵ Indian sociologists did not lag behind - "modernisation" models, were projected as panacea for India's rapid development. "Modernisation" was used as a synonym for "Westernisation".⁶ The underlying assumption was that what came about in the West with the onset of capitalism would come about in

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3. Mukherjee, K., Sociology of Indian Sociology (Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979), p. 43.
 4. Ibid., p. 50.
 5. See generally, Bettelheim, Charles, India Independent (Khosla and Co., New Delhi, 1977); Pavlov, V.I., The Indian Capitalist Class: A Historical Study (Bombay, 1964).
 6. See for instance, Srinivas, M.N., Social Change in Modern India (Orient Longmans Ltd., Bombay, 1966). The constraint of space do not permit us to deal in detail with "modernization" theories.

India with the adoption of the capitalist path of development. India would now quickly progress from the 'traditional' to the 'modern', old institutions would give way to new institutions which would in turn be characterised by 'rationality' and 'humanitarianism'.⁷

The attempt to grasp the complexities of the historical process through polar concepts like the "traditional" to the "modern" was and is typical of western sociology. For instance, both Weber and Parsons use polar concepts to depict and analyse reality. Indeed, status and contract, gemeinschaft and gesselschaft, mechanical and organic solidarity, informal formal groups, primary and secondary groups, culture and civilization, traditional and bureaucratic authority, sacred and secular associations, military and industrial society, status group and class, "all these concepts represent as many attempts to grasp the structural change of the institutional framework of a traditional society on the way of becoming a modern one".⁸ Parsons schema of value orientations catalogues the possible alternatives - affectivity versus affective neutrality, particularism versus universalism, ascription versus achievement, diffuseness versus specificity.⁹

7. Ibid., p. 48.

8. Habermas, Jiirger, "Science and Technology as Ideology" in Barnes, Barry ed., Sociology as Science (Ox and Wyman, London, 1972), p. 352.

9. See generally, Parsons, Talcott, The Structure of Social Action (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1937).

Indian sociologists must however be credited with an indigenous list - rural and urban, caste and class, static and mobile, closed and open, sacral and secular. Though often western concepts are borrowed and sought to be transplanted directly on to the Indian soil. Yogendra Singh, a la Parsons, described the movement of Indian society as being one from a qualitative ascriptive social system to that of an achievement oriented society.¹⁰

The endeavour to capture social reality through polar concepts, we will see, only lead to a partial and distorted understanding of the social process.¹¹ Underlying this failure is the failure of method i.e., western epistemology.¹² Firstly, the models of 'modernisation', proferred are a historical. Two streams of criticisms converge here. At the very outset the 'modernisation' theorist declares the Western model as the only model a post-colonial society can follow in its bid towards modernisation. This is an "un-tenable historical generalisation".¹³

They presume that history is unilinear
It looks at social development as a long
caravan with underdeveloped societies
trailing far behind. And, presumably,
(contd...)

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10. Singh, Yogendra, "Traditional Culture: Pattern of India and Industrial Change", in Bhat, Y.B. and Rao, C.R.M. ed., Tradition and Modernity in India.
 11. See generally Allen, R. Francis, Modernizing Nations: Industrialization and Beyond (Macmillan, New York, 1971).
 12. Gouldner, W. Alvin, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, (Hienemann, New Delhi, 1971).
 13. Kaviraj, Suctipto, "On the Concept of Political Development", Marxist Miscellany, August 1973, p.91.

they have to travel the same way if they are to get to more privileged heights. Actually, however, history is not so closed in the twentieth century. It is more generous in offering options. This is the primary historical fallacy" (14)

This ahistorical approach is compounded by the use of abstract concepts as tools for the dissection of social processes. In other words, 'traditional' and 'modern' are concepts which are not only static and moribund but also all subsuming. This brings us to the heart of the problem. The fact that the categories of 'traditional' and 'modern' are all inclusive reflects the inability of Western sociology to find an objective criterion to discriminate between the important and the unimportant in the complex network of social phenomena. This invariably leads to subjectivism. Small wonder that Indian sociologists can see no other path of development other than the western capitalist path of development. The inherent tendency to isolate and study seemingly important, but subjectively determined, elements in society are manifested in distorted empiricist studies. Listen to Madan and Verma:

Because of its multi-dimensional character development does not lend itself to empirical investigation as a totality. A more
(contd....)

14. Ibid.

manageable procedure is therefore to choose only one particular aspect of it for study and to treat some other suitably selected dimensions as an explanatory variable. (15)

That is to say, unable to seize the dynamics of actual social processes the sociologist turns to the use of pseudo¹⁶ indices to characterise historical movement of society. Srinivas, for instance, enumerates the determinants of "modernization" as a "disquieting positionist spirit", "a revolution in communication", "urbanization", "spread of literacy", "media exposure", "wider economic participation"¹⁷ "mobility"

Such a list of indices cannot enable us to measure the progress of any society. Firstly, they represent a curious mixture of indicators some of which are cause and others effect or sometimes both effect. Is the spread of literacy the cause or the effect (or are both effects of 'social mobility'? Secondly, indices like "urbanisation" are misleading.

15. Madan, T.N. and Verma, P.C., "Variations in the Proportion of Professional Workers in the Asian Countries", Dutta R. and Joshi, P.C., Studies in Asian Social Development, Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company, Bombay 1962).
16. See section on "Trends in Sociology of Women", n. 27.
17. Srinivas, n. 6, p. 50.

It does not necessarily represent a forward step in society. Moreover, it will not be correct to assert that Westernisation would lead to urbanisation. The destruction of the artisan class, we saw during British rule, lead to an exodus to the rural areas. This is despite the Westernisation introduced, by the British. Finally, as noted earlier, reality is buried under the rubble of dislocated concepts. To our minds the Marxist method not only avoids the pitfalls of the Western epistemology but also helps in the scientific exposition of social processes.¹⁸ We will outline this understanding in the last section of this chapter.

Overemphasis on Empirical Research

It is commonly recognized that any systematic attempt to understand involves a combination of empirical work and theoretical formulation; concepts and ideas sought to guide factual investigation, and detailed investigation ought to check, reformulate or perhaps further a particular theory. An overemphasis on data collection, computation, statistical correlations to the neglect of any comprehensive theoretical understanding has been one of the major trends in sociology. Indian sociological research too has fallen prey to what C. Wright Mills terms "abstracted empiricism".

18. See generally, Lenin, V.I., What the Friends of the People Are and how they fight the Social Democrats (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974).

A discussion on this orientation would involve three aspects - first, the assumption and premises of the approach, second, the techniques of research it commonly opts for, and third, the implications it has for the fundamental nature of social science and for society in general.

The assumption is that social reality can be comprehended by collecting data relevant to the phenomena under study, specially the attitudinal responses to structured stimuli. That is, the scope for this is unlimited as suggested by Lazarsfeld.

"It would not be more difficult and not even more expensive to collect happiness ratings than to collect data on income, savings, and prices".¹⁹

The approach involves a shift of emphasis from history of institutions and ideas to studies of human behaviour, which is after reduced to what is called 'psychologism' to the neglect of the social aspect. Statistical co-relations are passed of for sociological explanations. Greater emphasis is placed on contemporary rather than on historical social events. This is primarily so for contemporary events are more likely to provide the kind of data needed. Theory becomes identical with the variables used in interpreting statistical findings. And collected data in practice are

19. Cited in Mills, C. Wright, The Sociological Imagination (Penguin, Middlesex, 1951), p. 71.

often restricted to those facts and relations which are numerous, repeatable and measurable.

The fundamental source of information is a sample of individuals. The questions asked are usually in terms of behavioural attitudes or psychological reactions of individuals. Accordingly the assumption is that a compilation of such studies will lead to a better understanding of the society itself.

The result of this gross neglect of the social structure, and of history leads to a partial and incorrect understanding of situations. The individual is a social entity and his problems, his aspirations, his complexes are not related only to his immediate surroundings. A sociological understanding has to grasp the linkages between the personal surroundings and the socio-politico-economic structures.

Much of the studies on women, or labour and on movements suffer from this overemphasis of data, of psychologism, of statistical co-relations and a lack of understanding of the social reality as a whole, or as a dynamic entity. Studies on work force may be restricted to a categorization of sex, age and other attributes. Research conducted on the labour force thus consist mainly of voluminous information on wages, budgets, on food consumption, on mortality, on marriages etc.

All this has been done strictly in statistical terms, and a scrutiny of these without a clear theoretical formulation is of little use. Similarly studies on trade unions for the most part have dealt with "tripartite meets", legal provisions" and various deliberations".

Fortunately for us in India, not all sociologists have traditionally been wilful victims of abstracted empiricism to a total neglect of history, theory and philosophy.

Kamakrishna Mukherjee observes about the post-Independence sociology:

Trained by the British School of Social Anthropology of the 1940s and 1950s, the 'Brahmans' (academic leaders) among the modernizers were not only empiricists with a bias against the historical and material dimension of social reality but also devotees of "field work" conducted intensively and personally". (20)

Further on, he writes, that "... the action-oriented 'Kshatriyas' among the modernizers trained in the contemporary school of U.S. rural sociology, employed sophisticated tools of survey research for the collection of data and their analysis. But the substantive usefulness of their effort remained questionable because of the theoretical assumptions which were uncritically imported and became the tools and techniques of survey research may not have been valid or efficient for contemporary Indian society".

20. Mukherjee, n. 3, p. 53.

21. Ibid., p. 54.

In the light of the fact that a lot of literature on both women and labour studies is data oriented, even a laboured and rather longish elaboration on this aspect is justified.²²

Trends in Sociology of Women

With a majority of women studies being conducted on the modernization model, the idea has gained ground that a visible improvement has taken place in the status of the Indian women.²³ It is alleged that the increasingly active role women are playing in public life, whether it be in professions or services, politics or other aspects of social life, is visibly improving their status. Here it is significant to note that most of the sociological research done has been confined to only certain sections of women - either the upper caste, educated, westernized women involved in public life, or the middle class, working women caught in "role conflicts" as a mother/wife/daughter/daughter-in-law and employee.²⁴ We start our enquiry by suspending these middle class assumptions with middle class women in focus and a middle class ideology as a methodological stance

22. Paradoxically, of course, but as will be elaborated, there has been little data on women participation trade unions given the modernization model.

23. See Mazumdar, V., "Not by Jobs Alone", Mainstream, October 8, 1980.

24. A glimpse of the titles of the books, the headings of the articles or research papers would show this, for example, the following:

(contd....)

commonly shared by a large number of social scientists in India. A review, albeit briefly, of the typical studies of women done in the sociological arena, will illustrate their methodological limitations.

Modernisation and women Studies

Andrea Menefea Singh's observation on women studies in India tends to confirm a similar opinion regarding the obsession with "modernization".

The most widespread sampling technique among sociologists is to select a random or stratified sample of women from certain offices, professions or universities in order to measure the changing roles and attitudes of women. The reason for selecting women from offices, professions or universities is that it is assumed that these are the women in the forefront of changing roles and attitudes within the wider society and who are and will be leaders of public opinion. Thus, women who pursue higher education and/or modern occupations are considered both an index of change and predictors of trends among women in the wider society. (25)

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24. (contd...) Agnew, V., Elite woman in Indian Politics (Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1979); Kapoor, P., The Changing status of the Working Women in India, The Life and World of Call Girls in India, (Vikas Publishers, Delhi, 1974); Vikas, New Delhi, 1978); Venkatarayappa, K.N., Feminine Roles (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1966); Mehta, Ram, Divorced Hindu Women, western Educated Hindu woman (Vikas Publishing House, Delhi); The Educated women in Indian Society today: A Study Carried out by the YwCA of India (Tata Mcgraw Hill Publishing Company Ltd., Bombay, 1971); S.N. Manade and P. Ramachandran, Women and Employment (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay 1970); C.A. Mate, Changing Status of Women in Post-Independent India (Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1961) Mehta, Rama, The Western Educated Hindu women (Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1970.
25. (contd....)

The underlying assumption, as apparent, is the same which was discussed in "modernisation" theories in the earlier section. Veena Majumdar seeks to examine these theories which according to her "continue to influence policies for the advancement of women in Third world". Briefly they are: (a) women's employment is a logical development of the increasing access to education, that is a normal result of the modernisation process; (b) employment ensures women access to the world outside the family and brings them into the process of social production, rescuing them from seclusion; (c) employment provides access to independent income and responsibilities, leading to opportunities for personal development, rise in economic status and independence; (d) employment, however, when combined with the traditional roles of wife, mother, and home-maker imposes a double burden of women.

The validity of the above thesis comes into serious question considering that the large mass of women in India have always been part of the labour force - in agriculture and industry. Moreover, the large majority of them are illiterates, thus negating any relationship between formal

25. (contd...)

Singh, Andrea Mereftee, "The Study of Women in India: Some Problems in Methodology" in Souza, Alfred de, ed., women in Contemporary India: Traditional Images and Changing Roles (Manohar, 1975, New Delhi), p. 193.

education and employment. Secondly, both in unpaid family and in paid wage labour, most of these women did not control their income. Lastly, the economic condition of their families would need no scope available for betterment of life style or improvement of skills.

An examination of a particular study typical of this model, may help to illustrate the limitations of the approach. Raj Mohini Sethi in her study of modernisation of the Indian Women in comparison with the Turkish Women begins with a series of definitions of modernisation. For instance, she cites the definition of Ward and Kustov which reads:

By modernisation, we mean, a process of long range social and cultural change, often regarded as leading to the progressive development of society. It is a multi-faceted development specifically leading to the industrialisation of economy, and increase in the geographic and social mobility and, the secularisation of ideas which give rise to secular, scientific and technical education. It also means a change from ascribed to achieved status and a higher standard of living. (26)

Based on these assumptions a set of questions are constituted and indices indicating modernisation developed.

In India woman may be called modern:

1. If she asserts herself increasingly against the authority of traditional figures like father or husband;

26. Seth, Raj Mohini, Modernization of Working Women in Developing Societies (National, New Delhi, 1976).

2. if she participates actively in mass media;
3. if she does not involve herself deeply into the ritual and worship aspects of religion;
4. if she takes cognition not only of the intermediate environment but also of the outside one, that is, interest in "extra local conditions". (27)

It may be noticed how attitudinal changes are emphasised to the neglect of any structural change in women status in society. This is in keeping with the fundamental assumption of society as given and individuals as unhampered by structural constraints, propelled only by their self conscious attitudinal complexes.

Some Sociological Theories on the Labour Movement

The major propositions of the Structural-functional Approach - most familiar to the sociological world are - that society is an integrated whole, bound together by a common value system, that society persists with the harmonious performance of various role enactments by the different role actors, that the different parts of the society are inter-dependent in equilibrium, that changes in society emanate not from within but from without, that tensions can be resolved within the system.

Logically the industrial complex too viewed as a place of work which has various role performers, interacting

27. Ibid.

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with each other and who are bound together for certain purposes. With the growth of the organization and the with increase of complexities, tensions arise which have to be resolved. In this context a "labour union" may be thought of as one of a number of possible organizational responses to unstable situations generated in all large-scale organizations characterised by technological, economic and social changes".

Faced with eminent tensions, a redefinition of new goals for the members is sought for. And according to Miller and Form, the types of employees organizations which resu-
tantly emerge are unions, professional societies, clubs,
etc. Unions are therefore perceived as yet another of the
tension management mechanisms. This is in stark contrast
to the Marxist understanding of the emergence and role of
trade unions. While the former perceives trade union as an
instrument of maintaining equilibrium the other sees it as
an instrument of change.²⁹

Most Indian research on labour, being management oriented, have sought to study trade unions either as dys- functional if radical, and constructive if directed towards the interests of management. Others operating with the modernizational model have perceived the workers either as

28. Miller, Albert C, and Foran, Wilhelm H., Industrial Sociology, the Sociology of Work Organization (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1964).

29. Lenin, V.I., Trade Unions (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970).

a hali peasant, indirectly to settle down as a stable industrial worker, or as urban oriented.³⁰ Conclusions therefore have been in either/or terms. The actual process of change has been left out.

Yet other schools, have sought to explain labour unrest as expressions of 'misery', 'deprivation' - not differentiating between class upheaval and individual actions.³¹

Some others like Goldthorpe and Lockwood, have sought to explain trade unions in terms of types of social imagery. One 'polar' type of image is that of society as being sharply divided into two contending sections, or classes, differentiated permanently in terms of the possession of non-possession of power (the dictotomous or power-model). Contrasting with this is an image of society as comprising an extended hierarchy of relatively 'open' state differentiated primarily in terms of prestige (the hierarchical prestige model).

Goldthorpe and Lockwood have characterized the 'prestige' model as 'radical individualism' the 'power model' as a 'solidaristic collectivism. In addition to having a different means for achieving goals, these two orientations differ in types of goals to be achieved.³²

30. Lambert, Workers, Factories and Social Change in India (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963); Seth The Social Framework of an Indian Factory (Oxford University Press, 1968).

31. Miller, n. 27.

32. Coates, E. David, G. S. Ellis, V., Social Stratification and Trade Unionism: A Critique (Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1975).

Runciman has expressed assertially the same view although he labels the two orientation 'egoism' and 'fraternality'. Prandy has also isolated two images of the social structure - 'status ideology' and a 'class ideology'. Those who possess a status ideology see society as a set of superior and inferior grades in which every members accept the validity of the status creation, and than his own place in the hierarchy. Those who possess 'class ideology', on the other hand, see society as being stratified according to the possession or non-possession of power; they reject the claims of those with power and believe that this power must be challenged.³³

Several of the theorists who have isolated these two basic images of society have argued that the one tends to be held by white-collar workers while the other is generally held by manual workers. A class ideology is seen as being consistent with unionism in that it stresses collective means to collective goals.

To what extent this opinion is valid in the Indian context needs to be examined later.

What is more important for us methodologically at the moment is that all the above theories seek to correlate variables without penetrating into the dynamics of the society. Questions like 'what is the relationship between

33. Ibid.

worker and management' is answered in terms of perceivable factors and not in structural terms. This leads us to further problems that is, of defining structure. Is it merely what is observable, or is it more than that? Can the problems of the worker or the industrialist be understood by a reference to some observable factors like values, technological change, organizations goals, work place etc.

The industrial complex is not isolated from the society in which it exists, just as the society is not in isolation from the world system in which it exists. These facts are of particular significance in the modern world where changes in one part has repercussions on any other part. To illustrate, the phenomena of retrenchment or unemployment which haunt the workers' mind today can be only grasped if the reasons for it are understood in a historical context. And this is feasible only if the dynamics of the social process is seized upon. Similarly, the peculiar Indian situation, where the industrial worker is existentially a bundle of feudal and capitalist values can be grasped only if one delves into the particularities of the Indian history.

At the end of our review of the sociology of women and sociology labour, it would be apt to cite Desai's observations on rural studies.

Operating under the "modernization" syndrome, evolving an a historical structural functional approach, they conducted rural struggles in a manner wherein peasant struggles were treated almost as a non-issue ... for these scholars, the rural population was treated as "traditional" to be modernized by the new rulers in consonance with their assumptions of 'development'. For them tribal and peasant struggles were considered as disfunctional, anomic and dis-integrative phenomena, obstructing the rapid and smooth development of the capitalist path since independence. In short, the established scholarship, with few exceptions, treated tribal and peasant struggles as a law and order problem." (34)

The Feminist, the Marxist, the Reformist

We are here concerned not with those who assert that the existent position of women is what it should be, but with those who recognise that women have had a bad deal from society. The Feminist, the Marxist, the Reformist are all agreed upon this fundamental proposition - that much need and should be done for the upliftment of women. What is disputable, however, revolves around two related questions. First, why have women occupied a subordinate position in society? Second, how can the variations in form and intensity of that subordination be explained? Answers to these questions have theoretical cognitive and practical political consequences.

These clear theoretical orientations are discernable amidst the many women's organizations, that is the feminist,

34. Desai, A.h., Peasant Struggles in India (Oxford University Publishers, Bombay, 1979), p. xiii.

the Marxist, and the reformist. The debate in the West in recent years has raged primarily between the Marxist and the Feminists. The Indian situation is however not the same. While voices of feminists are being raised, the focus of difference is as yet that between the Reformist and the Marxist. The level of theoretical polemics however is on a low key. But that should not suggest that the ideological groundings of the various approaches do not have severe implications for the Indian Women's Movement as a whole.

Marxism/Reformism

The Marxist/reformist conflict can be traced to the earliest days of the Women's Movement in India, epitomized by the differences which originated in the All-India Women Congress. It is in this context, that we will concentrate on the AIWC, to focus on the differences. Moreover, since the reformists in India have most often professed the Gandhian approach, it would be fruitful to select the AIWC as an organization where Gandhians and Marxists worked together.

Renu Chakravarty in her recently published 'Communists in Indian Women's Movement', writes,

there was tremendous pressure to confine the activities of the AIWC purely to issues of social reform and that too was through resolutions and memoranda only. The ordinary toiling women in town and country were, by and large, not brought into the membership of the
(contd...)

AIWC, nor were they led into any movements to achieve their demands for a better life. (35)

The elitist bias was noted among others by Jana Matson Everett who observes that from the very beginning the Indian women's Movement was oriented towards elite representation and not towards mass mobilization.³⁶ Under Gandhi mass mobilization of women did take place but this did not undermine the elitist approach. The women's associations formed during the Gandhian campaign fell apart once the campaigns ceased, and most of the women involved were not incorporated into the Congress or women's organizations. Reports during the 1940s still indicated that few women were participating in the Congress organizations, and none of the major women's associations examined ever included more than a few low-caste, working-class or peasant women.

The reformists stressed on the retention of the status quo by over emphasising gradualness, avoidance of haste and retention of peace at all cost. Gandhi's attitude towards women explicitly upholds the existing unequal status of women. His envisagement of the upliftment of women is strictly within the social, that is, the existing social

35. Chakravarty, Henu, Communists in Indian Women's Movement (Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980).

36. Everett, Jana, Matson, Women and Social Change in India (Heritage, New Delhi, 1979).

limitations. He stood for the persistence of 'complementary sex roles'. The law of society and the law of nature was seen as one. Gandhi reaffirmed the age old beliefs of the eternal suffering and sacrificing Hindu woman.

To me the female sex is not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two; for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. (37)

Gandhi conceived of the technique of satyagraha as specially fitting for women because of their moral character and their capacity for self-sacrificing. Women's organizations reflected the attitude - Shri Dharma pointed out in June 1930.

Because the qualities which this new form of warfare is displaying are of the nature usually characterised as feminine rather than masculine, we may look on this life and death struggle of India to be free as the women's war.

The Gandhian conception of the role of the women reaffirmed the age-old beliefs of the eternal Indian women - the epitoms of sacrifice, tolerance, softness. This, reaffirmation of the existent value system is an aspect of the reformists to which particular attention should be drawn. This is in contrast to the Marxist attempt to question the existent value system. In later sections dealing with the trade unions, one will observe the problems of trade union

37. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 76.

challenging the values, and the problems of trade unions trying to bank on these values. It is pertinent to cite the present General Secretary of the IITUC, Kamanuja's call for greater participation of women in trade union as they are better negotiators and would therefore be in a better position to maintain peaceful and stable industrial relations.³⁹

The reformists basis is in the acceptance of the social system. Following this, attempts are made by social reformists, within the limits of the prevailing social system, to ameliorate the conditions of women. At the same time, their assumptions that structural changes are either not feasible or are deniable lead them to take positions which may ultimately impair the interests of women. The social reform approach within trade unions are observable in a number of central trade unions, though this particular study shall restrict itself to the IITUC.

Feminism/Marxism

For many the women's Liberation Movement is held synonymous to the bra-burning, all-women anti-man hysteria which was only one of the aspects and only one of the trends of the movement in the west. It is not enough to de-ride or mock at it, the usual responses it evokes. What

39. Indian Worker.

is to be realized is that certain specific objective situation existed for its emergence. Moreover, what has to be grasped is the theory that underlies it.

Romilla Thappar feels that the women's Lib. (the western kind) does not have immediate relevance to the Indian social situation. In her words,

... it is the product of an urbanized middle class with a large number of women trained in professions as a result of expanding educational opportunities whose professional skills are wasted by having to limit themselves to domestic work (40)

Whatever be its irrelevance the Indian upper class is apt to borrow lock stock and barrel from the west, including movements. The Indian feminists are voicing their views and however small be their audience it is important to question their thesis. With so many organizations harping on benefits of the traditional women, the Feminists hold a good chance of a hearing, as a voice of prophet.

The feminist decries the so-called complementary sex roles as the "sexual caste system" and locates these in the basis biological differences between the sexes. And therefore, it precludes history and transcends all social systems - tribal or feudal, capitalist or socialist. Shulamith Firestone's "The Dialectic of Sex" contains a comprehensive statement of radical feminism.

40. Singh, n. 24, p. 199.

...the contemporary radical feminist position sees feminist issues not only as women's first priority but as central to any larger revolutionary analysis. It refuses to accept the existing leftist analysis not because it is not radical enough. It sees the current leftist analysis as outdated and superficial, because this analysis does not relate the structure of the economic class system to its origins in the sexual caste system, the model for all other exploitative system, and thus the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution (41)

The positing of a simple caste system of males and females obscured the class contradictions among women. Marlene Dixon's polemics bring these contradictions into stark relief.

The ethic of sisterhood ... disguises and mystifies the internal class contradictions of the women's movement. Sisterhood temporarily disguises the fact that all women do not have the same interests, needs, desires; working class women and middle class women, student women and professional women, anglophone and francophone women have more conflicting interests than could be overcome by their common experience based on sex discrimination. The illusion of sisterhood are possible because women's Liberation Movement is a middle class movement in which the voices of poor and working class women are only rarely heard. (42)

In its essence the feminist position essentially leads to a moralist analysis - the history of women is pointed as a sequence of oppression by the male sex. Before delving

41. Firestone, Shulamith, The Dialectic of Sex (Morrow, New York, 1970), p. 37.

42. Hamilton, Roberta, The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1978), p. 86.

into the limitations and viability of the feminist position it is necessary to at least mention the increasing attempts to marry the Marxist and the Feminist approaches to enable a comprehensive analysis. The feminist is seen to cover the vital biological difference which allegedly the Marxist has ignored. Roberts Hamilton focusses on the fact that all societies make something of menstruation, whether magical, fearful, unclean or debilitating, in addition to the physical discomforts which vary from women to women.⁴³ The Marxist is seen as able to explain the class differences within women which allegedly the feminist has ignored.

Theoretically such attempts at an eclectic combination of approaches is far from a viable one. A theory is based on certain philosophical assumptions and attempts to put a bit of that and a bit of this is scientifically not feasible.

To return to the Marxist feminist debate it seems a little rash to accuse the Marxist of neglecting the specific biological situation of the women. What is important to remember is that oppression and discrimination is a social phenomena. Thus the reproduction process in itself may be the same over the ages. But the social conditions within which it transpire is different. Likewise the social implications are different. Concretely put, the situation of the

43. Ibid.

bourgeois woman who has been reduced to a plaything and is essentially a reproductive accessory of the man, who has no social existence apart from what marriage endows her with, is different from that of a tribal woman for whom marriage and family is not the be all end and all of her existence.

Women are not oppressed by man - they are socially oppressed, this distinction is methodologically essential even though the two in fact may coincide at some historical juncture. The Marxist lays crucial stress on the fact whether women in a particular socio-economic formation is involved in the process of social production or not. Engels states:

... to emancipate women and make her the equal of man is and remains the impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of women will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time... (44)

The key therefore is the seclusion of the woman within the family and her preclusion from socially productive labour. The source lies in the development of private property and monogamous marriage. But the particular form of discrimination differs from social system to social system and again manifests differently from class to class. Thus the difference between the feudal lady and the bourgeois woman on the one hand and the difference between the bourgeois woman, who gives

44. Engels, F., Origin of Family, Private Property and the State (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1972).

birth to a son to carry on the line and property, as against the working class woman for whom a new child is an additional source of income.

It would be mechanical however to think that the ways of the classes function in a compartmentalized manner. Thus while the woman worker works as much or more than her husband she is not free from male domination under conditions of capitalist organization of society. Her role is that of both a woman expected to do the household works as well as work for wages. She is the victim of a dual oppression - as the woman, subordinate to the man, most often not even in control of the money she earns, and as the worker who most often earns less than the man involved in the same work. This is the class of woman this dissertation seeks to deal with. The specific situation in India where the feudal mode of production exists along with the capitalist, the oppression of woman takes on a more complex turn. The trade unions do not have to merely tackle with the values of a market economy but also of a feudal society.

To sum up, the differences of the approaches - the feminist analysis, having placed primacy on biological inequalities addresses itself to patriarchal ideology which defines the system of male domination and female subjugation in society. The Marxist analysis on the other hand, locates the origin of female subordination in the development of a

surplus wealth and the emergence of private property in society. And the reformist, accepting the existing set up, as given, seeks to better the conditions of women.

Theoretical Framework

Indian sociology's inability to come to grips with reality can be traced to the 'idealist' foundations of western epistemology - the inspiration for most Indian sociology. Our critical review of extant literature has already attempted to reveal the methodological inadequacies of approaches based on western theories. Summarising the limitations of the western approach, we will posit the Marxist method, explaining how and why the method transgresses the limitations of the others.

Sociologists instead of viewing social reality as a dynamic inter-related whole tends to isolate and study various elements in the social structure. Given the fact that they do not have an objective criterion to determine the determining "element" in the social structure, the choice of "elements" is necessarily arbitrary.

The resultant study is thus partial, distorted and static. It is partial because the innate tendency is to confine oneself to research questions which are thrown up by the "object", such studies are therefore confined to the epiphenomenal. To illustrate, studies on trade unions will

deal with observable behaviour and interactional patterns, leadership structure etc. It is distorted because social relations become concepts in the mind of the subject, leading to reification of the concept. Consequently, the actual existing social relations constituting reality are overloaded. It is static because history is rendered either incidental or redundant.

The premise from which the Marxist begins are not abstractions or ideal constructs, but from real life, consisting of real individuals, their actions and material conditions. Marx summed up the materialist conception of history in his preface to the critique of political economy.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their wills, namely, relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (45)

It is evident that the method groups reality as a whole, as interconnected, as characterized by an objective criterion - the material forces of production. It is objective

45. Marx, Karl., Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977) pp. 20-21.

and not arbitrary because it lies outside the realm of consciousness. The inter-relatedness of the base and super structure, of the various elements in the superstructure are not conceived as static relationships - but as dialectical. And hence man is seen as both product and producer of society and history as both determined and determining.

The process of change is endogenous to society. The formation of class itself can be traced to developments within society. As the forces of production developed, division of labour emerged, and along with the unequal distribution of labour and its products - property leading to the emergence of class. The specific form of classes however vary from one particular social formation to another.

Unlike the sociologists attempt at characterizing classes by indices, the Marxist method identifies class by its relationship to the mode of production. The class which owns the instruments of production constitutes the ruling class which appropriates surplus from the ruled. In feudalism the serf may hold the land of the feudal lord and in return perform certain services - tilling the land of the feudal lord, performing military service, giving a portion of his own harvest etc. ⁴⁶ The collective force ensuring the fulfilment of the demands may be that of military strength, legal

46. Lobb, Maurice, Studies in the Development of Capitalism (George Routledge and Sons Ltd., London, 1946), p. 35.

backing, and the backing of custom. The role of custom is significant for our study if we are to understand the persistence of feudal values in India and their implications for the trade union movement.

Capitalism indicates "that stage of the development of commodity production at which not only the products of human labour, but human labour power itself becomes a commodity"⁴⁷. The worker has to sell his labour power to the capitalist to survive. The worker thus apparently free unlike the serf tied by fetters, is compelled to sell his labour to the capitalist for his and his family's survival.

Feudalism and capitalism as defined above refer to ideal typical forms. It is not necessary that each society will be characterized by either one or other mode of production. The case of India is in itself an indicator - containing both feudal and capitalist social formations.

The antagonisms between classes, as illustrated, is thus real and based on the relationship it bears to the mode of productions. Amidst the irreconcilable conflict that ensues with the beginning of class societies, the state emerges.

47. Cited in Political Economy: Capitalism (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977) p. 65.

... the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another, it is the creation of 'order' which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes. (48)

The state attempts to maintain class hegemony by contributing to the function of social order. This established social order is projected as the best and as necessary to keep away the forces of disruption and of violence. Any threat to the order is met by what is termed the "repressive apparatus of the state", The police may be called in, arrests made, legal proceedings begun -- all in an attempt to contain the violation of "order".

The question may be posed however, as to why then does such images persist as of the benevolence of police, or the essentially welfare activities preserved by the State. And it is here that we come to question of ideology and the role of ideas.

The dominant ideas of any particular society are the ideas of the dominant class. Never is the interest of state posed as the interest of the class controlling the state. What is stressed is the interest of all, of the whole society. And thus the notion that the interest of the capitalist and the interest of labour are one and the same.

48. Lenin V.L., The State and Revolution (Progress Publishers, 1974).

Since they are the dominant ideas they appear "directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought". The essential reaction has to be first discussed by science. Sociologists have tended to study the "spontaneous" and "current" modes of thought, without attempting to discover their validity. However, an impression should not emerge that ideology arises in abstraction. They too are rooted in the material basis of society.

... these imaginary expressions, arise, however, from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the phenomenal forms of essential relations (49)

Sociologists if they are to understand reality has to demystify these expressions. In our particular study, it is particularly relevant to discuss the ideological aspect of women's participation in trade union activities.

Schema

Chapter II will sketch the growth of industrialization in colonial India and note in this background the emerging participation of women in the labour force and the labour movement. Chapter III will portray an overview of the major trends in women employment and women unionization in the post-independence period. Chapter IV will confine itself to the differing perspective the major Indian trade unions have towards organizing women and its operationalization in practice. The final chapter will outline the major findings of the study.

49. Marx, Karl., Capital, Volume I, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974).

Chapter II

**GROWTH OF INDUSTRIALIZATION IN INDIA
AND THE EMERGING PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN
IN THE LABOUR FORCE AND LABOUR MOVEMENT**

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Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is essentially to understand the specificities of Indian industrialization under the auspices of British colonial rule and its implications for the women labour force and the trade union movement. Colonial rule and the evolution of colonial policy formed the basis which determined the very nature of the social experience of Indian industrialization, which was quite different from the classic development of industrial capitalist society in Western Europe.

Following a schematic review of the social conditions prior to British rule in India and the subsequent impact of colonial policies on Indian society, the emergence of the Indian working class and working class movement with specific reference to women, will be dealt with in the background of the historically determined conditions.

The Social Condition of India just prior to British Colonization

In the feudal Moghul society, land did not constitute alienable property, although hereditary rights to the use of land existed, alongside common possession and use of land.

1. Dutt, Ramesh, The Economic History of India under early British Rule (Kegan Paul Co. Ltd., London, 1901) pp.7-

The social surplus was collected as revenue by the State through the mechanism of feudal appointees. Considerable heterogeneity obtained in this system. In parts of Western India, "tax farmers", that is, merchants were deputed to collect the revenue which was in kind, under the obligation of having to pay the equivalent in cash to the feudal lord² (jagirdar), less a commission, and often in advance. Elsewhere, other middlemen formed the intermediaries between the jagirdar and the peasant. Although the exact form differed, the essence of a stratum of intermediaries who mediated between the peasant and the feudal ruling elite constituting the Emperor and jagirdars, was an universal phenomenon of Moghul India.

Alongside the peasant, existed the village artisan. A combination of tilling of land and handicraft comprised the community organization of the Indian village. Towards the end of the Moghul period centres of artisan and mercantile activity grew into sizeable towns, such as Murshidabad in Bengal and Surat on the West Coast. In cantonment towns such as Agra, mercantile and artisan activity gained considerable importance. Manufactories or "karkhanas" existed, where artisans worked under one roof under a merchant on

2. Pavlov, V.I., The Indian Capitalist Class: A Historical Study, (Peoples Publishing House, Delhi, 1964) pp. 44-47.

some nobleman, producing items of consumption for the elite.
Banking also flourished in these centres.³

Indian manufactures, particularly that of textiles enjoyed an excellent market in East Africa and Mediterranean countries, even after they were prohibited in the English market. British industry could not produce neither the fineness of fabric nor the quality of colours.⁴

With the decline of Moghul rule, the Indian polity was fragmented into a number of small states which paved the way for the eventual takeover of British rule in India. The states which were in continual inter-civiline warfare often sought the help of European trading companies in their feuds. From having small outposts in the coasts, these trading companies soon became political arbiters in these areas. From there to the rule of the East India Company was only a short step, once the Portugese and Dutch^{were} eliminated and^{the} French were defeated.

The East India Company

The East India Company which obtained its charter in 1600, began with a few trading depots.⁵ Following the battle

3. Pavlov, V.I., Historical Premises for India's Transition to Capitalism, "Nanka" Publishing House, Moscow, 1978.
- Habib, Irfan M., Banking in India, in Tapan Raychaudhuri (ed.), Contributions to Indian Economic History I, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960.
4. Williams, Eric, Capitalism and Slavery (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 69.
5. Antonova, K., Bogard Leon, G., Kolavsky, G., A History of India, Book II, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979,

(contd....)

of Plassey in 1757, the Company firmly established itself in Bengal, subsequently extending itself to seize political power in the whole of India, till the establishment of Crown rule in 1858.

The principal objective of the Company, besides outright plunder, was the procurement for the British market of Indian goods at the cheapest possible rate. Towards this end the Company even established small manufactories near Calcutta and converted, by force, considerable amount of land to indigo cultivation. Land revenue was continually raised:

The ceaselessly renewed demand for more and yet more spoils led to the most reckless raising of the land revenue demands to heights which in many cases even meant taking the seeds and corns and the bullocks from the peasants. (7)

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5. (contd...) p. 98. The trading depots were Surat in 1612; Fort Saint George, Madras in 1639; Bombay leased to the Company from 1669 and Fort William in Calcutta, 1696.
 6. Chowdhury, Benoy, Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal (1757-1900), Vol. 1, Indian Studies, Past & Present, Calcutta, 1964.
 7. Antonova K. et.al., op.cit., p. 106. In a memorandum from the Nawab of Bengal to the English Governor, dated May 1762, it was stated: "They forcibly take away the goods and commodities of the Ryots (peasants), merchants etc. for a fourth part of their value and by ways of violence and oppression they oblige the Ryots etc., to give five rupees for goods which are worth but one rupee." quoted in ibid., p. 107.

The enormous spoilation from India "was the hidden source of accumulation which played an all-important role in helping to make possible the Industrial revolution in England"⁸.

The outright banditry of the East India Company, while filling the coffers of British adventurers and transporting possibly upto one thousand million pounds in treasure between Plassey and Waterloo (1815) to Britain,⁹ caused devastation in India, a drastic reduction in population through constant famines, impoverishment and destitution.

With the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the mercantile basis of the East India Company posed as a hindrance to a free entry of the products of British industry into the Indian market. An offensive by the British industrialists particularly the British mill-owners of Manchester and Lancashire was launched against the Company. In 1813, finally, the monopoly of the East India Company in trade was ended. From then on the British policy was mainly directed to the development of India as a market for the rising British industry.

The Era of Direct British Rule

With assistance from the British Government, it was seen to, over a period of time, that virtual free entry of British

8. Ibid., p. 112.

9. An estimate of between five hundred million and one thousand million pounds was made by William Digby, in his Prosperous British India, published in 1901. Quoted in Baran, Paul, Political Economy of Growth.

goods into India was made possible while tariffs were imposed against the entry of Indian manufactures into British. ¹⁰
The Indian handicraft industry was totally destroyed.

While machine made cotton goods from England ruined the weavers, machine made twist ruined the spinners. The Indian artisan was faced with the loss of his world but no gain of another. This expropriated class had no alternative left but to try their hand either in agriculture or to migrate towards the city.

Not only were the old manufacturing towns and centres destroyed, but the very basis of the village economy- part agriculture, part domestic industry collapsed. The artisans, craftsmen, spinners, weavers, smelters, potters and smiths crowded into agriculture. India was turned into a basically agricultural society. Britain continued its policy to convert India into a colonial appendage of British manufacturing industry.

British Investments in India

India was supplying raw material to Britain and buying manufactured goods. The appropriation of raw materials at a

10. Antonova, K. et.al., op.cit., p. 119. "Between 1814 and 1835, British cotton manufactures exported to India rose from less than one million yards to over 51 million yards. In the same period Indian cotton piece goods imported into Britain fell from one and a quarter million pieces to 306,000 pieces and by 1844 to 63,000 pieces". The same process could be traced in respect of silk goods, woollen goods, iron, pottery, glass and paper. Pavlov, V.I. (1978) op.cit., Section Three.

more extensive scale necessitated the construction of rail-
 11
 ways. The second important sphere for British capital
 investments was the construction of irrigation installations
 in regions where crops were cultivated for export. It
 ought to be mentioned nevertheless that investment in irriga-
 tion was only a fraction of the investments made in the
 railways. An important sphere for the investment of private
 British capital from the middle of the nineteenth century
 were plantations - of tea, coffee and rubber. The establish-ment
 of jute mills constituted the only substantive British invest-
 ment in the establishment of factory production in India.
 Some investments were also made in coal mines. While a sub -
 stantive part of the initial capital for these enterprises
 were supplied by port folio capital provided by British investors,
 considerable amounts of capital were also raised locally
 from landlords (zamindars) and merchants. Control lay with
 the system of Managing Agencies which were largely British,
 with a few run by Europeans from Continental Europe. This
 stranglehold over plantations, jute mills and whole sale trade
 continued to be completely dominated by these managing/well^{agencies}
 into the twentieth century, particularly in Eastern India,
 12
 which was commercially more important. British India was

11. Antonova, K., et.al. op.cit.

12. Bagchi, Amiya K., Private Investment in India;
 (1900-1939, (Cambridge University Press, 1972).
 Gadgil, D., India's Industrial Revolution.

thus constituted into a basically raw material supplying appendage, a captive market for manufactures and a convenient source of revenue, for Britain, industry being established to the extent where it furthered these objectives.

The Development of Indigenous Industry

From the middle of the nineteenth century, a section of the mercantile class which had prospered in collaboration with British colonial activities, be it the Opium Trade with China or military adventures in Ethiopia, had gradually begun to invest in industrial enterprise. A number of textile mills came up in Bombay and later in Ahmedabad, to lay the basis of indigenous industry and the indigenous industrial capitalist class. Away from the tight control of the British traders, managing agents and colonial administrators which was suffocating in Eastern India,¹³ these early industrial industrialists thus breached the exclusive British preserve over industry. Their primary market was the domestic one and the mills of Bombay thus were producers of coarse cloth and yarn. At a disadvantage with British exports for finer varieties, the millowners of Bombay became the starting-point for the demand of tariff protection for indigenous industry.

The declared policy of the British colonial rulers of formulating policies designed to positively discriminate against the development of industry in India - barring the raw material extraction and processing industries -- ensuring

13. Bagchi, n. 12.

that industrial development in was restricted to the cotton mill sector. No engineering or chemical or metallurgical (with the sole anomaly of Tata Iron and Steel Co. and towards the fag end of British rule, the Indian Iron and Steel Company) industry, the very basis of the technological and industrial development of the west, emerged till after Independence.

Events following the First World War, when British India began to attract the manufactures of Japan, Germany and other industrialized competitors of Britain, the avowed policy of "Free Trade" that Britain had held steadfastly to, proved no longer to be in British interests. A system of tariff protection was established, by way of which British manufactures enjoyed preferential duties as compared to that of other countries. The rate of tariff that was increased over a period of time, although not prohibitive, provided an improved environment for the flourishing of Indian-owned industry. The accumulated merchant capital, till now invested in land, credit and other unproductive investments, began to be diverted into the purchase of jute mills, albeit the inferior ones. By the nineteen thirties, Indian capitalists in Eastern India, were no longer content to have their jute mills run by managing agencies and in some cases began to ¹⁴ assume a say in management. In Bombay, as well as in

14. Kidron, Michael, Foreign Investments in India (Oxford University Publishers, London, 1965) pp. 40-45.

Ahmedabad, the textile industry continued to expand. Another avenue for the channelising of Indian merchant and money-lending capital, was the formation of Indian banks. The consolidation and expansion of Indian capitalism was thus well on its way.

The Agrarian Situation

As mentioned earlier, the development of capitalist relations in India took quite a different path as compared to Europe. Merchant capital which to an extent transformed into industrial capital, had and continued to have strong links with pre-capitalist agriculture.¹⁵ The British through a deliberate policy designed to provide revenue from agriculture, as also to internalize the existing social structure so as to provide a prop to its political domination, created a new class of rural landlords. Through the Permanent settlement Act of 1792, in Bengal and subsequently through similar legislation in the rest of Northern India, the British created the new "zamindar" class. In the South it preserved the "ryotwari" system. The pre-existing feudal social order was thus perpetuated, as a necessary basis for the colonial exploitation of the country.

The introduction of British legal system after 1858, and the inhuman burden of taxes and debt on the peasant, conspired

15. Levkovsky, A.I., Capitalism in India: Basic Trends in its Development, PPH, Delhi, 1972, Chapter six.

towards the rapid pauperization of the Indian peasant. Land passed from the peasant into the hands of merchants/ money-lenders and more prosperous sections of the peasantry, at such a rapid rate, that peasant rebellions broke out, notably the Deccan uprising in 1870.¹⁶ Tenancy farming in areas where peasant proprietorship was earlier predominant and Zamindari, were thus formed into the bulkworks against agrarian progress and the continuous marginalisation and pauperisation of the peasant proprietor.

Emergence of the Indian Working Class and Women Workers

The ruination of artisan and peasant formed the basis for the formation of the Indian working class, first in the indentured labour for railway construction at home and abroad, particularly in Africa, and plantations, and later for the industries. The catastrophe which preceded the formation of the working class finds reflection in the report of Lord Bentinck, Governor General of India made in 1834-35:

The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India. (17)

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16. Pavlov, n. 2. Darling M.L., The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt (Oxford University Press, London, 1925), Ch. X especially, p. 205-6.
17. Strachey, John, End of Empire, (Victor Gollanc, London 1959).

Through this misery without parallel, the ruined artisan and pauperised peasant entered the ranks of wage labour. Those most effected were naturally the lowest in the feudal social rung:

A large section of factory labour in every part of the country belongs to the low castes, the poor, the most downtrodden, and the 'menials' who were the first to be pushed out of the villages due to their disintegration. (18)

This large scale migration of the dispossessed of the villages, has been described by Radhakamal Mukherjee:

Bihar was one of the regions in India where there was more than great disparity between rural and urban wages and standards of living. For every twenty five non-cultivating landlords and tenants, there were about agricultural labourers in Bihar as compared to two hundred labourers in U.P. The mounting pressure on land drove more tenants to join the vast array of agricultural labourers to become earth diggers, carriers (neijas) and road vendors or leave for Bengal and Assam for domestic service, mining, plantation etc. The population of women labourers was as high as 75 per 100 In the decade 1911-1921, 338,000 emigrants left U.P. for Bengal, 77,000 left for Assam and 115,000 for Bombay. 99,853 immigrants came to Kanpur district from other districts of U.P. in the same decade, of them 52,889 were women. It was the landless labourers who were the first to migrate to the industrial centres, followed by cultivators of small uneconomic holdings who migrate during the slack season or when drought or famine overtakes agriculture. (19)
(Emphasis added)

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18. Mead, Margaret, The Indian Peasant Uprooted (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1931).
 19. Mukherjee, Radhakamal, The Indian Working Class (Mind Kitab. Bombav. 1948) p. 4.

In the early years of the twentieth century serfdom existed in its worst form among the Mames of South Bihar and Chotanagpur and the Gotes of Orissa. Indentures entered into on the Pous Sankranti still persisted and it was these depressed castes and semi-hinduised aborigines who most welcomed the opportunity of work and wages in the mines and factories and plantations where they were freed^{or} aspired to be free from the social shackles.

Whether in plantations, railway construction or in the mills, every member of the family was absorbed. The labour force was composed of men, women and children. On the ~~one~~ hand, this provided an easy way to increase the availability of labour, further enhanced by long working hours unfettered by law. On the other hand, cheap female and child labour aided the ranking in of larger profits. The conditions of work were primitive and inhuman, the newly created working class protected neither by law nor their own organization.

The presence of women in the factories is evident from the fact that the Factories Amendment Act of 1891 was enacted with the purpose of prescribing an eleven hour day for women, with a rest interval of one-and-a-half hours.

Women workers formed part of the labour force in large numbers in almost all the industries of the period. The first industries, almost all of an auxiliary nature were

railways, textiles, plantations. A brief survey of the conditions of work in textiles and plantations would help in understanding the specific role of women in factory industry.

As stated earlier plantations was one of the first industries to be started in colonial India. The Assam tea company was established in 1839. Plantations hired a large proportion of women. Female and child labour were considered more suitable for purposes of plucking tea leaves. Often women and children were brought to the plantations without their consent and knowledge. Communication being what it was then, and ignorance being rampant, the workers had no idea as to how to return. Indeed the first organised industry in India to attain legislative control was the plantation industry of Assam. The system of recruitment through professional recruiters had led to severe hardships for the workers, especially as a result of the method used by planters to prevent workers from leaving the tea gardens. Several Acts were, therefore, passed both by the Bengal Government and the Central Government from 1863 onwards to regulate recruitment. Most of these laws were however, enacted not with a view to safeguarding the interests of workers, but ²¹ more with the view to protect the interests of the employers.

21. Giri, V.V., Labour Problems in Indian Industry, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

The textile industry, yet another sector with a large number of women workers, often employed the entire family. The cotton gins and presses which had been started by the newly rising Indian industrialists and which had become widespread in the cotton exporting centres, furnished the worst conditions. In his report, Mr. Tom Drewett, the senior inspector of boilers, Bombay, gives the following description:

The ginning season lasts about eight months, about five of which, the hands work from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. and the remaining three months they work day and night for as long as weeks at a stretch. I do not think there is a double set of children anywhere, so they must have worked twenty three hours out of 24 hours. (22)

An overseer testified "when there is much work they worked from 4 a.m. till 10, 10-30 or 11 p.m. The men and women sometimes work for 10 days and nights at a stretch without rest.²³ The statement of Mr. R.F. Wadia, describing conditions in one of his factories with 40 gins, at Panchora points out again to the presence of a large number of women workers.

I have only forty women attending those forty gins. I am not alone in this respect, it is the general system. There is no change of hands except at meal times. Those working these excessive hours frequently died. (24)

22. Revri, C., The Indian Trade Union Movement 1880-1947, Orient Longmans, 1972, p. 15.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

Complaints were frequently made by the workers about bad raw materials and machinery. Sometimes there were pieces of stone in the cotton, added perhaps to increase its weight, and some of the machines bounced them with fatal velocity.²⁵ As the workers were likely to be covered all over with lint, in the event of any mishap they were suddenly caught in flames. Women with saris above their heads were almost universally burnt to death on such occasions. In 1892, when factory statistics were first recorded, as many as 1369²⁶ accidents were reported. Buchanan further describes the pathetic conditions of work:

Gins and presses never stopped for meals as a rule the hands (mostly women) take their meals at the gins and he has often seen them taking their food and supplying the gins at the same time, thus mechanically three parts asleep, and a child at the breast sucking one minute and throwing cotton in the machine the next. They go on working day and night until they are completely worked out. The women are looked on as a part of the gins, and they belong to the establishment and two or three hours is the longest time they can be absent out of the twentyfour without any notice being taken of it. (27)

The existence of women workers in the factories in large numbers is not an accidental phenomena. Historically, England where the industrial revolution took place, had also witnessed the emergence of a large number of women workers.

25. Cited in ibid from Buchanan, D.H. Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India.
26. Statistical Abstracts of India for 1892.
27. Buchanan, n. 22.

This phenomena is inextricably linked to the character of modern industry.

The starting point of modern industry is "the revolution in instruments of labour, and this revolution attains its most highly developed form in the organized system of machinery in the factory"²⁸. This is significant for with the introduction of machinery, women and child labour took on a significance of its own.

In so far as machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes the means of employers of slight muscular strength, and those whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose links are the more supple. The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought for by capitalists who use machinery". (29)

The human labour which is required for both spinning and weaving consists chiefly in piecing broken threads, as the machine does all the rest. The work requires no muscular strength but only flexibility of finger.³⁰

In many cases thus, the entire family was employed. This was especially true of the plantations. Any impression that the employment of the entire family may have led to an improvement in the total earnings of the family however

28. Marx, K., Capital, vol. III (Progress Publishers, Moscow) p. 372.

29. Ibid.

30. Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1844), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977.

(contd...)

would be fallacious. The industrialist saw to it that wages were determined according to the number of total working members of the family and the minimum needed for the maintenance of the family. A remark made by an official report confirms that the wages were related to the income of the family of the worker, that is to say, his wages were supplemented by the wages received by wife and daughter or son.³¹

A study of wages conducted by the government in 1892 in the textile factory show the following pattern.³²

Males	Rs.	12 per month
Females	Rs.	9 per month
Children	Rs.	6 per month

30. (contd...)
Engels writes "men are therefore not only not needed for it, but actually by reason of the greater muscular development of the hand, less fit for it than women and children, and therefore naturally almost suppressed by it".

34. n. 19, p. 135.

32. Ibid.

* In the plantations in 1931, out of 1,907,126 persons 693,299 or over 36 per cent were women. But the discriminatory wage pattern existed here too.

Children roughly earned		Rs. 4 and 5 per month.
Mothers	" "	Rs. 7 and 8 " "
Fathers	" "	Rs. 46 and 12 " "

Similar wage discrimination existed in mines. In the Raniganj coal-field, during 1930 wages ranged from Rs. 12 to Rs. 16 per month for men and Rs. 8 and Rs. 12 for women.

The entire workers' family had to sell its labour power to the industrialist. Though legally, and apparently the worker was free, in actual reality not only was he himself tied to the industrialist but so was his family.³³

This marginal character of women labour need to be stressed upon.

This concept of women as a sort of balancing force in the family or national economy has a whole series of practical implications which have the net effect of making it difficult for women to become integrated as a permanent part of the work force and of rendering them particularly susceptible to unscrupulous or discriminatory treatment in the employment market. (34)

Constituting a reserve labour force, they were employed in large numbers when needed and retrenched when not needed. The next chapter on the trends in employment would illustrate this fact. The prevailing value system in society reinforced this concept of women's subsidiary role. Trade unions, too

33. n. 25, p. 373. "The value of labour power was determined, not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by the necessity to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of the family on to the labour market, spreads the value of the man's labour power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour power. To purchase the labour power of a family of five workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formally did to purchase the power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the access of the surplus labour of four over the surplus labour of one".

34. ILO, Women Workers in a Changing World, p. 19.

cannot claim to be above such values and it is one of the tasks of this study to see to what extent the trade unions have overcome this.

Emergence of the Indian Labour Movement and Women's Participation

The Indian National Movement, striving to attain independence for its country was the most dominant, significant and all encompassing movement in colonial India. The emergence of the labour movement in India is inextricably linked with the national liberation movement. Although trade unions were never formally affiliated to any political party in the initial stages, almost every prominent leader of the national movement was connected with the labour movement at one time or another. The influence of various trends in the national political movement is apparent in the counter ideologies of Indian trade unions.

Ideologically differences manifested themselves in both the Indian National Congress and the All India Trade Union Congress from the very beginning. As early as 1921, at the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress, the leftist group presented a manifesto calling upon the Congress to "make the immediate demands of the TUF its own demands".³⁵ The nationalist leaders contended that organizations

35. Revri, C., The Indian Trade Union Movement: 1880-47, (Orient Longmans, 1972), p.88.

or economic interests would result in the division in the national democratic movement. The widening rift led to the eventual formation of INTUC in 1946. The Congress, after 1947 as the head of an independent nation, visualized a different role and function for the trade unions. Details of these differences and their implications on women workers will be discussed in a later chapter. The process of ideological conflicts was not restricted to the Congress or the AITUC alone. The All India Women's Conference underwent it too as, Renu Chakravarti's writings, which has been mentioned in the earlier chapter suggests.

For the purpose of our study, the objective and role of women participation visualized by the Congress and Gandhi in particular is of special significance. Many of the existing social attitudes towards women participation, can be traced to the period of the nationalist movement. Gandhi sought to make women participate in the Constructive Programme which would enable them to organize social reform activity on a local level. Social reform work was considered by the progressive as well as the conservative sections of society as an acceptable and a commendable form of activity.³⁶ Therefore, women could accept both supportive and leadership roles in the Programme without fearing to step outside the

36. Agnew, V., Elite Women in Indian Politics (Vikas, New Delhi, 1980), p. 145.

limits of conventional behaviour, encouraging women to join the Nationalist Movement did not transgress the limits set by society. He used the traditional precepts and religious imagery. He asserted that women's primary responsibility was in her home and in the welfare of her husband and children. He emphasized qualities of self-sacrifice and endurance. The values projected thus were a reaffirmation of the values held in Hindu society. Chakravarti writes,

It is true that in the Congress struggle of 1930 and 1932 a large number of women participated. But it did not bring much of a change in their mode of thinking, in their activities or in their social life. (37)

Moreover, the more vocal and active women hailed from families associated with the Congress - for example, the Nehru women, Motilal Nehru's wife, Uma Nehru, Kamla Nehru, Basanti Devi and Urmilla Das (the wife and sister of C.R.Das) Agnew concludes that,

The participation of women in Gandhian politics might have changed the roles and status of a few women. But they remained the exception to the rule. (38)

Two features apparent in the early period of the Women's Movement can be held to be true for the Trade Union Movement now. One is the preference of social welfare

37. Chakravarty, K., Communists in Indian Women's Movement, (Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980), p. 145.

38. Agnew, n. 36, p. 61.

activities for women rather than political work. Second is the tendency of only those women, to join trade union activities, who come from families, with a tradition of political involvement. One study in the later chapters would corroborate this point.

Apart from the influence which the National Movement had or the Labour and Women Movement, the peculiarities and difficulties of the growth of trade union movement in a colonial state need to be taken note of.

An organized trade union movement could not grow smoothly in a colonial state, with its vast army of unemployed and comparative absence of civil liberties. It could not but pass through arduous, zig zag and uneven path. Compounded with this was the complex problem of regional, linguistic, religious and caste distinctions that existed in the Indian society.

Apart from the disuniting influence of caste system, provincial or even narrow geographical barriers dividing one part of the community from the other, and due to almost total lack of communication and contact, people of neighbouring provinces or even neighbouring parganas considered one another to be almost alien. Languages, sects, differences in dress and modes of living made the estrangement complete".(39)

If the Indian male worker, situated in these conditions found it difficult to actively participate in trade union activities, the Indian female worker found it doubly difficult. While the working class family may have been

39. Halder, B.F., Evolution of Labour Management Relations, (P.C. Scott, Calcutta, 1953), p. 161.

victim of poverty, of malnutrition, of inadequate clothing, of insanitary living conditions, it can be safely asserted that the women folk of the family faced the worst part of it. Expected to do both the domestic chores at home burdened with self negating ideology, and compelled to earn to support the family still she had to rest content to a subordinate portion in society.

Early Strikes

No consensus exists among social historians or even governmental functionaries as to when exactly did the Indian labour movement arise. The Royal Commission on Labour of 1929 wrote in its report, "prior to the winter of 1918-19, a strike was a rare occurrence in Indian industry. Strikes took place occasionally on the railways and in other branches of industry but to the majority of industrial workers the use of strike was unknown"⁴⁰. Mr. Buchanan, on the other hand observes that "from the beginning there were loosely organized refusals to work", though the "idea of common action" came late to the workers as a whole"⁴¹. He cites the findings of the first Factory Commission of Bombay in 1875, which suggests that workers were indifferent to the whole question

40. Royal Commission on Labour, 1929, p. 333. cited in Revri C., The Indian Trade Union Movement 1880-47 (Orient Longmans, 1972).

41. Buchanan, D., Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India (The Macmillan, New York, 1934), p. 416.

of conditions of employment, to corroborate his point.⁴²
N.M. Lokhandy, one of the first labour leaders of the country, stated in the course of his statement (to the Factory Commission of Bombay of 1874) that, "that strikes are of frequent occurrence in every one of the mills in this city. The chief cause is the reduction of wages on the day of payment without any previous information to workers of the contemplated change. These strikes sometimes last for few days."⁴³

Whatever be the disputes regarding the ascertainment of actual dates, it would be correct to assume that protests of workers in an unorganized manner started very soon after the setting up of the industries. From our point of view, to look for some specific date for the beginning of a movement is to miss its essential sociological significance and it is likely to result in a historically simplistic schematic description.

Early Legislations

Legislations were enacted to curtail the glaring abuses against women in mills, very early in the industrial history of India. In 1881 the first factories Act was passed to prohibit the employment of women in the night shift.⁴⁴ As early

42. Ibid.

43. Karnik V.B., Strikes in India 1850-1950 (Manaktalas, Bombay), p. 6.

44. Ramanuja, G., The Story of the Indian Labour (INTUC, New Delhi, 1967), p. 5.

as 1891 the factory act was passed to reduce the working hours for children between the ages of 9 to 14 from 9 to 7 hours a day, the limitation of daily hours of work for women to eleven a day, half an hour - afternoon meal recess, and the provision of a weekly off day.⁴⁵ The debatable point is whether the legislations are a product of the workers organized effort to get for themselves a better deal or not. Gadgil observes that, "It is also true that in the case of most labour legislation, including that of 1912, pressure from Lancashire and Dundee was to a large extent responsible for its initiation."⁴⁶ Revri tends to agree with the above opinion.⁴⁷ Veteran trade unionists project a differing view,⁴⁸ acclaiming the role of workers in initiating the proposals.

Most writers on the earliest phase of Indian trade union movement have rightly noted that the social legislation on workers was the result of a multiplicity of influences acting simultaneously. The legislation forced on the unwilling

45. Ibid., p. 6.

46. Gadgil, L.R., Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times (Oxford University Press, London, 1954), p. 275.

47. See Revri, O., n.1, pp. 19-26. He specifically mentions that "in the then existing stage of social development of the country the workers were not organized and articulate, and hence could not see to the enforcement of the factory legislations".

48. Ranadive, V., Women Workers of India (National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1975).

ruling class in England by the organised working class in that country had a semblance of dovetailing legislation in colonial India, but not necessarily a law for implementation. The conflict of interest of capitalist investing in England having to compete with others investing in the colonies with cheap labour and tax legislation control, many a times, resulted in bourgeois forums being articulated in England, for progressive labour legislation for colonies. Moreover, it cannot be denied that local protests, however feeble had a contributing role in seeking these legislations enacted. The central point to be noted is that even progressive labour legislation, including those effecting women, could objectively serve the interest of colonial exploitation at a certain historical stage.

The constraints of the dissertation will not permit us to follow the debate. But the significant fact which emerges is that the growing contradiction between the British and the rising Indian capitalists in later period had also an important bearing on the course of the Indian labour movement in the colonial period.

Women and Trade Unions

The limitations of data availability on women participation have already been elaborated upon in Chapter I. Information gathered is thus from a variety of sources where

incidental mention has been made about the role of women in various strikes, dharnas, meetings and picketings. No conclusive generalizations can be drawn from such evidence. But the lack of material in this area, as compared to the substantial documented evidence about women participation in the Nationalist movement, is suggestive. This is especially so in the context that women formed an important section of the Indian working class. A statistical profile of strikes in the pre-independence period suggest the preponderance of strikes in the textile industry. Women formed, as seen, a substantial section of the textile industry. And yet so little is known about the role, position and activities of women workers.

To build some understanding based upon the available information, it would be useful to proceed from one indice to another. Membership, leadership, mention of women participation in important strikes or other forms of agitations, raising of demands pertaining to women workers will be the induces used. Moreover, a general study of the basic trends in women employment in industries in the same period may reflect the strength or weakness of trade unions in organizing women.

Membership

It will be seen from Table I, that women's membership of trade unions increased from 1.2 per cent in 1927-28 to

6.6 per cent in 1949-50, after which it slightly declined. In relation to the number of women workers in India, however, membership of trade unions is very small. Out of 417 lakh women who were self-supporting or earning dependents, women trade unionists in 1950-51 were only 106,424, i.e., just about 0.25 per cent of the whole. This is a woefully negligible number. A poor reflection of the politicisation of women in the Nationalist movement, it clearly indicates that little to no attempt was made to organise women workers into trade unions.

The earliest effort to organize trade unions for women workers were made as early as 1922. Women workers of Bombay met that year for the purpose of organizing clerical workers in the city. In September 1933, the Bombay Presidency Women Conference was held.⁴⁹ The fact that consolidation and expansion of organizational strength did not take place is reflected in the percentage of women unionization.

The desperate conditions of women workers, have already been elaborated. Urgent need existed for unionization but the fact that this did not happen suggests an absence of effort in this direction. While actual participation in movements may have been greater, consolidation in organizational terms did not take place. As will be seen in the

49. Sengupta, P., Women Workers of India (Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1960). See chapter V, pp. 66-73.

Table I
Female Membership of Registered Trade Unions
Submitting returns -- 1927-28 to 1951-52

Year	Total Membership	Female Membership	% of female Membership
1927-28	100,619	1,168	1.2
1928-29	181,077	3,842	2.1
1929-30	242,355	3,299	1.4
1930-31	219,115	3,151	1.4
1931-32	235,693	3,454	2.5
1932-33	237,369	5,090	2.1
1933-34	208,071	2,999	1.4
1934-35	184,918	4,837	1.7
1935-36	268,326	7,309	2.7
1936-37	261,047	9,025	3.5
1937-38	390,112	14,703	3.8
1938-39	399,159	10,945	2.7
1939-40	511,138	18,612	3.6
1940-41	513,832	19,407	3.8
1941-42	573,520	17,094	3.0
1942-43	685,299	25,972	3.8
1943-44	760,967	20,866	2.7
1944-45	889,388	36,315	4.1
1946-47	1,331,962	64,798	4.9
1947-48	1,662,929	102,299	6.2
1948-49	1,960,107	119,355	6.1
1949-50	1,821,132	119,565	6.6
1950-51	1,756,971	106,424	6.1
1951-52	1,853,213	116,061	6.3

Source: Trade Union Movement in India, p. 76.
 Cited in Bengupta, P., women workers of
India, p. 69.

next chapter, this tendency persisted in the post-independence period.

In a statewise classification till the 1950s Assam, Bihar, Bombay and Madras made up ^{largest} per cent of the total membership of women. In the early 1960s, it was largest in Bombay, in 1950-51, it was Assam and in 1951-52 it was Bihar. Strangely enough, the percentage of women members to the total membership was only 2.4 in West Bengal in 1950-51 and 2.9 per cent in 1951-52, despite the concentration of coal mining industry, tea plantations and the jute industry. ⁵⁰ The rapid growth in the trade union movement in Bengal since then, and the higher degree of women participation will be studied in the next two chapters.

From a study of total membership of trade unions and percentage of women members a co-relation can be seen between the two. The degree of women participation increases with the general growth of trade union movement.

As early as in 1890, women workers emerged as leaders and addressed the Bombay textile workers meeting. ⁵¹ A remarkable demonstration of solidarity with fellow workers at the early stage of the movement was given by the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Bombay. Even at this stage women demonstrators

50. Mathur, A.S. and Mathur, J.S., Trade Union Movement in India (Chaitanya Publishers, Allahabad, 1957), p. 7.

51. Buchanan, D., n. 2, p. 416.

took part. The workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras who were declared locked out on 21st October 1920, on the issue of discipline, were joined by their fellow workers from the Carnatic Mills. A clash took place between the strikers and the "black legs" enlisted by the mills, police and military were called in by the employees and a number of workers were wounded and killed.⁵²

The 1934 Bombay Textile general strike was on the most vital significance especially from the point of view of the working of the united actions of workers against employees universal attack on their conditions. The characteristic feature of the strike, visible from the very beginning were the presence of a large number of women picketeers.⁵³ The presence of women as a major constituent of textile labour force and this section being involved in strike action suggests a strong correlation between women workers and strike action. But much more empirical data on women's participation in these early strike actions, need be collected to make unassailable assertions.

Trends and Tendencies of Women Employment

An outline of the trends in women employment in the traditional industries, where women formed a large part of the labour force, for example, textiles and mines, confirm our basic understanding of the role of women as a reserve

52. Ramanuja G., n. 5, p. 6.

53. Revri, C., n. 8, p. 90.

army of labour in capitalism. In times of severe crises, women labour are eliminated, as it happened during the Great Depression. The dynamic connection between the crucial social categories of class and sex has to be forged. Or else a wrong understanding will emerge about the specificity and generality of the problems of women workers. Utilization of women as marginal labour force is illustrated in the following account of trends of women employment in mines and textiles during the war years and the Depression.

The textile industry employed 50 per cent of the total number of workers in the perennial factories of the country prior to the world economic crisis of 1929. With the Wall Street Crash of October 1929, Britain transferred a part of Imperial preference which meant virtual preferential duties in favour of British industry was incorporated in the existing scheme of discriminatory protection granted to Indian iron and steel industries. The resultant impact was that in the Bombay Cotton Mill industry alone, out of about 140,000 workers employed earlier, approximately 10,000 had been thrown out of employment on account of the introduction of efficiency methods of work, whereby spinners were required to mind two sides of spinning frame instead of one and the ordinary two loom weaver was required to tend three looms. The steady

55. Indian Year Book, 1930, p. 518. cited in Pant S.C., Indian Labour Problems (Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1970).

increase of women workers in textiles in Bombay which began in 1914, fell sharply in 1928/29.⁵⁶

1914	21,404
1916	24,065
1924	31,065
1926	33,541
1927	32,048
And then,	
1928	25,817
1929	25,356

Women are the first victim of any retrenchment scheme. This stems from the basic understanding that women are mere marginal workers, subsidiary wage earners, a useful group to be drawn in when desired and thrown out when required. This problem is quite acute today may be more so, the percentage of total women workers having fallen constantly and steadily over the years prior to and after the Indian independence in 1947.⁵⁷

The Great Depression of 1930-34 besides imposing large scale cuts in wages and enormous intensification of labour for those who could retain their jobs, there was widespread unemployment resulting in much suffering among the wage earning classes. In the minds in 1929, employment of women

56. Morris D. Morris, The Emergence of An Industrial Labour Force in India. A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills 1854-1947 (Oxford University Press, 1915), p. 217.

57. Ranadive, V., n. 9, p. 179.

underground was prohibited and employment of women decreased massively. By 1937, number of workers in all mines declined to about 48,000 and in coal mines to 23,000. The proportion of women workers in all mines and coal mines were 18 and 15.4 respectively; ⁵⁸ a drop of 11.2 and 13.3 respectively from 1927. This phenomenon of women workers being used as a marginal work force is an essential aspect of the capitalist social formation.

The world depression after lasting for over five years receded and temporary recovery set in. With the armament boom of the approaching war, the volume of world trade and shipping also arose. The Indian cotton textile industry, which experienced the longest period of depression almost since 1923, entered at this time a state of revived activity, owing mainly to the Sino-Japanese war. In spite of the rationalisation measures adopted at the mills, resulting in an increase in the number of looms and spindles per worker, the number of work people in Bombay mills went up to the unprecedented figure of 180,000 in 1936. By the same year night shifts had become quite common and some mills were working twenty four hours with three shifts. Yet, surprisingly, while the average daily employment of men in Bombay textiles leapt from 128,400 in 1934 to 148,13; in 1937, the average

58. Pant, n. 55, p. 397.

daily employment of women in the same concern dropped from 24,319 in 1934 to 23,58 in 1937.⁵⁹ The trend to date has not been reversed.

With the outbreak of world war II, the pace of industrialization was greatly accelerated.⁶⁰ Working conditions in factories were considerably affected during the war and there was a lot of congestion and overcrowding. Ordinarily the weekly hours were from 48 to 54. But during the war,⁶¹ working hours extended even to 72 hours per week. Prohibition of the employment of women for underground work in mines was also lifted. We have seen how with the ban in 1929 the number of women in all mines declined. But after 1942, due to the shortage of labour, the prohibition was lifted and the number of women workers increased again. In 1945, the proportion of women workers in mines was again 24.6 per cent as compared to 18 per cent in 1937; and 29.2 per cent in 1927. After the war the ban was re-imposed and the number and proportion of both declined.⁶² The trends we have so far studied suggest that employment opportunities for women are determined by the exigencies of the economic interests of the employment providers rather than by the social or economic

59. Morris, D. Morris, n. 56.

60. Ranadive, V., n. 48.

61. Ibid.

62. Pant, n. 55.

needs of women. After the ban on underground work, a very small percentage of the women who originally worked in the underground was able to be accommodated on the surface in odd jobs. The estimated figure is 10 per cent.⁶³ The legacy of this period is apparent in the trends of employment in the post-independent period, which the next chapter will deal with.

Conclusion

The primary thrust of our argument in this chapter was the perpetuation of feudal social relations even with the emergence of capitalism. The linkages between the totality of the relations of production and the institutional and cultural patterns is to be understood if we are to grasp the agglomeration of the "traditional" and the "modern" in society.

Traditional images of the Indian women is deeprooted in society. This has been reinforced by the Nationalist Movement, which had drawn heavily upon traditional ideal typical images of Indian women for political mobilization. Unionization and agitational activity by women violate traditional norms. Traditional patriarchal family system and the sexual division of labour does not permit much scope for active women participation in trade unions.

Finally, the marginal nature of women labour in capitalism as illustrated, places the woman in an insecure position, which discourages trade union activities.

63. Ibid.

Chapter III

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN UNIONIZATION
IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Chapter III

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN UNIONIZATION: TRENDS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Introduction

India ceased to be a colony in 1947. The Indian National Congress which had headed the nationalist movement assumed power. Development, "modernization", progress, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, were the goals of independent India. Yet the break with the colonial period was not decisive. This is manifested in the perpetuation of the antiquated land relations which, as noted, was a characteristic feature of the British colonial policy. Persistence of feudal land relations implied persistence of the caste system, persistence of the unquestioned loyalty inherent in a serf-lord relationship, persistence of unchallenged male domination and female subjugation. And thus emerged the juxtaposition of the "modern" with the "traditional" - a phenomena which Srinivas was tempted to term "cultural schizophrenia".¹ While Indian constitutional provisions envisage on equal status of women in society, the social framework does not permit its realization.

The attempt in this chapter will be primarily to study certain trends and tendencies in the post-independence period, for example, employment of women, the implementation of legislations pertaining to women, the emergence of a

1. Srinivas, M.N., Social Change in Modern India (Orient Longmans, New Delhi, 1977).

large section of middle class, white-collar working women, the growth of unionization among women workers, Details of the trends-, if studied, against the background of the developments in Indian society sketched above, may help to ascertain the sociological explanation for the trends.

Employment of Women

The percentage of women in the total labour force came down from 34.44 per cent in 1911 to 31.53 per cent in 1961 and to 17.35 per cent in 1971. According to the 1971 census, there were 31 million women workers, 28 millions in rural areas and only 3 millions in urban areas. As many as 81 per cent of this total group is engaged in agriculture, only 6 per cent is engaged in the organized sector of the economy, and the rest are in unorganized, non-agricultural occupations. Our study is limited to the organized sector, and thus necessarily deals with only a small fraction of India's working women. The findings of this study will be only suggestive of the conditions prevailing in the unorganized sector. While, as will be seen, women employment has declined in factories, mines and plantations, the organized sector as a whole has registered an increase.

Of the 6 per cent in the organized sector, little more than half (3.3 per cent) or 10.9 lakh women are employed in

2. Towards Equality (Ministry of Education, New Delhi, 1974.

factories, mines and plantations (1974). Table 1 and Table 2 indicates employment of women in factories and mines respectively. While Table 3 deals with women workers in coffee and rubber, Table 4 is of women workers in plantations.

A steady decline is observable in the percentage of women workers in both factories and mines. Between 1951 and 1971 the women's share of total employment in factories declined from 11.43 per cent to 9.1 per cent, i.e., a decline of 20.37 per cent. The women's share of employment in mines has declined from 21.1 per cent to 11.9 per cent, i.e., a decline of 47.4 per cent. The heaviest decline has been in coal mines - from 0.55 lakhs to 0.20 lakhs. While total employment in coal mines increased from 3.52 lakhs to 3.82 lakhs, the decline in women's share is by 66.8 per cent.

In coffee, the number of women workers in the total labour force increased from 40.4 per cent in 1951 to 45.3 per cent in 1961 and has declined to 44 per cent in 1970. In rubber plantations their number increased from 22.1 per cent in 1951 to 35 per cent in 1970. In tea estates in Assam the percentage of women workers increased from 46.1 per cent to 49.2 per cent while in the South women workers represented 47.2 per cent of the total labour force in 1951 and 49 per cent in 1961. Plantations is the only industry where women employment has remained constant. Indispensability³ of women labour for 'plucking' is probably the reason.

3. Ibid.

Table I

Employment of women in factories

Year	Total Employees (1000)	No. of women employees (1000)	Percentage of women to total employees
1951	25,365.0	290.0	11.43
1955	2,690.4	295.1	10.96
1958	3,102.2	343.9	11.08
1960	3,367.8	367.3	10.91
1961	3,497.0	372.3	10.65
1962	3,648.6	394.1	10.80
1963	3,860.0	400.4	10.37
1964	4,024.0	409.1	10.16
1965	4,118.0	394.5	9.57
1966	4,069.0	364.7	9.96
1967	4,071.0	394.6	9.50
1968	4,067.0	346.1	9.00
1969	4,137.0	382.0	9.00
1970	4,264.0	394.0	9.00
1971	4,285.0	392.5	9.10

Source: Indian Labour Statistics and National Report.

Table II
Employment of Women in Mines

Mines	1951	1956	1961	1966	1968	1969	1970	1971
----- (figures in thousands) -----								
Coal T	352.0	352.4	411.3	425.5	395.4	396.4	391.5	382.2
W	55.2	46.0	38.1	30.7	24.7	23.0	21.5	20.1
	(15.7)	(13.0)	(17.0)	(7.2)	(6.2)	(5.8)	(5.5)	(5.2)
Iron T	20.2	37.3	54.5	60.3	52.2	48.6	51.8	52.8
Ore W	7.7	10.7	15.3	15.7	13.0	11.4	12.4	12.9
	(38.2)	(28.8)	(28.8)	(25.9)	(24.9)	(23.4)	(23.9)	(24.4)
Mica T	52.2	34.0	29.6	19.8	16.9	16.0	13.9	12.1
W	7.2	2.7	2.4	1.2	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.1
	(13.8)	(7.8)	(8.1)	(6.1)	(10.1)	(9.4)	(9.3)	(9.1)
Manga-T	55.5	110.0	46.9	47.0	37.2	31.0	29.3	30.4
nese W	24.4	44.2	17.7	19.1	15.0	12.3	11.6	12.2
	(43.9)	(40.3)	(37.7)	(40.6)	(40.3)	(39.6)	(39.6)	(40.1)
Others T	69.1	94.9	128.7	146.7	142.6	146.5	151.7	153.0
W	15.1	22.0	32.8	33.9	29.9	29.9	30.4	28.9
	(21.8)	(22.1)	(25.5)	(22.9)	(20.9)	(20.3)	(20.0)	(18.8)

Total T	549.0	678.6	671.0	699.3	644.3	638.5	638.2	630.7
W	109.6	125.8	106.3	100.7	84.3	78.0	77.2	75.2
	(20.1)	(20.0)	(15.8)	(14.4)	(13.1)	(12.2)	(12.1)	(11.9)

T = Total average daily employment

W = women's employment

Source: Indian Labour Statistics.

Table III

Percentage of women workers to
Total Labour Force in
Coffee and Rubber Plantations

<u>Year</u>	<u>Coffee</u>	<u>Rubber</u>
1951	40.4	22.1
1956	42.9	24.5
1960	38.6	22.1
1961	45.3	21.4
1970	44.0	35.0
	(1,64,000)	(99,000)

Source: women in Employment for 1970,
L.G.E. & T., p. 15.

Table IV

(a) Women workers in Tea Plantations

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Assam Percentage</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>South India Percentage</u>
1954	553,000	255,000	46.1	1951	47.2
1959	571,000	274,000	48.0	1956	49.9
1963	551,000	271,000	49.2	1959	49.4
				1961	49.1

Source: women in Employment

Table IV

(b) All India

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1961	822,000	362,000	44.7
1970	756,000	376,000	47.0

Source: Women in Employment

This trend towards decline or stagnation in the number and proportion of women workers employed in industries is generally attributed to the following causes.

- (i) structural changes in industry through rationalisation and modernization.
- (ii) impact of policies aiming at equalization of wages between men and women.
- (iii) impact of labour laws that protect the health and welfare of women workers.

(1) Rationalization and Modernization

A very blatant case of displacement of women workers took place in the textile industry. In cotton industry, women workers were mostly employed in reeling and working sections. Automation of the processes, has either rendered the need of human labour redundant or the operating of machines, needing skilled labour, have dispensed with women workers who are mostly unskilled and for whom training facilities are as good as non-existent. The silk, the nylon and jute industry have faced a similar fate. In textile mills in Bombay where women predominantly were employed in winding and reeling departments, the number has come down from 25,000 in 1974 to 5,000 in 1968 and still has in 1974.⁵

(ii) Equalization of Wages

It is commonly accepted proposition that recommendation for equal wages was one of the factors for the retrenchment

- 4. Pant, S.C., Indian Labour Problems (Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1970), See Chapter 2.
- 5. Ranadive, v., Women Workers of India (National Book Agency, Calcutta 1976), p. 14.

of women. The "Survey of Labour conditions in Coal Mining Industry" in 1967 reports

To a certain extent, the tendency on the part of employees to reduce women labour force may be due to the fact that they had to incur additional expenditure in the shape of maternity benefits and maintenance of creches, etc. (6)

The ironical fact is that in most cases while retrenchment has taken place, equalization of wages has remained unimplemented. A glance at Table 5 would go to substantiate this.

In the course of Occupational Wage Surveys conducted by Labour Bureau during 1958-59 and 1963-65, it was observed that, with minor exceptions, female earnings at minimum, maximum and average levels were lower than those of men in all the three sectors of industrial activity, namely, factories, mines and plantations. In a few industries such as jute and silk textiles, textile machinery, earnings of men and women were close to each other. In the mining sector, differential was the widest in mica mines (84.6 per cent) in the first survey and in iron ore mines (110.4 per cent) in the second survey. In the case of plantations, differential was the highest in coffee followed by rubber and tea in both the surveys. In the second survey, on an average, men earned more by 76.6 per cent in manufacturing industries, 47.2 per cent in mines and 11.6 in plantations.

6. Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Workers
(ILO Report, No. viii, 1975), p. 33.

7. (contd....)

Despite the significant and crucial role of 'plucking' by women in tea plantations and their numerical preponderance, wage discrimination exists. This clearly reflects the weakness of trade unions firstly in organizing women and secondly in raising demands pertaining to women. This discrimination, as apparent in the following quotations stems from an inherent conception of the social roles assigned to women. Reflection of this is also apparent in the nature of work assigned to women.

An ILO report states, "one of the most blatant forms of discrimination against women would appear that in male dominated societies women's work is apt, without reason, to be regarded as of less value than that of men".⁸ Arguments absolutely contrary to the above are voiced in statements of the All India Industrial Tribunal. It reads:

"We are satisfied that this is quite fair if it is remembered that the female worker generally belongs to a family group, with at least, one male earner as its head, that in the case of majority of female workers the basic wage at present is fixed about 75 per cent of what is fixed for the male worker and that special amenities enjoyed by women like maternity benefits, provision of creches etc.

7. (contd...)
Morgia, Readings in Indian Labour and Social Welfare (Atma Ram and sons., New Delhi, 1980), p. 275.
8. Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for workers, n.6.

should make up for the deficiency"⁹. Thus the movement for equal wages and increased opportunity or resisting decreasing opportunity for employment develop an inseparable character. On the contrary the employers may use one to cost into the other.

Nature of Work

The concentration in unskilled and lower levels of production is interlinked to the subordinate status of women in society and to her role as a reserve army of labour in the economy. In most of the older industries, the majority of the occupations employing women are mostly of an unskilled and semi-skilled nature. This enables employers to keep their wages at levels lower than the male workers. The other trend noticed in many industries is that while male workers may graduate from unskilled to semi-skilled and from the latter to the level of skilled jobs, sometimes even to jobs at supervisory levels, the female workers, by and large tend to remain at the level where they are recruited. Tables in the Appendix illustrate the occupational pattern of women employees and their concentration at the level of unskilled workers.

Protective Legislations

We have already noted how these labour laws were being used as an excuse to perpetuate wage discrimination and

9. Ranadive, n. 5, p. 28.

retrenchment. Apart from this, some idea should be attained as to what extent the labour laws have been implemented.

Creches

The Factory Act of 1948 laid down that in every factory where more than 50 women workers are employed, "there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms (creche) for the use of children, under the age of six years, of such women"¹⁰.

Different committees appointed by the state and central governments to study the working conditions and welfare benefits have stated that the existing conditions regarding creches are quite unsatisfactory. Moreover, as the following Table would suggest, a decline is apparent even in the number of creches provided.

The Survey Report of 1961-62 stated that "the creches were almost rare in the estates in North India".

The Labour Investigation Committee appointed in 1963 for the jute industry mentioned that about 20 mills in Bengal have established creches out of approximately 60-65 mills. It further commented: 'There appears to be a great need for starting creches in other mills as women are employed to a considerable extent ...'¹¹.

10. Ibid., p. 45.

11. Ibid., p. 48.

The Survey of Conditions in Mines (1962) Committee observed that at the all-India level about 82 per cent of the coal mines were employing women and coming under the statutory provisions to provide creches. But it was found that only about ¹²56 per cent of such mines had provided this facility".

The trade unions complain to the authorities regarding the inadequate facilities provided but with no effect.¹³ Ineffectivity can be explained by various factors but one obvious reason has to be the lack of organized trade union movement of women. How else is one to explain the lack of effectivity in sectors where women constitute a majority like plantations, cashew, tobacco, bidi. The next chapter reviews the extent of unionization of women and the priority given by unions to women problems.

Maternity Benefits

According to the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, a woman is entitled to a particular amount fixed on the basis of the daily wage, as maternity benefit and leave for certain period till she returns to work after the child is born. Though the Act is meant to be applied in all states, considerable disparities exist from state to state and industry to industry. A number of women are still not covered by either the Maternity Benefit Act or by the Employees Insurance Act --

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 47.

the ESI Scheme. Moreover, taking advantage of the Women Workers' ignorance, many employees evade paying. There is a provision for working in an establishment for continuous 160 days for a woman worker to be entitled to the cash benefit. Very often the employer denies the cash benefit by terminating the women's service and reemploying her.

It is only in cases where the union is strong enough to fight out her case that she gets the benefit. But very often even trade union workers are not fully aware of the provisions of various benefits.¹⁴

Average No. of claims made per 100 women employed

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>
Factories	2.1	1.4	0.6
Plantations	15.1	14.5	13.3
Mines	14.6	16.9	16.1

Source: Government Data. Cited in Ranadive, V., Women workers of India (National Agency, Calcutta, 1976) p. 40.

The above data reflects the declining trend in both factories and plantations. Mines register an increase, but in comparison to the total women work force, the number of claims are very few.

14. Ibid., p. 43.

Membership

Between 1928-29 and 1946-57, the percentage of women membership doubled (2.1 to 4.9 per cent). The same trend continued during the years following 1951-52. It reached 11.8 per cent of total membership in 1956-57. The following table indicates a steady decline from 1961-62 to 1974, with 1968 and 1970 being the sole years where a slight increase was recorded. Indeed even the total actual number of women members declined from 3,70,164 in 1961-62 to 2,62,154 in 1974.

Percentage of Men and Women workers
during 1961-1974

Year	No. of Unions submitting Returns	<u>Membership of Unions submitting Returns</u>			Percentage of women to Total No.
		Men	Women	Total	
1961-62	7,081	3,607,039	3,70,164	39,77,203	9.3
1962-63	7,251	3,334,755	3,46,987	36,81,742	9.4
1963-64	7,250	3,628,211	3,48,865	39,77,075	8.8
1966	7,244	4,078,146	3,13,501	43,91,647	7.11
1967	7,523	4,196,698	3,28,749	45,25,447	7.3
1968	8,851	4,699,944	4,21,067	51,21,011	8.2
1970	8,338	4,469,883	4,20,275	50,80,358	8.3
1971	8,909	5,044,902	3,86,380	54,31,282	7.1
1972	8,011	4,960,598	3,14,916	52,75,514	6.0
1973	7,442	5,026,896	2,53,251	52,80,147	4.8
1974	5,602	3,935,203	2,62,154	41,97,357	6.2

Source: Figures circulated by the Union Labour Ministry.

The following Table indicates the total degree of unionization in the years 1951 to 1964.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Degree of unionization (%)</u>
1951 - 52	24.5
1952 - 53	27.5
1953 - 54	25.3
1954 - 55	26.4
1955 - 56	27.6
1956 - 57	28.2
1957 - 58	33.1
1958 - 59	40.1
1959 - 60	43.4
1960 - 61	44.6
1961-62	39.6
1962 - 63	33.2
1963 - 64	40.8

Source: Cited in headings in Indian Labour and Social Welfare (Atma Ram, Delhi, 1980), p. 200.

Compared to the percentage of women members in trade unions, men membership is much higher. For example, in 1956-57 the percentage of women membership was 11.8 per cent while men membership was 16.4 per cent, in 1963-64, percentage of women membership was 8.8 as compared to 32.0 per cent of men membership. The difference between men and women membership had increased manifold between the years 1956-57.

and 1963-64. While the decline of women workers in the decade 1963-72 in factories, mines, plantations may be one of the factors responsible, it also reflects the importance attached by the trade union leadership in organizing women. Moreover the above factor is not tenable in the light of the following facts.

"In the 20 years between 1931 to 1951, women employment declined from 25.9 per cent to 20.3 per cent, but share in trade union membership rose from 2.1 per cent to 6.8 per cent. In the next decade, there was a positive change in both, but during the next 10 years upto 1971 women employment went up from 24.7 per cent to 27.3 per cent, but the female membership of trade unions upto 1968 declined from 9.3 per cent to 8.2 per cent."¹⁵

Of the total trade union membership of 51,21,011 in 1968, women's share was 4,21,067 or only 8.2 per cent. Amongst the worker's unions, states which normally accounted for sufficient number of female trade unionists (40,000 or above) during the same year, were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Amongst workers' Unions, the industry groups which accounted for sufficient number (30,000 or more) of female trade unionists during 1968 were 'manufacturing', 'Agriculture', 'forestry', 'Fishing', Mining and queerying and services.¹⁶

15. Morgia, n. 7, p. 729.

16. Ibid.

A further examination of the extent of participation of women in one of the industry groups, which have a higher number of women union members, would indicate that membership alone would not reveal the extent of involvement of women in union activities.

A report submitted by the Labour Bureau on the Women workers in mines reveal that,

about 52 per cent of the sampled women workers in the selected mines were reported to be members of one or the other trade unions as against a relatively higher proportion of 69 per cent in the case of male workers. No woman worker was found working as office bearer or holding prominent position in the trade union activities. (17)

Leadership

The study of leadership pattern is a frequent topic chosen by sociologists. Some literature thus does exist on trade union leadership, though not on women leadership exclusively.

All the three trade unions under study, INTUC, AITUC, CITU have expressed their dissatisfaction with the scanty representation of women in management and executive bodies of the trade unions. Yet outstanding women leaders within the trade union movement have always existed. Anusya Sarabhai

17. Study of the Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines", in Indian Labour Journal, Vol. 20, No. 8, August 1979.

was one of the first women activists but many have followed her. But like Anusya, they are more often than not members drawn not from the working class. They belong to affluent families, who chose to work voluntarily in the Trade Unions. Maitree Bose of INTUC, Parvati Krishnan of AITUC, Sushila Gopalan of CITU among many others are only some of the leading women trade unionists. But the fact that trade union organizers are drawn from non-proletarian origin is as much true of male organizers as of the female, probably slightly more so in the case of the latter.

Leaders coming from high caste, well-educated families do not face the problems which a working class woman, weighed down with superstition, ignorance and poverty, would face. If a working class man finds it difficult to be a vocal participant, a working class woman finds it a thousand times more difficult. The IV Congress of CITU observed:

It was also found that women, even in industries and occupations where they formed a sizeable section were not being represented in the leading bodies of the Union.

This is not because women are hesitant or not inclined, as popular beliefs suggests. But because the social attitudes and the role as housewife could be from involving in any other activity but what society has delineated as her role. (18)

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18. Fight Unitedly for the Cause of Indian Working Women: Report of the National Convention of Working Women (New Delhi, 1979, CITU) p. 33.

Jaspal Singh in his study on 'India's Trade Union Leaders', in a study of Punjab discovered that all except 0.7 per cent are men. One of the two female interviewers was the wife of an erstwhile minister and the other is the daughter of a prominent political leader, the wife of a freedom fighter and herself a member of the State Legislature Council (Vidhan Parishad). He notes that the leadership positions are generally occupied by men, women being an exception. The co-relation of women activists with the political family background evident in the National Movement holds true now also.

To conclude from a survey of membership and leadership that women have played no role would be hasty. Indeed, B.T. Kanadive, a Veteran trade Unionist points out at this paradoxical situation.

Thousands of women participate in strike, struggle, face jail and prison, go through privations along with men workers and employers. But they are far from occupying the position in the union is their due.

Vimla Kanadive places the responsibility for the insignificant representation of women workers on the different executive and managing committees of the unions, on the trade unions leaderships as a whole. She writes:

The reason for the low membership of women in the trade unions and their aloofness towards the organization is mainly because of lack of conscious and persistent efforts of the trade unions to draw them into the trade union activity. (21)

It cannot be denied, whether one agrees or not, that the leadership of the union also is a victim of the feudal outlook and does not try to encourage them to participate in the union activity. Not only that, there are certain instances where it has discouraged them to come forward when women themselves were ready to be on the executives. ²²

From all this we can conclude that women constitute a lower stratum of the work force in terms of skill, wages and unionism. A possible explanation for this state of affairs must look for the societal context in which the Indian working class is born and brought up. The persistence of the sexual inequality in the family from the pre-industrial stage, the continuation of Manu's ideology of inferior status of women and the practical advantages that the employers enjoy.

The enquiry also revealed that women shared the burden of more responsibilities while their rights in the family matters were less than those of their husbands or other male members of household. It was not that women did not

21. Ranadive, n. 5, p. 64.

22. Ibid., p. 65.

participate in union activities alone, but the participation of women workers in all recreational and cultural activities was negligible in all mines studied. We can assume from this that the norms of a male dominated family system do not permit the women folk to mix freely with male members not belonging to the family. In keeping women work force in subhuman bondage more than the man make the task of full participation of women all the more difficult. As trade union leadership seized of this problem has aptly observed only a sustained and conscious effort on the part of leadership with a new ideology could be possible after the situation.

Emergence of women white-collar employees and the role of middle class women in the trade union movement

Independent India witnessed a steady increase of white-collar women employees. Clerical staff, nurses, teachers, are perhaps the most common occupations which educated, middle class women are increasingly adopting. In the decade 1961-71, the number of women workers in the occupations of general clerk, teacher and nurse went up by 146.5 per cent, 93.5 per cent and 55.9 per cent respectively. Women in the white collared occupations constituted less than 3 per cent of the total women workers in 1971. But a study of their role in trade unions is significant, in so much, as they constitute

the educated and allegedly more conscious section of
²³
 working women.

This section is organized to some extent under unions along with other male employees for their common demands. Certain citations of actual participation of women in agitations may help an assessment of the dominant trends.

Teachers

An organized movement of teachers has slowly taken shape. Women teachers have played an active role in many of the agitations launched by teachers. While in certain cases, women have joined a en masse, as will be seen, the more general trend is the presence of few women teachers who represent a more conscious section.

The available reports indicate that the participation of women teachers is not limited to specific regions alone. Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, West Bengal, Assam, New Delhi, Maharashtra have all witnessed it. To illustrate, ... in Haryana, in 1973, the teachers agitated to demand pay scale on the Delhi pattern. A thousand lecturers were thrown into jail, women teachers were manhandled inside the school premises by constables ----²⁴".

In Punjab, in the movement, led by the Unemployed Teachers' Union, "more than 200 persons, including 85 lady
 23. Mongia, n. 7, p. 709.

24. People's Democracy (February 18, 1973).

lecturers and 17 children were arrested and put in various jails", where all the teachers, "male and female" went on hunger strike. At a dharna, even women were lathi charged.²⁵ Instances of women demonstrating, picketing and facing the attack of police in Kerala are many.²⁶

Central Government Employees

In the Central Government Employees strike of July 12-16, 1960, women workers did not hesitate to join the agitational path. The Hindu reported that in "20 jail employees of the Telephone Exchange" were arrested and put in custody in a local jail where there is no accommodation for women. Gujarat witnessed the lathi charge of women volunteers in Lohal railway workshop. In Calcutta those arrested numbered 692 and 41, including 24 and 10 women put respectively in 'open' and 'close' arrest. Most were from the Post and Telegraph staff.²⁷

The vocal participation of middle class women as compared to working class women, the difference of attitudes between them, the nature of constraints they face, will be discussed in the final chapter.

25. Gill, Sucha S., "Struggle of Unemployed Teachers", in Economic and Political Weekly (29th January, 1979)

26. Peoples' Democracy, n. 24.

27. Five Glorious Days (AITUC, New Delhi, 1960).

The Role of Women outside the work force in
The Trade Union Movement

It is ironical that while trade union leaders and organizers have paid scant attention to the problems of women workers, and opinions have been rife that women are naturally disinclined to come out into the streets, women members of workers families have played an active role in many movements. Apart from refuting the ideas harboured by many that the onus of low participation of women in trade unions, rests on women themselves, it iterates the significance of the "class" content of the women question.

A few illustrations of the role of women who are not workers in the concerned industry will elucidate the point. Apart from the Railway strike of 1974, a few more movements would be referred to. Vinla Ranadive of CITU had surveyed the railway colonies in Bengal during the period, and reported on the plight of workers and their families, the harassments they had to incur, and the resistance put up by the women. Kharagpur and Kanchipura in 24 Parganas were some of the areas visited.

Despite threats on their husbands lives -- "If you want your sindur to remain, bring your husband to work", the women²⁸ were determined not to send their menfolk back to duty. In getting khuli all the 150 workers were on strike.

28. People's Democracy (June 9, 1974).

At about 6.30 a.m. on the 18th May the police, acting on the information of the informer swooped down and arrested some of the strikers. About 40 women came forward to resist the arrest and lathis started showering on their heads. Among them was an old blind woman, Appamma - she got the worst beating - a young woman showed us stiches in her hand where she had been injured. Her baby of just eight months was brutally thrown on the ground... When the resistance to the arrests started, the news spread to the nearby colonies and within no time 500 women had gathered. They marched to the police station demanding release of those arrested. Again they were lathi charged and tear gas shells fired.

At Ranchapara, urban police arrested two people- "from all quarters the conch shells were sounded and from every block women and girls poured out to the van -- not less than 500 women".

In a procession in Nanhata Railway Colony, more than 1,500 women, some with babies, participated, and faced police attack of lathis and bayonets.

Durgapur, in 1970 saw active involvement of women in the movement for trade union and democratic rights.

"When the continuous strike was launched from August 12th, the women began organizing pickets and took out squads for demonstrations and home-to-home campaigning and this gave encouragement to workers ... the women volunteers began guarding the approaches and alerting the workers at the sight of the armed forces. They were maintaining whole

night vigils for this purpose. Hundreds of women, who were formerly not connected with any organization, enrolled as volunteers. The women volunteers blew conch shells and beat tins to warn the workers about the arrival of the CRP and other armed forces".

Often women sought the guidance of organizers to dissuade their husbands from disowning from the strike. The workers being house bound for fear of assault, it was the women who did the shopping etc.

In the Central Government Employees strike, July 12-16, 1960, reports suggest that "strikers have been arrested, beaten, their quarters broken and children and the women folk terrorized and thrown out into the streets".

These detailed case studies of white collar workers, teachers agitations, railwaymen's strike and central government employees strikes have been reproduced to examine the proposition that women are, intrinsically, specially in the Indian context, prone to be negatively oriented towards trade unionism. These case studies strongly suggest that (i) women participate willingly when a movement is at a heightened pitch; (ii) in continuation with the traditions built in the pre-Independence national movement days, women come out in numbers to blunt the edge of repressive measures against their menfolk;

(iii) a familial affinity unites women with the trade union and class interests of their husbands, brothers and fathers and they can be relied upon as a reserve fore of trade unions even if they do not formally constitute the work force in the industry; (iv) as compared to the unskilled workers, where the cultural denial and physical compulsions of manual labour within the factory and the family keeps them away from continuous participation, middle class white-collar unions have a greater participation of women members in agitations and organization on a comparatively more continuous basis; and, (v) participation in sporadic actions or in times of crises likely to affect the entire family is of a qualitatively different order than an equal share in trade union activities at all levels and in continuation. Participation through the family unit or withdrawal from trade union activity in the interest of family responsibility still seems to be an important structural basis of understanding women's role in trade unions as against the so-called western concept of individualism.

Chapter 14

INTUC, AITUC, CITU: ORGANIZING WOMEN

Chapter IV

INTUC, AITUC, CITU: ORGANIZING WOMEN

Introduction

The most fundamental of the ideological differences which split the Indian trade union movement into two distinct trends is the acceptance or rejection of "class struggle" INTUC broke away from AITUC precisely on this. Essentially related with this point is the difference of attitudes towards women and their role in society. An understanding of the theoretical framework from which the trade unions operate is necessary in order to grasp the rationale of the positions the trade unions take on various issues.

While INTUC visualizes social change within the paradigm of the existing socio-economic system, AITUC and CITU characterise the existing system as inherently exploitative and therefore in need of structural changes. Thus INTUC conceives of improvements in the status of women without fundamental reallocation of social roles. AITUC and CITU, on the other hand locate the unequal status of Indian women as interrelated to the institution of private property in a class society.

This chapter will seek to study the co-relation between the ideological perspective on women and its operationalization in terms of various issues, for example, equal remuneration of wages, maternity benefits, creches, retrenchment,

withdrawal of women from underground and night work and reservation of jobs for women. Preferred forms of raising demands and organizing women workers, the social composition of the women members in the trade unions will also be studied in the context of the fundamental assumptions. Since both AITUC and CITU are agreed on a common theoretical understanding on the status of women, no separate enunciation of the understanding would be needed.

INTUC

The Indian National Trade Union Congress came into being on the eve of Indian Independence in 1947. But much before that differences within the All India Trade Union Congress (which represented the earliest attempt to coordinate trade union activity in the country) was sharp and irreconcilable. An earlier chapter has already dealt with this aspect.

Though INTUC itself emerged much later, a labour sub-committee, entitled the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh (HMSS) set up by the Gandhi Seva Sangh, existed as early as 1939. The stress was laid essentially on the mutually non-antagonistic relationship of classes, on non-violence and trusteeship.

With Independence, and with the formation of a Congress government pledged towards a capitalist path of development, new needs arose in the trade union front. The

INTUC was committed to help implement the policies of the government. The fundamental assumptions underlying the Congress were the same as those of INTUC. And therefore the INTUC was pledged to play its role as the workers' representative in building a strong Indian nation pursuing the capitalist path of development, which the newly independent state of India had launched upon. Compulsory adjudication, abjuring of strike action for collective bargaining, support to nationalization and reliance on governmental machinery to get the grievances redressed were the main planks.

In the process of building the new nation roles were visualized for various members of society. Workers, women, peasants, capitalists were all expected to contribute to the path of progress, growth and modernization. The Gandhian scheme of the old and incorporation of the new ideas were projected forward. This revival of the old values to suit new needs is particularly relevant in the context of women.

The Gandhian conception of the role of the modern Indian women has been already referred to in the earlier chapters. The age old image of the sacrificing, suffering Indian women, who represents the softer aspect of life was put forward. And what was stressed was that in her weakness lay her strength, and her attributes were complementary to

the opposite sex. Women's contribution to society was different from men. The attributes commonly associated with women were then not seen as socially and historically developed attributes but as part of the immutable scheme of nature.

D.P. Ghiya, writing on "Work among women" in the *Indian Worker*, the organ of the INTUC argues that:

The main point to be emphasized is, that there are particular spheres of life in which women have a distinctive role and in which they can make a special contribution. It is now universally recognized that in the management of household, in bringing up children, in the field of social service, nursing and midwifery, teaching especially in elementary schools, in certain crafts and industries like knitting and embroidery etc. and in the field of fine arts, women have by instinct, a better aptitude. (1)

Ghiya thus reduces what is now commonly recognized as a socially defined role to the biological level. For him the role of women is centered within the family. The lists of suggestions he formulates, focus on the needs of a woman as a housewife to the neglect of the fact that most women from the working class have to work for wages outside their families to sustain their selves and their family:

What I want to emphasize is that for maintaining happiness in the family women is a key factor and plays an important role; therefore, upliftment of women is wanted urgently. The
(contd...)

1. Ghiya, D.P., "Work among women", Indian Worker, October 5, 1970, Gandhi Jayanti No.

following measures should be invariably taken by the social welfare officers for the advancement of women which would ultimately result in maintaining high efficiency among the workers. (2)

The underlying rationale of the suggestions is that improving living conditions for women will lead to better homes for the workers, and a happier worker is more efficient worker. The unequal status of women is accepted as a fact. It is pertinent also to emphasize the sentence, "... feelings of equality will further improve the social structure". Such idealistic conception of equality views equality as an abstract phenomena, a mere feeling, not as a value that is socially rooted. Earlier too, he refers to equality as a "doctrine" that demands "they must have the same faculties as men". The concept of equality, as will be seen, is posed very differently by AITUC and CITU.

INTUC's perspective on women, and its belief in complementary sex roles clearly emerges in the writings in the "Indian Worker". The image of woman as the weaker sex prevailing in society is reflected in headings like "What is in store for the Fair Sex in 1980"³, and "Women's Healing Touch"⁴. Both the headings belong to articles of responsible

2. Ibid.

3. D'Souza, E., "What is in store for the Fair sex in 1980", Indian Worker, vol. XXVIII, No.30, May 5th, 1980.

4. Ramanuja, G., "Women's Healing Touch", Indian Worker, vol. XXVIII, No. 31, February 16, 1981.

members of INTUC. The first is written by E.D'Souza, the Chairman of the Central Women Workers' Committee and the second by G. Ramanuja, the General Secretary of the INTUC.

A more detailed elaboration of the two articles would show however that, a paradoxical situation does arise when ideologically one is committed to one position and when facts of the existent social reality speak differently. Ramanuja and D'Souza both call for increasing participation of women in trade unions. But reasons given, even explicitly are different. Ramanuja expressed the view that,

The active participation of women with their gentle and healing touch in the country's trade union movement will help the entire movement become tolerant, patient and non-violent. (5)

The priorities seem to be in maintenance of peaceful industrial relations rather than in upliftment of women. But he obviously sees no contradiction between the two. D.Souza's statement, on the other hand, reveal an ill-concealed concern for the plight of women workers and the urgent need for them to organize themselves into trade unions. She categorically asserts that "women are one of the most exploited classes in our society, both socially and economically" and then outlines the sources for the restriction of job opportunities.

5. Ibid.

(i) prevailing social attitudes which tend to regard women unfit for most occupations; (ii) resistance from employers and in some cases male workers to appointment of women at higher levels; (iii) denial of, or the job training opportunities for women in higher skills; and, (iv) ignorance of most women regarding jobs outside the conventional classification.⁶

She further suggests a series of remedial measures ranging from a change of social attitudes towards women, and orientation of films, advertisements, text books which project the women as a weaker being, better training facilities and educational opportunities. Further she details out the ways in which equal remuneration of wages is avoided. Lastly she emphasizes that:

As far as the economic status of the working women is concerned, no legislation can reduce the disparities in wages as long as the women workers are unorganized ... Formation of women's wing in all central trade unions can play a vital role to look after the problems of women workers and improve their bargaining power. (7)

This is in stark contrast to Ramanuja's plan that "Women being skillful bargainers should be made to participate as negotiators, which would mean fewer strikes". That D'Souza is able to see farther than the perspective of INTUC would normally permit is probably because of her

6. D'Souza, E., n. 3.

7. Ibid.

involvement with women workers at close quarters and perhaps also because of her being a woman. But the emphasis in both D'Souza and Ramanuja's writings is on the necessity of peaceful industrial relations and on "negotiations" for solving any problems. This is in keeping with INTUC's relationship with Congress, and with the ideological premises of the Congress. The point has been elucidated in an earlier chapter. We will see in the next sections how INTUC prefers to mobilize women on a social service basis and how AITUC and CITU encourage women to participate in agitational struggles.

AITUC and CITU

Both AITUC and CITU derive their conceptual understanding of the status of women from the Marxist framework. The Marxist understanding explains the subordination of women as intrinsic to class society. Private property, the monogamous marital arrangement, the patriarchal lineage system and the unequal status of women are interrelated. The Communist Movement thus makes no distinction between the struggle for a classless society and for the emancipation of women. Lenin has reiterated this unbreakable link:

The true emancipation of women is not possible except through Communism. You must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between women's human and social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will
(contd...)

draw a strong, ineradicable line against the bourgeois movement for 'the emancipation of women'. This will also give us a basis for examining the women question as part of the social, working-class question, and to bind it firmly with the proletarian class struggle and the revolution. (8)

The inextricable link between the women's movement, the trade union movement and the movement for the transformation of class society into the state of socialism, is fundamental to the understanding of a communist party. An examination of the activities of the AITUC and CITU (who also abide by this understanding) should necessarily review whether a realization of the link is commonly understood by the workers, both men and women.

It is only right, that before proceeding any further, the position of the CPI, should be elucidated in its own words:

Communists stand for the emancipation of women in the fullest meaning of the word ... Communists also believe that there can be no real emancipation of women until they participate in social production and come out of the confines of their home and domestic drudgery. This requires a transformation of society from capitalist, whose mode of production and social structure is based on exploitation, to a socialist one.

In one country, where strong vestiges of feudalism and its reactionary ideas have great hold on the kinds of both men and women, nothing substantial can be achieved without a tremendous campaign
(contd...)

8. Lenin, V.I.

against feudalism too. The fact is one basic perspective in its totality regarding the emancipation of women". (9)

The above delineation of the respective ideological positions of AITUC, INTUC and CITU will help to understand the reasons for their differing positions in relation to the various issues pertaining to women.

Equal Wages

In some instances the three trade unions can and do arrive on a common minimum understanding. This can be seen in the concrete issue of equal remuneration of wages. The AITUC, the INTUC, and CITU are all agreed upon the fact that discrimination in wages persist despite the Equal Remuneration Act.

D'Souza of INTUC observes:

In the organized sector, it is noticed for women employed in industries, in spite of the attempts to bring about equalization of wages between men and women most industries continue to maintain the pattern of differentials by indirect methods. The two occupational wage surveys conducted in 1958-59 and 1963-65 reported differences in the minimum, maximum and average earnings of men and women in most industries. The principle of equalization is evaded by individual establishments by not employing both men and women for the same job and by classifying certain jobs as earmarked for women and keeping lower wage rates for such jobs. (10)

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9. 'Communist Party and the Status of Women', in New Age, September 29, 1974.
 10. D'Souza, n. 3.

were conducted as to whether the maternity and other benefits should be offered only to those who practice birth control or clarifications by the Health Minister that such an attempt would be 'inhuman' are made, suggesting that a serious thought was given to the matter.¹³ The AITUC and CITU do not view family planning as mere administrative operations. But they consider the number of children, - a worker or a peasant has, as being co-terminous to their needs. Each child is viewed as an extra pair of hands to work primarily and not an extra mouth to feed.¹⁴ The INTUC however, by placing the cart before the horse, seeks to popularise family planning on the plea that the poor are poor because they have more children. Stress is laid on the role of trade unions in propagating family planning recommendations were made to trade unions to organise special training courses for women workers in trade union functionaries."¹⁵

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12. (contd...) the women workers, compared to male workers. In cashew, tobacco and various other industries to jobs which are predominantly done by the women workers are paid very low wages, and the wage of those women workers was not suitably increased even after the enforcement of the Act". p. 25.
 13. Indian Worker, April 5, 1971, p. 8.
 14. See Mamdair, Mahmood, The Myth of Population Control (New York) Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 14. "People are not poor because they have larger families. Quite the contrary, they have large families because they are poor.
 15. Indian Worker, October, 15, 1970.

Retrenchment

On the issue of retrenchment and withdrawal of women from night work and underground work, INTUC takes a different position from AITUC and CITU. The National Commission on Labour had observed that the legal prohibition of night and underground work and employment in hazardous occupations have obviously restricted women's employment. The Committee mentioned that the ban on night work has proved to be an obstacle to the employment of women, and the introduction of the multiple shift system in some organized industry has resulted in the impossibility of rotating women between different shifts which has given rise to some resentment among some male workers.¹⁶

The representatives of the INTUC are of the view that this provision is unduly restrictive and feel that the permission to extend the period upto 10 p.m. should be available to all industries.¹⁷ This will enable their employment at two shifts and remove the present excuse for retrenching them. AITUC and CITU is against the removal of the restriction. In their opinion, the employer's plea was only an excuse, since operation in which women are engaged in mines

16. Ibid., The opinion was voiced by the Convener, INTUC's Women Wing who was also a member of Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh and the organizing secretary of the Colliery Mazdoor Sangh.

17. Ibid.

and textiles - are preferred during the day. INTUC's stand was in consonance to the move made by the Congress Government to withdraw the bar on women workers going underground in mines, and working in the third shift. The reasons forwarded were that it would create employment for women. AITUC and CITU, however, understand the question of employment at a more fundamental level. They relate it to the existence of private ownership of the means of production, where a factory will be opened or wound up, expanded or curtailed, mechanized or not - not in the interests of workers but in the interests of profit.

Reservation

A few women's organisations had raised the demand for reservation of women in jobs. AITUC too had demanded the reservation of 25 per cent the jobs in textiles for women and presented a memorandum to the textile Board. The AITUC had subsequently considered it as harmful to the interests of working class and gave it up. The CITU opposed it, considering reservation for women as mere distribution of unemployment and potentially divisive for the working class.

18. Kanadive, V., Women Workers of India, (National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1976), p. 59.
19. Trade Union Records, vol. XVI, No. 19, August 15, 1960.
20. "Fight Unitedly for the Cause of the Working Women" n. 18, p. 15.

We have been unable to acquire any official statement of INTUC on this issue.

The Social Composition of Women to which priority is attached

Having reviewed the differing positions on the fundamental trade union demands for Women workers, we will attempt to study the relative priorities of the trade unions in organising the different sectors of Women. We have already noted that the CPI and CPI(M) view the organizing of the working class and peasantry as a priority. This emphasis emerges sharply even from a glimpse of a report of a conference or any other form of gathering by AITUC or CITU. Specific importance is attached to the presence and participation of members from the working class. The intent however is not to make a fetish of working class women alone. Unity of all sections are sought. But caution is maintained to see that demands of the working class are not relegated to give place to middle class views. A report of the inaugural conference of the Maharashtra Mahila Sangh held in January 19 and 29, 1974 in Maharashtra, will help to indicate what kind of alliance the Communist trade union visualizes.

More than 500 delegates from 16 areas of seven districts of Maharashtra attended the conference. The majority of

them were workers, agricultural workers and adivasi women, they represent textile workers, powerloom workers, bloplant (travel-kit) workers, wool workers, bidi workers, besides vendors of fish and vegetables and saleswomen in shops. Delegates also came from the pharmaceutical workers who have been continuing their fight for maternity benefits and child welfare. They were middle class - housewives, teachers and office workers." ²¹

A report of a Women's Training Camp held by INTUC in Madras reveals the difference in orientation. The 27 women participants in the camp consisted of employees in engineering, electronics and garment industries, ESI and banks, nurses and teachers. ²² No attempt is being made here to suggest that INTUC has no working class women members. The contrary is self-evident. What is being argued is that INTUC lays no special stress on working class participation as against the better educated and better paid white collar workers.

Modus Operandi and preferred forms of activity of the three Central Unions

It has been iterated time and again that the Communist led trade unions attach particular significance to the role of organized movements of the worker. The Congress-led

21. People's Democracy, February 17, 1974.

22. Indian Worker, n. 4.

unions, on the other hand, bound by Gandhian conscience, have focussed on social reform activities, and have sought to reduce the role of "strikes" and other agitational forms of protest to the minimal. This is reflected very clearly in the records and reports of the respective trade unions. Thus while "The Trade Union Records" of AITUC, and the "Working Class" of CITU focus on "struggles" launched and report them in details, the INTUC's "Indian Worker" makes no mention of the actual process of strikes, or other forms of agitations at all. Instead reports on various negotiations and policy decisions occupy a large part of the pages in "Indian Worker". Priority is given to the tripartite meetings held between the government, the management concerned and the union representatives. Thus it is quite impossible to derive any information on the actual participation of women in the trade union movement itself. Social welfare activities on the other hand are well documented in the "Indian Worker".

We have thus depended almost entirely on the AITUC and CITU reports for data. As stated at the very outset, the data is severely constrained for several reasons. The available data was not compiled with any intention of documenting evidence of women participation in trade unions.

Mention of women is thus incidental. Moreover, the records of both AITUC and CITU, not being academic sources, have no particular order and method in its presentation. However, an attempt will be made to analyse the data in terms of industries such as mines, plantations, textiles and in the context of regions represented. This will facilitate us in locating areas of greater participation and in understanding the sociological reasons for the phenomena.

While acknowledging the limitations of a social welfare approach, the relevance and significance of such activities cannot be under-emphasized. Work done by INTUC in this direct for women will be presented in the following section. A comparative study of the activities of the two approaches will indicate to what extent, the respective trade unions have been able to implement its basic policies.

The INTUC - The social Service Approach

Service for the working class, not struggle of the working class is the key of INTUC's understanding. Pledged to the existing path of development, the INTUC aims to at once ameliorate the conditions of the workers and instil in in them a commitment to the path of progress envisaged by the government. While stressing the limitations of a social service orientation, the work done in this direction has to be appreciation.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted the trade union movement to develop the model of the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad. For the last 41 years, the Textile Labour Association has been propogating the e ssential human aspect in workers everyday life which has made it a living institution. Besides looking after the e conomic interests of the workers, it is running a hospital, schools, adult education centres, Mater-nity home, volunteer corps and similar other social and welfare activities, touching the life of women, children and youth".²³

This was the ideal which was taken as the basis of the INTUC when it was formed 11 years ago. Pursuing the policies, the report of the INTUC observes:

"Illiteracy has been a curse with the Indian people. INTUC Unions have realised the importance of under-taking literacy campaigns. From the reports available, it is found that almost in all parts of the country unions have been conducting adult education classes either in working class locality or in union offices. In places like Ahmedabad, Indore, Bombay and Jamshedpur, there are also arrangements for education of children and craft teaching for the women workers when they are at home during

23. Report of the Activities of the INTUC since the Madurai Session for the period, December 1957 to 1959, Vasvada, INTUC, New Delhi), p. 98.

their leisure hours and also for women and grown up girls who remain at home when the men folk go to the mills and factories. In some cases these centres have also arrangements for showing films to workers on union functioning, national development work and cultural activities, etc..."²⁴

Illiteracy is accepted as apriori, as one of the many curses Indian society is afflicted with. No one factor, or process, or system is picked as responsible for the phenomena. The suggested solutions are essentially palliative, not remedial. No mention is made of the Government's educational policy and its impact. The AITUC and CITU, while being critically aware of the causes responsible for the "curses" may fall prey to the slogan (raised by extreme sections) which calls for revolutionary changes or nothing. The reports of AITUC and CITU, which has been consulted for the purposes of this dissertation, did not have any significant report or the ameliorative measures. Principally, however, both realize the need of remedial measures, while emphasizing²⁵ the fundamental and structural limitations of the system.

24. Ibid., p. 98.

25. New Age, (September 20, 1953), p. 6. "The Coordinating Committee has pointed out that agitational work alone is not sufficient, but the local women's Committees should themselves take up the organization of hard work centres, adult literacy schools, and cooperatives for the sale and purchase of goods produced by women, and in this way help to give immediate relief to the unemployed.

The question however is also of resources. A left-wing trade union, not sponsored by the government or any other financial sources, would be direly restricted in its functions. Thus while a state government run by the left may seek to implement remedial measures, a trade union professing similar views may be unable to do so.

The INTUC had sought to launch a cooperative movement. In Ahmedabad the workers have their cooperative credit societies as factory level and their own central cooperative bank. Some unions had also launched programmes for promoting habits for small savings among the workers.²⁶

Prohibition is yet another programme to which INTUC has principally been committed.

"Prevalence of alcoholic drinks and drug habits have done immense harm to the working class. The INTUC has supported the policy of prohibition ... Unions in Gujarat, Bombay, Indore, Assam, and Jamshepur have set up special units to propagate prohibition and set up recreation centres libraries, sport and clubs to guide the energies of workers in their free time and in the proper direction".²⁷

We have already noted the effect of alcoholism of a male worker on the women folk of his family. The women is often beaten, humiliated, or deprived even of the scant earning to meet the drinking expenses. Often the untimely

26. Ibid., p. 100.

27. Ibid., p. 99.

death of a male member results in the women having to bear the entire responsibility of feeding after the children.

A Comparative Study of Membership

A survey was made of CITU Unions in various states prior to the National Convention of Working Women held in Madras on April 9-10, 1979. The survey included only unions which had both men and women workers - and it was found that in 580 unions, included in the survey, 18 per cent were women workers, and 80 women workers were office bearers and executive committee members, which is less than one per cent of the total number of office bearers and executive members of these unions. Apparently this figure, in the words of the report of the above mentioned convention, "is not bad, but if all the CITU unions are included in the survey, the percentage of membership of women workers will be much lower".²⁸

The CITU unions have more women workers as members in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, West Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu than in other states. In the words of the report "the position of membership of working women in unions affiliated to other Central trade unions and independent National Federations will be more or less the same".²⁹ INTUC

28. "Fight Unitedly for the cause of Indian Working Women,"
n. 18, p. 40.

29. Ibid., p. 40.

and AITUC did not have any consolidated information on their women membership.

Office Bearers

All the three trade unions acknowledged the poor representation of women in executive bodies. Apart from few individual women who held high places of office at the All-India level, minimal representation existed in state and district levels.

It would not be rash to conclude that representation wise participation of women was dismal. The concluding chapter will probe into the sociological causes responsible for this.

We conclude this chapter by underlining the differential ideological approach of the three Central Trade Union, to trade Unionism as such. CITU and AITUC together look at the Trade Unions as a shield in the hands of the working class to protect it against growing onslaughts on its share of the produce. They also reject the possibility of improving the conditions of the working class on any lasting bases without overthrowing the cap, labour organization of society as such. These trade unions are seen also as schools for action for socialist transformation. Emancipation of women and workers as a class is seen as interlinked both in the short run and the long run. Their immediate tactics springs from this understanding. On the other hand, INTUC seeks

improvement here and now within the capitalist order itself, relies on the state apparatus, for achieving its goals, is less militant and more wedded to reform. Their attitude to the women question and place of women in trade unions is similarly coloured by conciliation, continuation of the tradition without break, support to the governmental decisions and trying to change undesirable situation including the plight of women workers through education, (change of heart of the power wielders) and propagation of Gandhian conciliation.

In spite of these differences of ideology and preferred modes of improvement of bad situation on many issues concerning equal pay for equal work, social legislation for protection of women workers etc. The three unions find them united mostly on formal platform and sometimes in street struggles also.

Participation of Women in trade union Movements:
AITUC and CITU

The nature of data being essentially sporadic and limited, no unimpeachable generalisations can be made. But some features can be projected, some problems focussed, some questions raised.

Plantations

A perusal of AITUC and CITU documents clearly indicate that in the plantations, the participation of women is considerable in the various forms of agitations, conducted by

the trade unions. However, representation in executive bodies is minimal. Active role of women is limited to local areas. The main reason given is the distances between the different estates. An executive member would necessarily have to move about from estate to estate, a task which is difficult for a women to perform.

A regional comparison suggests that women participation in the movement itself is greater in North Bengal and Southern plantations than in Assam. A possible reason could be that INTUC is the dominant union in the Assam plantations and the professed orientation of INTUC has already been noted.

Reports of CITU state how women in plantations in North Bengal and Kerala gheroad the B.L.O.s and management³⁰ for demands like adequate ration, implementation of the provisions of maternity benefit Act and creche and housing and against increase in workload." AITUC reports on the Dabjeeling Plantation workers' Conference where both men and women³¹ marched together in a demonstration. The prominent part women workers took to resist the attacks of goondas, hired by the management to evict the vice-president of the Tripura Tea Workers' Union, (CITU),³² indicates that women there are used to participation in union activities.

30. Hanadive, V., n. 23, p. 3.

31. Ibid.

32. People's Democracy, April 11, 1976.

Formation of Mahila Samiti in Darjeeling Plantation³³ and the presence of women executive members reflect the level of unionization and consciousness of women. It is significant that women have been organized under organizations such as the Cha women Mazdoor Union Darjeeling despite the difficulties of organizing and attending meetings in the hilly regions and distant estates.

Concerted effort by the Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union (CITU)³⁴ in West Bengal forced the employees to rescind a previously enacted order, for increased work load of women. The order was introduced in the pretext of implementing equal wage for equal work.

The women plantation workers of Karnataka, numbering about 1 lakh, are denied equal wages in spite of legislations passed. In an agreement in 1975 with the management the words "men" and "women" disappeared and Grade I and Grade II appeared. The CITU Union did not sign it. The Karnataka Provincial Plantation Workers' Union sent a memorandum protesting against the manouvre of the management to the Government of Karnataka and Union Minister for Labour, seeking intervention.³⁵

While the above instances refute any theories suggesting an inherent apathy of women to organize and agitate, it must

33. Ranadive, n. 23, p. 8.

34. People's Democracy, April 4, 1976.

35. People's Democracy, April 11, 1976.

he remembered that conditions of women in plantations in terms of wages, creches, maternity benefits as seen in the earlier chapter still very bad. The fact that more than half of the plantation labour force is women is significant.

The CITU Conference 1979, while mentioning that "on the demand for equal remuneration for workers, the plantation workers fought prolonged struggle throughout the country", noted with concern "that in spite of the wage rise and concessions secured by the plantation workers in the recent period, the wage level in the plantations is still very few", one of the lowest in the country and their service conditions are far from satisfactory. They suffer from very acute problems. Creches are hardly provided in the plantations. There is practically no medical benefit given to them ..."³⁶

Textiles

Reports of AITUC on textile industry is more of the Southern Belt than of the Bombay Mills. CITU, unlike the case of plantations, have not reported much about women participations in textiles. The main problem in the textile industry, as seen was the decline in the number of women workers. According to Parvati Krishnan of AITUC, the trade unions were better able to fight retrenchment of women in the South than in Bombay. However, the trade unions have

36. "Fight Unitedly for the Cause of the Working Women"; n. 18, p. 19.

failed to intervene in the employment policy which clearly discriminate women. The various modernization schemes in textiles have resulted in the shift of employment policy.³⁷

Organization of Women in textiles is particularly strong in the Coimbatore district, as the following extracts of a report would suggest.

"... the Conference organized by the Coimbatore district Mill Workers Union (AITUC) took place, attended by over four thousand workers".

The Conference took place in the background of the crisis of employment facing particularly the women workers in the textile industry. In 1938 women constituted 35 per cent of labour force in the textile industry in Coimbatore district. But since 1952 "there had been a growing tendency to eliminate women workers..." In preparation for the meeting, gate meetings were held for more than a month in all centres which were attended by a large number of women workers. Collections were made for the conference from the women themselves and support came from women belonging to all Unions - in one mill, the women workers belonging to the INTUC union contributed over Rs. 50 to the Conference. "A large number of women workers themselves participated in the discussion and spoke on the resolution. Delegates from the textile mills in Coimbatore, from the tea and coffee curing establishments,³⁸ from the ginning and rice mills.

37. Trade Union Records, vol. XVI, No. 21, September 5, 1960.

38. Ibid.

Organised participation of women in trade union movements in both Bombay and Coimbatore has a tradition stretching back into the Nationalist Movement. There are a number of instances "in the working class struggles since 1930" of the participation of women workers, especially in "many textile strikes in Bombay and Coimbatore."

In the general strike in 1973-74 women workers in Bombay textiles came out en masse in one of the areas with broom sticks and rolling pins to protest against repression." Their active role was noticed "when they spoke in the meetings, distributed handbills, picketed the gates at the time of the strikes". In the period of 1956-57, they "enrolled in thousands at the mill gate at the call of trade unions". A review of membership of that period would show the largest percentage of women unionization (11.8 per cent)³⁹

The subsequent decline in the percentage of unionization, the negligible representation in executive bodies, the retrenchment of women in textiles, the gradual elimination of women workers reflect not upon the subjective disposition of women workers to unionize but upon the "lack of conscious and persistent efforts of the trade unions to draw them into the trade union activity". A particular feature akin to plantations is that after women unionists in the specific work situation, intervenes. But, because of physical

39. Ranadive, V., n. 30, p. 8.

distances and the limitations imposed by the existing division of labour at home, a woman worker finds it difficult to partake of union activities after work hours.

Coal Mines

Coal Mines is one of the industries with a large percentage of women trade unionists. The 1966 Labour Reports point it to 8.9 per cent. Yet in coal mines, the decline in the number of women workers has been very sharp, as earlier chapter has shown. The Baveja Committee on coal industry had suggested a retrenchment of 50,000 coal mines through "a programme of training and replacement of female workers".⁴⁰ While the trade unions protested against this recommendation, we have found no evidence of actual participation of women, or of the success of the protest.

A report on coal mines by the Labour Bureau⁴¹ have shown that while percentage of unionization is more than 50 per cent, active involvement is absent as is representation in executives.

Conclusion

INTUC even at an ideological level accepts gender roles. AITUC and CITU do not. Yet at the operational level,

40. Fight Unitedly for the Cause of Indian Working Women: Report of the National Convention of Working Women, n. 12, p. 4.

41. Study of the Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines" in Indian Labour Journal, Vol. 20, No. 8, August 1979.

even AITUC and CITU workers have fallen prey to sexist assumptions, as to what a woman should or should not do. The assumption that unionization is contrary to women's nature is widely held and reinforced through the idealization women involved in "social service activities". However, in both "unionization" and "social service" participation of women is restricted to specific areas alone, confirming the fact that a concerted effort to organize women was not made by the unions.

There are two aspects to this problem. One is related to the initiative role of the unions, the other to the response of women themselves. An attempt to sociologically understand the constraints (at both the structural and ideological level) operating against greater participation of women will be made in the concluding chapter.

Chapter v

CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

Our study, at the very outset, has emphasized the methodological limitations of western epistemology which is the predominant orientation, Indian sociological research has adopted. Operating with a particular understanding of development and modernization, Indian sociologists have neglected to study the phenomena of women participation in the trade union movement. Regarding a militant trade union movement as dysfunctional to society (and to modernization) and considering the status of working class women not the best indice to measure the progress attained by women in independent India, Indian sociological literature has virtually left this area untouched.

A study of the role of women in Indian trade unions has revealed that sociologists were not the only ones to neglect this aspect. The trade unions themselves have shown a callous indifference towards the organizing of women. This indifference reflects the basic social assumptions about the role of women in society. Women are primarily meant to look after the house and family. Her role if any in the workforce is marginal. This sexual division of labour is inextricably linked to the economic, social and political structure of society. Any comprehensive

and scientific understanding of the status, role, problems and constraints of the Indian working women is possible only if an idea of the structure of Indian society is ascertained. Our theoretical understanding of the social structure has been elaborated in the first chapter itself.

And thus an attempt has been made to historically probe into the growth of Indian industrialization, the formation of the Indian working class and the emerging participation of women workers. We have seen that thanks to the specific colonial situation, feudal relations of production persisted in India even with the onset of capitalism. Post-independent India perpetuated this admixture of social relations. For our study on the participation of women in trade unions, this fact has been of particular significance as will be elaborated.

were we to summarize the findings of our study in few sentences, we would state that the institutional arrangements and norms of society block the free participation of women in the trade union movement. It would also be valid to claim that the poor representation of women in trade unions and even poorer representation in executive bodies, belie the fact that in many important trade union movements, women have had an important role to play. Contrary to a popularly held belief that women are by nature

apathetic to agitational methods, the study reveals that women are hindered by structural and ideological constraints from participating more actively.

Institutional settings of family and of work reinforced by gender roles restrict women from participating in social, economic and political life. Though the structural and ideological constraints are part of a whole, it would be convenient to discuss them separately. The peculiarities of India's social formation which is both feudal and capitalist, discussed in earlier chapters reflects itself in both the institutional arrangements and the social norms.

Institution Setting of Work

Women, as observed, in a capitalist social formation are treated as marginal to productive labour. Women's responsibility for the home and presumptive physical and intellectual lacks are used to explain away conditions of employment and even to argue that women do not need paid work at all because they actually depend on a male breadwinner. The discrimination in wages and the rationale cited has been noted.

Dichotomization of domestic and breadwinning functions intercepts at both the family and at the larger economic level. The interlinkages between the patriarchal family system and the capitalist social formation clearly emerges.

The ban on underground mining operations for women prior to the war and the subsequent withdrawal of the same (as stated earlier) is a standing example of the policy of treating women as a reserve army of unemployed. Coupled with the insecurity associated with marginal nature of work, exists the fact that women for the most part occupies the lowest rungs in the occupational hierarchy. Unskilled, illiterate, impoverished they are easily replaceable. Acutely aware of these weak bargaining position and the possible risks likely to be incurred by active trade union involvement, women are prone to stay away. The first to be the victims of any retrenchment policy and the last to be taken note of by the trade unions, women are placed in a very difficult position.

Institutional Setting of Family

Subsidiary in the work situation women occupy a subordinate position within the family too. The patrilineal family system does not envisage any independent role by the female members. Women even when earning for the most part is not in control of the finances. The authority in terms of both money and decision lies with the eldest male members.

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1. "As their earnings are low, they do not want to pay even a small subscription fee".
Morgia, J.N., Readings in Indian Labour and Social Welfare (Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi, 1980), p. 730.

Division of labour in the family is almost always absolute. Irrespective of the fact whether a woman earns her livelihood or not, the domestic chores are defined as women's chores.

This division of labour has far reaching implications for the participation of women in trade unions. Most writings both academic and of organizational activists, have stressed the fact that the physical compulsions of looking after the house leave no time for women to join trade union activities.

The National Committee on the status of women clearly writes:

Even with regional variations, basic notions about male and female roles display some common features. A woman is primarily associated with the home, is expected to look after domestic chores and her typical roles are those of housewife and mother. In the cultural understanding of the people, home-making, the child bearing and child rearing is identified with femininity. Whether women work in the fields, factories or mines, at construction sites, or in white collar jobs, all of them are expected to be home-makers in the same manner as women who confine themselves to home-making activities. (2)

Boserup has described the women in the Asian plantations as one with a double job, as housewife and full time labourer. For a large part of the year, men are at leisure

2. Status of Women in India (I.C.S.S.R. Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1975), p. 28.

when work in plantations are over. But the housework is still done by the women. A woman's day begins at 4 a.m. or 5 a.m. with cooking for the family. Then, after 7 or 8 hours of plantation work, she must fetch water and firewood and cook another meal. Children are often brought to the fields the smallest one strapped to the back of the mother.³

A survey of working class families in Bombay reveals that most of them had an excessively long working day if the day is considered to include both house labour and wage labour. Many of the families surveyed had unemployed male relatives living with them, but in no one case did they help in household chores.

Gulati in her study in brick-kiln workers in Kerala observed a similar division of labour. While working double-fold, the woman was still subservient to the man. Gulati noted the tendency that not only do women eat last, but they also eat the least. While the men are in a position to spend whatever little they earn in drinking or gambling, the women most often is not in control of the money she earns.⁴

Compelled to earn and look after the family, the woman worker in sheer physical terms finds it a hard task to join

3. Boserup, Ester, Women's Role in Economic Development (George, Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1970).
4. Gulati, Leela, "Female Labour in the unorganized sector" in Economic and Political Weekly, vol. XIV, No. 16, pp. 744-52.

in trade union activities. Even attending gate meetings after work is not easy. A scrutiny of reports of INTUC, AITUC and CITU have iterated this point time and again. The survey of 87 mines by the Labour Bureau have also shown that the dual responsibilities of work and family left no time for every other activity.⁵

The status of women is thus subordinate in both the family and in the work situation. On one hand, in Simmel's words,

Because of the peculiar functions she was relegated to activities within the limits of her home, confined to devote herself to a simple individual, and prevented from transcending the group-relations established by marriage, family, social life, and perhaps charity and religion. (6)

On the other hand, the needs of capitalism used women as a reserve army of labour to be employed or eliminated, as market needs demand. Neither institutional arrangement is conducive to unhindered and free participation in trade union activities.

The deciding authority in a patrilineal system is the senior male member. Thus if the male member of a family violates social norms, the women of the said family are encouraged to do the same. Our study of Women participation

5. "Study on the Socio-economic Conditions of workers in Mines: A Summary of the Report" in the Indian Labour Journal vol. 20, No. 8, August fee, 1979.
6. Cited in Hurt, Janet G., "The Sociology of Gener", in Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 10, No. 2, March 1981.

has indicated that women, whose male relatives are actively involved in trade union work, are more prone to participate actively.

Ideological Constraints

The social orientations, attitudes, perceptions prevailing in any society cannot be studied in isolation from the institutional arrangements. Notions about gender roles are more than cultural orientations. Based on certain institutional structures, they are infused into personality through socialization to such an extent that they attain an autonomy and rigidity of its own. These gender roles, in turn, reinforce social institutions.

The process of legitimization of the unequal status of women is so effective that any proposals of reallocation of roles would be met with disapproval from not only the men but the women as well. A study conducted in an American factory revealed that a large number of women defended retrenchment of women on the grounds that men are the main bread-winners. Indeed subservience is still regarded as a virtue if held by women. This is so because the cultural orientations in society are not something apart and outside the personality. Indeed culture is part of consciousness itself.

Gender roles ascribed to women in Indian society have incorporated social norms belonging to both the feudal and to the modern industrial capitalist world. Earlier chapters have sought to explain the emergence of a social system in India which is both feudal and capitalist. This is reflected in the quality of attitudes apparent in the perception of women in India.

Glorifying the saintliness of womanhood and motherhood, the virtue of sacrifice on the part of woman is upheld as the most noble. Women were expected to give up all for the sake of her husband, father or son as the case may be. Indeed, even when Gandhi attempted to encourage women to participate in the nationalist movement, he drew examples from mythology and history.

Sita set out for the forest with Ramchandra and there was nothing he did of which she remained in ignorance. Draupadi, making herself a true partner in life, accompanied the Pandavas in their wanderings and when her honour was threatened, she proved to the world that she had the strength to protect herself with soul force. Damayanti stood by Nala's side in all he did; not only that, but she even proved to be his protector when he was not in his right mind. (7)

Coupled with this glorification of women, exists ideas which hold women as inferior, as impure and lowly who are unable

7. Agnew, V., Elite Women in Indian Politics (Vikas, New Delhi, 1979) p. 59.

to reach the heights of a man. Considerable anthropological literature exists on this "impure" conception of Women. Without probing into the interlinkages between the two sets of attitudes, it can be stated that both attitudes reinforce the secondary role women are expected to perform in society. Women are perceived as the second sex, as the "other" in relation to man, who is primary and fundamental in society. Our basic cultural formulations of personhood exclude women from the political, the religious, the cultural realm. While men are cultural products, views of women are restricted to her role within the family.

The idealization of Women's moral and material nature is a phenomena not unique to India. England with the development of commercial capitalism witnessed the emergence of the 'cult of domesticity', which confined the female to a 'morally superior position', perhaps in an attempt to compensate their real loss of economic status. In India, this idealization incorporates the added dimension of dharma. Gandhi, had used this religious concept to mobilize

8. Beauvoire, Simone de., The Second Sex (Penguin Harmondsworth 1972).
9. Boulding, Elise, "Women as Civic Beings", Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 10, No. 2, March 1981.
10. Garrison, Dee, "Beyond her Sphere. Women and the Professions, in American History by Barboe J. Harris", Journal of Social History, Winter 1980.

women politically. Thus desh Seva was a woman's dharma virtues of women depicted in the Indian epics was a woman's dharma.¹¹ To look after the family was dharma. Participation in agitational trade union activities, violating notions of patron-client relationship, violating norms of femininity, obviously marks a rupture in this traditional network.

With the growth of industrial capitalism, the impoverishment of the rural masses, the entry of women into factories, commercialization of prostitution and trafficking in women steadily increased. Women were increasingly projected as a sexual object.¹² Mounting incidences of sexual assaults and harassments are a reflection of the social attitudes prevalent in society. Attempts to explain it outside the social paradigm, as a biological confrontation of the male aggressor against the woman would be fallacious. Such a model would be unable to explain the variance in the status of women in different societies.

Attitudes towards women in Indian society today is agglomeration of the feudal and capitalist society. Thus it is a very common occurrence where a man imposes the most severe restrictions on his daughter or sister while he himself

11. Agnew, n. 7.

12. Status of Women in India, n. 2, p. 33.

indulges in the most promiscuous activities.

The possibility of sexual harassments on women workers is yet another fear to deter women from trade union activities. It is in this context that "rape" can be seen as an instrument for the oppression of women, who belong to the economically and socially weaker sections. Sexual harassment occurs in situations where police intervenes in workers' agitations. Molestation of women during lathi charges, arrests and other form of repression is a familiar phenomena. Ironically, it is the molested or raped women not the male aggressor who is viewed with hostility, shame and suspicion. While a male worker released from jail is heralded for his heroism, a woman raped by goondas is treated as contaminated. Most families are thus hesitant to let their women folk participate in trade union activities.

Studies of most working class families have indicated that the physical constraints of employment and domestic work do not permit any time for trade union activities. A study of middle class families suggests that more than the actual domestic work to be done, it is the social norms which prevent a more active role in trade union activities.

Acharya's study among the Jamshedpur Branch of Life Insurance Employees show "how the social expectations of a woman's role in the household even if she is a breadwinner

for the family hinders her functions and obligations as a member of the labour market.¹³

The study intended to find out the extent of union involvement of white collar women workers. Only two persons had held the position of committee members. Both their husbands were active unionists, employed in the same office. All the sample studied were union members but their role was restricted to joining demonstrations, which too was restricted to situations of crisis. The priorities stated were in teaching their children, cooking, marketing and keeping the house. On being questioned about their husbands doing the household chores, the universal response was, "What will people say?" An attitude also existed that men would take care of "one job problems". The feeling was "we are not the main breadwinners, we are supplementing our husband's income.

Attitudes prevailing over among working women thus suggests a confirmation of the domination of males. The dominant ideology built on the dominant socio-economic system current in a society is often upheld even by members who are at the receiving end of such ideology. And thus studies have shown that women may defend discriminatory wage patterns or retrenchment of women on the ground that

13. Acharji, Nilima, "Women Workers in Organized and Un-organized Sectors in India", Indian Worker, 9 March, 1981.

the men is the main breadwinner. Similarly, after women trade union activists may be looked up or with the same suspicion and hostility by women as well as by men.

Very little research has been conducted on the values prevalent in working class families. The Bombay Survey suggests that some women expressed a desire to leave their jobs if they could afford it. But this reflected not so much any notions harboured about the ideal, typical Indian women as much as that of the oppressive living conditions and overwork that they had to undergo. However, more research need to be done on the relationship between the two categories of "women" and "class".

The family structure, the gender roles are not conducive to female participation in trade unions. Women coming forward during wartime or periods of crises to look after the hospitals, kitchens and administrative work is acceptable primarily because these activities are merely an extension of the work performed by them at home. Social welfare activities are thus more prone to attract women than trade union activities. Thus while a woman social worker will be acclaimed in society, the trade unionist joining demonstrations and confronting the police would be regarded as suspect.

The INTUC has maintained a continuity in projecting the woman as the complementary sex. Writing of organizational representatives have confirmed this. AITUC and CITU on the other hand by questioning the fundamental basis of gender roles, violate the existing social norms. It is pertinent to note that while theoretically the proponents of AITUC and CITU condemn the male domination existing in society. Many in practice reveal male chauvinist attitudes. The trade union leadership itself acknowledges the fact that many men discourage women from assuming leadership from assuming leadership.

No underestimation of the strength of the "feminine mystique" to perpetuate itself should be indulged in. Unfortunately, most sociologists writings about women conform to the existing social orientations. Many draw upon Parsons to argue that women's marginal position in the workforce means that destructive competition is eliminated from the wife-husband relationship, that stable personalities are built, that home is a place where men can get away from the stress and competition in society, and that women can integrate the family. This reveals the manner in which the existing inequality of sexes is reproduced from generation to generation. Interestingly, Ghiya's suggestions for women in "Indian workers" was based exactly on these pre-suppositions.

The constraints of the study, the limitations of available data have been stressed from the start. Yet, one hopes that this study has been able to highlight the main features of women participation in the Indian trade union movement. The study, being essentially general, only broad trends and tendencies could be observed. Much more research at a more specific level could be done in this area.

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APPEND

Table X

Average daily wage rates for Men and Women in Selected Occupations

Industry	Minimum		Maximum		Average daily earnings	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
I	II		III		IV	
A. Cotton Textiles						
Head jobber	9.08	6.18	28.41	6.18	15.13	6.67
Jobber	6.60	5.11	9.59	5.39	7.97	3.30
Weaver	5.10	1.84	6.32	1.84	7.59	1.50
Drawing Tenter	5.15	4.86	5.65	5.25	5.35	4.44
Residual occupations	3.04	3.05	5.78	3.05	3.79	3.08
All occupations	3.17	3.17	4.47	4.09	3.79	3.61
B. Jute Textiles						
Warp winder	3.17	3.08	4.17	4.60	4.77	3.97
Softener feeder	3.05	2.91	3.05	2.91	3.67	2.60
Mazdoor	3.05	2.85	3.08	2.88	3.15	2.89
Residual occupations	3.04	3.05	5.78	3.05	3.79	3.08
All occupations	3.17	3.17	4.47	4.09	3.79	3.61
C. Silk Textiles						
Healed & Reed repairer	3.81	4.15	4.33	4.15	4.24	3.36
Warper	4.31	2.62	5.08	2.62	4.88	2.94
Asst. Warper	3.42	1.01	3.75	1.01	3.61	1.00

I	II	III	IV			
Cut looker	4.38	3.84	4.55	4.11	4.51	4.00
Stentering machineman	3.96	2.39	4.71	3.46	4.33	3.04
Mazdoor	3.78	2.72	4.15	3.05	3.75	2.99
Weavers	4.08	2.08	6.61	2.95	5.42	2.50
Creel boy	3.60	1.59	3.73	1.63	3.76	1.60
Picker	1.20	1.08	1.75	1.11	2.82	1.11
Silk examiner	2.89	2.03	3.55	2.14	3.22	2.08
Cooker	2.87	1.87	2.87	1.93	4.07	1.98
Sorter	1.81	1.96	2.48	1.97	2.10	1.96
Doubler	2.09	1.28	2.48	1.38	2.31	1.62
Residual occupations	3.65	2.59	7.08	3.33	4.63	2.92
All occupations	3.90	2.11	5.87	2.34	4.84	2.38
<u>D. Woollen Textiles</u>						
Darner	4.71	4.87	6.07	5.89	5.76	5.12
Mazdoor	4.25	1.19	4.86	1.43	4.45	1.25
Bobbin setter	3.98	1.01	4.59	1.01	4.12	1.00
Weaver/handloom	3.97	2.45	8.09	3.20	5.56	2.75
keeler	4.07	3.32	5.25	3.63	4.41	3.65
Mule minder	4.51	0.98	5.47	0.98	4.74	1.00
Residual occu- pations	4.37	2.92	9.95	4.30	5.15	3.41
All occupations	4.30	4.03	6.70	5.21	4.69	4.37

	I	II	III	IV		
<u>E. Metal Extracting and Refining</u>						
Mazdoor	3.14	2.73	3.69	3.04	4.66	3.76
<u>F. Rough Casting & Forging</u>						
Moulder and core maker	2.61	1.62	7.75	2.37	4.82	1.86
Mazdoor	2.35	1.55	3.25	1.88	3.02	1.63
<u>G. Bolts and Nut Manufacturing</u>						
Sharper	2.89	1.50	6.28	1.50	9.12	1.50
Packer	2.54	1.65	3.67	2.40	2.87	1.75
Mazdoor	2.70	2.22	2.88	2.22	4.24	2.10
Hand machine operator	2.81	2.26	4.45	2.26	5.46	2.00
<u>H. Machine Tools</u>						
Machinist grade I	5.22	5.93	9.69	5.93	6.00	5.00
<u>I. Electrical Machinery Appliances</u>						
Meter machine grade II	8.96	4.55	15.88	5.72	14.32	5.15
Mistry	6.28	6.75	11.52	10.11	10.29	8.66
Examiner Grade I	5.34	4.35	7.41	5.31	6.99	4.82
-Go- II	4.79	5.31	7.47	5.65	7.94	5.45
Coil winder Grade I	3.92	3.45	11.29	4.86	6.70	4.18

	I	II	III	IV		
Coil winder Grade II	3.58	2.94	5.32	3.65	9.20	2.39
Machine operator	4.46	3.36	8.03	5.47	8.32	4.07
Packer	4.01	2.18	5.62	2.18	6.20	1.83
Assembler	3.84	3.41	6.88	4.90	6.96	3.91
Residual occupations	3.39	2.33	8.53	5.06	9.78	2.03
All occupations	3.99	2.95	6.71	4.28	6.54	3.37
<u>J. Paper & Paper Products</u>						
Finisher	4.85	3.30	7.31	3.92	6.71	3.82
Unskilled helper	2.71	1.48	3.18	1.69	3.18	1.99
Digester operator	3.46	1.43	4.42	1.68	4.45	2.88
<u>K. Glass</u>						
Cutter	2.60	1.07	4.60	1.15	3.39	1.12
Finished wheel grinding	2.04	1.41	2.93	1.83	2.68	1.72
<u>L. Petroleum Refining</u>						
General workmen	5.07	4.69	6.37	5.88	6.27	4.96
<u>M. Tea Plantations</u>						
Plucker	2.16	1.31	2.30	1.67	2.39	1.67
Labourers	1.55	1.38	4.67	2.41	2.17	2.26
Supervisor	2.48	2.26	3.59	3.22	3.09	2.63
<u>N. Coffee Plantations</u>						
Mistry/Kangani	1.97	1.77	2.23	1.77	2.10	1.90
Labourer	1.66	1.26	1.73	1.30	1.53	1.27
<u>O. Rubber Plantations</u>						
Field worker	1.89	1.42	1.90	1.42	1.98	1.48
Tapper	1.42	1.24	2.07	1.87	2.22	1.96
<u>P. Manganese Mines</u>						
Ore washing operator	2.11	1.46	3.65	2.59	2.50	1.81
Mate	2.48	0.98	3.29	0.98	2.63	1.08
<u>Q. Mica</u>						
Dhani	1.76	1.00	1.85	1.00	1.72	1.00

Source: Indian Labour Statistics and National Commission on Labour Report-

APPENDIX .

~~Table VI~~

Number of Occupations Employing Women in Selected Industries
Industry Occupations in which women constitute
5% or more of total employees

	Total no. of occupa- tions selected	No. in which women form 5% of employees	Names of Occupations in column 3
A. <u>Manufacturings:</u>			
Cotton Textile	28	4	Winder, Sweeper, Winder (cray), Reeler
Jute Textile	37	6	work winder, braker feeder, hand-swer, Reving feeder, Softener receiver, sweeper
Woollen Textile	26	6	Darner/Cloth Mender, Picker, Bobin Seeter, winder, reeler, residual occupations
Metal extracting and refining	30	1	Reza/Mazdoor
Manufacture of Machine tools	27	1	Packer
Manufacture of electrical machinery and appliances	31	6	Examiner (Mechanical) Grade I and II, Coil Winder Grade I & II, Apprentice, Assembler
Fine Chemicals	38	10	Helpers, machine/plant operators and attendants, Muccadam
B. <u>Plantations:</u>			
Tea	7	2	Labourers (field worker, mazdoor/pruner/beldar/plucker etc.) residual occupations
Coffee	7	2	Regular labourer, casual labourer
Rubber	6	3	Tapper, field worker, residual occupations.
C. <u>Mines:</u>			
Coal	26	5	Sweeper, general mazdoor (earth cutter, stone cutter, crushing mazdoor) shale picking mazdoor, loader/unload er, minder
Iron ore	31	4	Reza/mazdoor, sweeper, skip loader, miner
Mica	20		Surface mazdoor, Reza, residual occupations.
Manganese	28	12	Ore washing operator, excavator, loader/unloader, mazdoor, differ, sweeper, carrier, open cast miner, sorter, scrooner and cleaner.