

**PROTEST AND INDIAN WORKING CLASS
(REFLECTIONS ON THE MODES OF INDUSTRIAL PROTEST)**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled 'PROTEST AND INDIAN WORKING CLASS (REFLECTIONS ON THE MODES OF INDUSTRIAL PROTEST)', submitted by Ms. Pampa Mukherjee in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university and is her own work.

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P. Mukherjee
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INTRODUCTION

Social reality is a totality of situations which are in a state of dynamic mobility. A major defect of sociological research has been the creation of categories which break up and apportion this totality into disjointed segments. What goes on at work is separated from the lives of people, from what goes on at home and what happens today is distinct from what happened yesterday. While such categories may be required for analytical purposes, they cannot be seen as real division or as an adequate basis for conclusions. The reality of everyday life contains and encompasses all the variables, all the categories into interlocking experiences. Analysis must express this totality if it is to result into undistorted explanations of social phenomena¹.

Academicians and scholars in their studies on labour are quite contented with the description of dry facts relating to the size of the labour force, the growth of trade unions and the frequency of the strikes². Working class protests are visualised more as labour problems rather than as a product of socio-economic and psychological factors, treating them more as an

1. V.I. Allen, Social Analysis, Longman, 1975.

2. R.D. Agarwal, Dynamics of Labour Relations in India, New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill, 1972.

G.K. Sharma, Labour Movement in India, its Past and Present, Delhi: Sterlin Pub., 1971.

V.B. Karnick, Strikes in India, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1967.

"island" factor phenomena, a state of mind rather than as responses to their surroundings, in and outside the mill gates.

This study seeks to understand and analyse protest as a concept as well as an activity of the Indian working class. Their forms of dissent, their nature, content and basis of their dissatisfaction within a broad socio-economic framework forms the major thrust of this study. The social background of the workers attempts to provide a deep insight into the attitudes and behaviours of these people in the production process. Their frustrations, fears and anxieties, their distrust and disillusionments giving rise to conflict, unrest and tensions at the workplace are explained as an interplay of complex variables rather than as only an economic fall out.

There has been a tendency to explain labour protests in relation to market forces. Apart from the fact that market system cannot cope with the problems of maladjustments where changes are not marginal, there are non-economic aspects of the subject. There are things which cannot be bought and sold e.g. aspirations, job satisfactions, industrial peace, 'fair' job regulations. They depend not only upon wages and physical environment of the work place, but also upon such factors as the likes and dislikes of a worker, an amiable and cordial atmosphere and the recognition of the workers as an individuals.

We will therefore try to understand how the workers in the initial years of industrialization adapted themselves with the

new work milieu, how they tried to accommodate their cultural values and life styles in a competitive market system. This is imperative as the bulk of the workers are generally drawn from a rural set-up reflecting a gap in their work place.

The process of industrialization seems to have an enormous impact on the society, its structures and relationships³. It demands particular work ethics, value orientations which may be in a sharp contrast to the traditional society from where the workers originally are inducted into the system⁴. It involves the setting up of a new body of rules governing relationships between those who give and those who take orders. Hence the logic of industrialization is supposed to have consequent reactions.

The traditional way of life is seen as essentially resisting the process of industrialization or else lacking in cultural and social organizational overheads which support the factory system in the West. This however needs to be viewed in the Indian context. The relationship between industry and the traditional society has been a subject of debate since the Royal Commission of Labour in 1931.

While dealing with labour relations therefore, one needs to focus on the workplace, the industry, the factory and the changes

3. Uma Ramaswamy, Work, Union and Community, Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983.

4. Clark Kerr, et.al., Industrialism and Industrial Man, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

it brings to human lives and neighbouring localities. That is to say that one needs to inquire into the circumstances external to the worker themselves and to characteristics which are specific to particular cultures in which the labour relations operate.

There exists a wide collection of literature on the subject i.e. on Indian working class in particular⁵. They are mostly historical and narrative concerned with the analysis of problems faced by the officials in organizing the labour force in the early years of industrialization. Morris whose work, "The Emergence of an Indian Industrial Labour Force" published in 1965 is considered to be a major study on the subject. He however, does not see the workers as human subjects, a living reality with specific experiences at the workplace. Instead he projects them as mere agents of production. The phenomena of absenteeism, the push-pull factors, workers' protest are not explained in the context of life and experiences of the workers. The entire argument is narrowed down to labour mobilization and discipline. He prefers to keep away from the immeasurable aspects of the behaviour of the working class.

Sukomal Sen's "Working Class in India", though a comprehensive work gives little information about the lives of

5. Manik Kher, Profile of Industrial Workers, T.R.F., 1984

Sukomal Sen, Working class in India, Calcutta, 1977.

Morris. D. Morris, The Emergence of an Indian Industrial Labour force, Bombay: O.U.P., 1965.

Radhakamal Mukherjee, The Indian working class, Hindi Kitabs 1954.

the workers, their work condition, the nature of their subjection to the factory system, the differing pattern of working class activity and the forms of their consciousness. Much of these are a subject of our inquiry here.

Manik Kher projects a different picture tracing the change of industrial workers from a mere wage earner to a partner in production. He links this change with the change of power balance in industrial relations, the forces of which are the workers, managers and the trade unions. Collective identity, a sense of grievance and incompatible goals are seen as the major elements of every social conflict.

Very often the term protest, conflict etc. leads to definitional problems. There is however a need to undertake such a study in order to understand certain key variables which are inherent in such an activity. Further it gives a much clearer picture on the subject viewing it as a projection of one's consciousness and not solely as a negative attribute. No substantial work on the subject is available, however, whatever literature exists⁶ is actually on a protest as an event, or as a method of conflict resolution or as a part of a purely localised concern but rarely focuses on the implications of the term. Even if available it is merely in the form of a cursory study. We

6. Norman F. Cantor, The Age of Protest, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970; Alan Marsh, Protest and Political Consciousness, London: Sage Publications, 1977; Jerome. H. Skolnick, The Politics of Protest, New York: Ballantine, 1969; Bernard Crick & Willian A. Robson (ed.) Protest and Discontent, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

will collate all such references into a systematic discussion in our project.

Tilly and Tilly⁷ prefers to use the term collective action to protest and similar terms, for it prejudices the intentions and the political position of the actors usually from the perspective of the authorities. The idea of collective action applies more or less equally to actors who are determined to tear down the system and those who seek minor reforms to the outcast and the privileged, to the successful and the ineffectual. The above contention neglects the notion of individual protests, reducing them to collective activity only. The question is not to debate on the relative efficacy of individual or of collective actions in an institutional set up but to recognize each act of discontent.

P.K. Edwards' recent work 'Conflict at Work' published in 1986 provides a useful insight. He uses the term 'structured antagonism' in order to evade the ambiguity of terminology. He analyses patterns of behaviour instead of asking why strike rates vary between industries. It asks how work relations are organised so as to produce some forms of behaviour and not others and what significance these forms have for the structure from which they emerge. He believes that conflict and co-operation are produced jointly and formulates his own theory of conflict which is materialist in orientation.

Protest, whether it is of the working class or of

7. L.A. Tilly & Charles, Tilly (ed.), Class Conflict and Collective Action, London: Sage Publication, 1981.

millenarian struggles or of agrarian conflicts, it takes different forms depending upon the historical and social development in a particular society. Whether it is as individual spontaneous act or an organized outburst, the basic assumption of the studies on the issue is to attribute class consciousness to the workers - a consciousness of their own existence. It is however important to note that the particular forms of conflict expressions do not flow inevitably from a given set of conditions. They are not fixed categories. Expression of discontent involves people in action and requires the development of particular perspectives.

On the basis of conflict, opinions vary considerably. At a general theoretical level, conflict in society is generated by the inequality which is a structured phenomenon. The very nature of society directs behaviour to the advantage of some rather than to that of others. Society and hence the industry is not based upon full recognition of the needs and interests of all and there exists systematic domination of some by a few. The powers which the workers possess tend to be of a negative kind rather than enabling them to play a significant or an equal role in the formulation of their life chances.

For Kornhauser⁸ an understanding of the motivation in the industry is indispensable in analysing industrial conflicts and protests. He sees a relationship of any act of change resulting

8. Kornhauser, Dubin, Ross, et.al. (ed.). Industrial Conflict, New York, McGraw Hill, 1954.

in conflict with the authority to the motivation of the ascribed party. He says that pressure for change of the kind which causes industrial conflict arise from the discrepancies between what people want and the ability of the industrial situation to satisfy their wants.

The Fabians seem to concentrate their assumptions on misery (Webbs, Sidney, Beatrice, Hammonds and G.D.H.Cole). The logic of misery, Smelser⁹ rightly contends explains both too much and too little. It subsumes everything to a general explanation of misery while phenomena indicates to have its roots in the overall social structure. It obscures an explication of the diverse paths of social movements or to a reason explaining why these movements did not take place when misery was equally or more stark. Most of the literature on this are narrative and lacks an analytical view on the subject.

Barrington Moore¹⁰ finds in injustice, the basis of popular conflict and sees large organizations of today as the vehicle for expression of that feeling. He offers a twifold explanation of conflict, of that of (a) tension release and (b) of social movement. He further argues that conflicts are unresolved tensions. His book attempts to reconstruct the rationales of the diverse forms of action. It assumes that collective action is

9. M.Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution, International Library of Sociology, London: RKP, pp.395-6.

10. Barrington Moore, The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, New York: White Plains, 1978.

historically specific, that its form and social bases vary significantly from one time and place to another and show the cumulative effects of past experience.

In our study we will argue that conflicts are not mere aberrations in the relations between labour and capital. They provide significant clues to the understanding of the relations of power and the distribution of societal resources. It is quite axiomatic that industrial conflict has a negative meaning for most people. Conflict does not exist just because people like to fight. It is an expression of real discontent.

Within this broad framework, this work will deal with protest as a working class activity in a general theoretical level. Since it is an overall exposition on the subject, no strict periodization has been taken. However, time and again we have referred to the pre-industrial years i.e. the early years of industrialization till the late 20's as a distinct difference exists in the styles of protest and in the life style and values of the working class etc. between the early and the latter phase. This work is solely based on secondary sources.

The study is spread over three main chapters, followed by a conclusion.

Chapter I, provides a general overview of the Indian Working Class, their life styles, socio-economic conditions, recruitment process and migratory cycles. We have traced their

transformation into a new worker in the production process. It is based on the available literature on the subject which will be critically analysed.

Chapter II deals with the concept of protest by delving into its socio-economic and psychological aspects. Relationships and finer distinction between terms and concepts will be explored like protest and ideology, protest and violence, protest and dissent, protest and relative deprivation. We will also deal with the theories of conflict viz Pluralist, Unitary, Radical and Marxist, trying to understand the real basis of conflict.

Chapter III is a set of reflection on the modes of protest among Industrial workers. We will take into account, the individual spontaneous acts to have an insight into the underlying assumptions. The organisation, their style, nature and content of modes of protest will be discussed in detail.

Thus an attempt will be made to understand protest movement not as disruptions but as reflections of workers' consciousness and how these activities are conditioned by factors other than the purely economic ones.

CHAPTER-1

THE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL WORKFORCE - AN OVERVIEW

A study of the mill hands as a social reality within and outside the production process is imperative to the understanding of the labour relations, "as an active adaptive and self regulating system",¹ the structure of the class and the way in which it adapts itself to the existing system.

The weakness of most studies on the subject is that they have almost neglected the most important element - 'the worker'. They are considered, more often than not as an "expendable commodity, obvious factor contributing to the problems of industry, or an amorphous bloc - names on a union roll, statistics in a government survey or members in a strike - but rarely as a dynamic members of a workforce². In fact, the workers have never been a passive complacent entity within the factory system - yielding and unthinking, a mere piece of human clay³. They often exist in spheres of social

-
1. Z. Bauman, Between Class and Elite, Manchester University Press, 1960. "Labour movement can be defined as an active, adaptive and self regulating system, assimilating its outer environment by trying to impress upon it the desired structural changes and accommodating its own structure to the changing requirement of the successful assimilation".
 2. Eamon Murphy, Unions in Conflict, A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-30, New Delhi : Manohar Publication 1981, p.2.
 3. Richard Newman, Workers and Unions in Bombay 1918-1929, Australian National University Monographs on South Asia-6, 1981, p.1.

system that are untouched by the factory discipline and routine, though mostly in an altered form, to become a part of the urban and industrial culture of the subsequent generations. N.R. Seth cogently sums up the weakness of studies on the Indian workers - "The industrial worker as a subject for sociological study should be treated as a citizen, a living piece of socio-cultural entity rather than an agglomerations of attributes to be fitted into one or another set of conceptual pigeon hole"⁴.

The studies on the Indian industrial workforce may be classified into different categories depending upon their area of concentration. Works like that of M.D. Morris⁵ are more of a statistical analysis concentrating chiefly on wages and other aspects of the workforce, as a factor in the cost of production.

Others like V.B. Karnick⁶, Charles Myers⁷ concentrate on employer - worker relations and attempts made by the govt. to solve industrial disputes through the implementation of the legal machinery.

4. N.R. Seth, "For a Sociology of Indian Industrial Workers", Social Action, October, 1977.

5. M.D. Morris, The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India : A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1965.

6. V.B. Karnick, Strikes in India, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1967.

7. Charles Myers, a) Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India, Harvard University Press, 1958.

b) Industrial Relations in India, Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1958.

It is rather baffling that on the Indian industrial workers, scant attention has been given by the sociologists in particular and academicians in general. Historians and their works⁸ concentrate more on the structure rather than on development and often with a lack of precision.

The workers need to be understood not only in relation to their workplace, where they operate, but also in relation to their wider social environment. It seems axiomatic that any social institution e.g. a trade union, will be profoundly affected by the social and environmental milieu in which the workers operate outside the factory. The external and internal relationships which shape the structure of organisations are grouped around the roles people occupy and the production system with which they interact. "He cannot - shrug off at the mill gate his attitudes, values and loyalties which are created by the total environment in which he operates as a family man, an inhabitant of town or village or city, a member of a caste or religion, as a mill worker, as a weaver or spinner and so on"⁹.

Until and unless we focus on the workers as a social reality we cannot make valid generalizations about the nature of the Indian working class and the way in which it organizes,

8. Radhakamal Mukerjee, The Indian Working Class, Bombay, 1954.

Sukomal Sen, Working Class in India (1830-1970), Calcutta, 1977.

B. Shiva Rao, The Indian Industrial Worker, London, 1939.

9. Op. Cit., Murphy, p.3.

protests and forms a coherent whole, "either from a contemporary or historical view point".

In the present chapter, an attempt will be made to project certain general characteristics of the Indian working class in the process of its formation and the a trajectory of its growth into a "new working class". An insight into this subject can form the basis of our understanding of industrial conflicts and industrial relations from a wider socio-economic context in the subsequent chapters. We will focus primarily on certain key elements as "village nexus, recruitment, commitment thesis, migration cycles by a study of the "new working class".

In a developing country, the efficiency in the production process is supposed to be linked with the social background of the industrial worker. It is all the more valid in an agricultural economy, where the major portion of the workforce comes from the rural sector. It is argued, that a polarity between the rural and urban way of life exists. The former represents, at least as an 'ideal type', a 'static status bound society, whereas the latter is regarded as the 'contractual' type, an impersonal sector. The factory workers being exposed to such a polarised existence, carries its impact in his behavioral traits.

The Indian working class differs fundamentally from their

counterparts in most of the Western societies¹⁰. In contrast to the West, the early recruits to the industries were from the nethermost stratum of the traditional village society, socially and economically deprived groups, habitually inured to exceedingly unfavourable economic and social circumstances. According to the Royal Commission of Labour, 'the Indian worker is a migrant peasant. This migration is not a permanent exodus but seen as a temporary transfer. It is the landless labourers who are first to migrate to the industrial centres followed by cultivators of small economic holdings. "The city worker of modern India did not come out of the ranks of expropriated artisans, he came mostly from the peasantry.... The normal course of industry was obstructed in India. Industry did not go through the successive phase of handicraft manufacturing small factory, mechanofactories and then mass production. So the Indian worker has not been trained in industry"¹¹.

The reign of the old land industry "without compensating development of modern industry had resulted in the overcrowding of agriculture, giving rise to a large number of

10. In most of the western societies, the origin of the industrial proletariat is traced to the town dwellers - the artisans and other social groups to the town economy. For details see.

a. Solomon M. Schwarz, Labour in the Soviet Union, Moscow : People Publishing House, 1951.

b. O. Ornati, Jobs and Workers in India, New York : Itaca, 1955.

11. M.N. Roy, India in Transition, Bombay : Nachiketa Publication, 1971.

agricultural workers willing to move to urban industrial employment.

It is against this background that the formation and growth and subsequent problems of industrial workforce in India should be analysed. The adverse socio-economic condition following the early years of industrialization 'pushed' the agricultural workers to the factory where the wages seemed to be lucrative enough to draw large numbers. The significance of this 'push from the land for the character of the Indian industrial labour force is cogently stated as follows:-

"The mass of workers still represent the superfluous elements of Indian rural population whom an impoverished land.... is incapable of supporting. Socially and economically, they represent the most backward sections of the population"¹².

'Commercialization of land' may be another important reason for large scale land alienation. The feature was predominantly more severe among the tribals. Penetration of the agriculturists shopkeepers and moneylenders, contributed significantly to the process. They tended to be pushed out of their traditional occupation and habitat and extensive areas were reduced into a reservoir of cheap labour or "labour catchment areas"¹³.

12. B. Shiva Rao, "Labour in India". The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1944, p.128.

13. Lalita Chakravarti, "Emergence of an Industrial Labour force in a Dual Economy British India, 1880-1920". The Indian Economic & Social Review, Vol.XV(3), pp.251-55.

However in addition to the push from the land, institutional factors such as 'family and caste/structure may also push certain individual away from the village. A survey of the communal composition of textile workers of Bombay in 1937, showed that 43% of the belonged to the 'depressed' caste (untouchables), majority of them being Mahars, whose hereditary occupation was to serve as village menials¹⁴.

The Indian census of 1911 and 1921 also gave some information regarding the caste background of the workers of the jute industry in Bengal, the details of this has been stated in Ranajit Das Gupta's study. His work shows that most of the workers were from the low caste, cultivators with little or no land, members of the traditional labouring and service categories of the declining crafts of Northern India¹⁵. As per their religious composition about 30% of jute workers were Muslims in 1929, and little more than 69% were Hindus. The factory gates, however opened avenues for the betterment of their economic condition and for their emancipation¹⁶ from the economic and social dependence on the caste Hindus.

14. S.B. Chirde, Industrial Labour in India"-a socio-economic analysis, Bombay 1940.

15. Ranajit Das Gupta, "Factory Labour in Eastern India : Sources of Supply, 1855-1946, Some Preliminary Findings", IESITR, Vol.No.3, 1976.

16. Radhakamal Mukherjee, The Indian Working Class, Bombay: Hind Kitabs, p.5. "It is this depressed castes and semi Hinduised aborigines who most welcome the opportunities at work and wages in the mines, factories and plantation where they were freed from social shackles.

It is rather interesting to note that the caste composition of industrial workforce in 1890 showed altogether different trend of the four major industrial cities of India.

Caste Composition of Industrial Workforce - 1890

Bombay	Ahmedabad	Kanpur	Calcutta
Maratha - 21	Wagri - 6	Koeri - 4	Tanti - 5
Bhandari - 3	Muslim - 4	Brahmin - 2	Muslim - 6
Wani - 2	Rawul - 1	Chamar - 2	Bagdi - 4
Brahmin - 2		Ahir - 2	Koeborto - 2
Muslim - 4		Chutri - 1	Bairagi - 2
Parsi - 1		Kurmi - 1	Kayastha - 1
Dhobi - 1		Muslim - 1	Muchi - 1
Mali - 1			Teli - 1
Teli - 1			Sankari - 1
Kamath - 1			Jaiswara - 1
Kumbhar - 1			Kandick - 1
Muchi - 1			
Gowra - 1			
Sonar - 1			
Kunbi - 1			
Lohar - 1			
Chutri - 1			
Brahmo - 1			
Unstated - 2			
Total - 47	Total 11	Total 13	Total 25

Sources :- Indian Factory Commission - 1890. Bani Prasna Mishra, "Factory Labours During the Early Years of Industrialization : An Appraisal in the Light of Indian Factory Commission, 1890, I.E.S.H.R Vol.XII, July 1975.

The cross section study showed that the labour mobility was not restricted by caste factors. There exists no clear cut clustering in certain occupation like shoe making, bone crushing etc. in Kanpur, especially no high castes were represented. In Ahmedabad it was the traditional weaver caste who formed the bulk of the factory labour. The working class in this area has had a specificity of its own and a carry over of craft tradition into trade union organisation could be a significant factor.

The representation of rich peasant castes in Bombay working class showed that it was not only those who found their traditional culture inadequate but certain internal tendencies in agriculture which forced this labour into industry¹⁷. As family, caste and language ties were strong in the past, these began to weaken under the pressure of economic forces. Better job opportunities in the expanding urban centres even attracted higher caste villagers.

Forced to leave their ancestral home to seek employment in the factory under acute socio-economic conditions, the workers found themselves in an alien atmosphere where "custom was replaced by contract, cooperation by competition, the intimate

17. A generalization regarding the caste composition and occupational choice of the workers cannot be made because of differential heterogeneous complexion of the working class varying from region to region.

village neighbourhood by impersonal relations and anonymity"¹⁸.

The formed a part of the industrial wage earning class.

Nonetheless, the workers were and are being pulled back by the counter forces of the village society, however weak that it may be. Despite industries lucrative wages and dismal economic condition in their homes, their roots were strong enough to attract them back occasionally. This phenomena however exists till date. The mill towns created formidable problems of social and economic maladjustments. The restraining pull of the village being determined by various social factors.

The villager cum worker, mostly belong to joint family system, an integrated group which not only constituted a social security system but also a fall back during rough economic situation. The feeling of security was reinforced by the effect of the caste system on occupational choice and social intercourse¹⁹. Today eventhough, the caste affiliation of the workers and their subsequent occupational choice is less important, but it is still influential in certain occupations such as weaving and spinning. These social factors were further compounded by the impact of the native language, which acted as another important pull factor. Language differences reinstated the attachment of the villager to his local area, which are reflected in the fact that there are some seventeen distinct

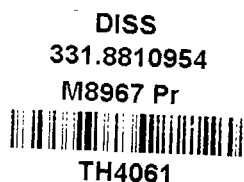
18. G.K. Sharma, Labour Movement in India, Delhi : Sterling Publishers : 1971, p.17.

19. Op. Cit. Myers, p.39.

linguistic groups and many more dialects. Language alienation creates a sense of loss of identity and delays the process of adaptation to the system. This may probably be one of the reasons though not a primary one, for lack of communication between the newly recruited employees and the production process in the industrial system in general.

1904-14L
Finally, the preservation of rural links was partly the result of selective migration. Indian peasants do not usually move at random, nor do they engage themselves in alternative employment in the nearest industrial towns. Despite poverty and overpopulation problems affecting the entire region, every district and village works out its own way of shedding its labour surplus, establishing links with specific sources of income elsewhere. "The original links between city and hinterland may be fortuitous, but once established, the flow of migrants continue unerringly down the same channels. Villagers intending to migrate have a detailed knowledge of their destination. In this sense urban migration should be seen not as an aimless drift to an impersonal metropolis but as a premediated journey from a rural microcosm to an urban one (Newman, pg.15).

A distinct break from the traditional village bound life by migration to the factories has been put forth by Pandari Nath Prabhu in a study of 523 working class families in one section of Bombay.



"The industrial worker comes from a close familiar well knit environment of a village. ...the industrial worker coming to the city life with the accompanying traits of individualism, materialism, indirect contacts and impersonal ways and indifference. He feels cut off for the greater part of his existence from the family which to him was affectionate and protective²⁰.

Thus the consequences of factory work on the traditional society is thus envisaged as a population engaged in family operated agriculture or handicraft work suddenly pushed into a factory which thrusts upon them their first exposure of organised employment, time schedules, machine operations and so on. "The members of this working force must learn to accept the authority of the managers in place of the family, tribe or village. They must conform to a pace of work established by the dictates of new masters, rather than by their own inclination or traditional standards"²¹. The process of wrenching away from the old and the gripping for the new in the industrializing community creates a variety of frustrations, fears, uncertainties, resentments, aggression, pressures, new threats and risks, new problems, demands and expectations upon the workers, on their families and

20. P.N. Prabhu, "A Study on the Social Effects of Urbanization on the Industrial Workers Migrating from Rural Areas to the City of Bombay" in the "Social Implication of Industrialization & Urbanization" Five Studies in Asia, Cal:UNESCO Research Centre on the Social Implications of Industrialization in Southern Asia, 1956.

21. C. Kerr (et al.), Industrialism and Industrial Man, Harmondsworth : Pengum, 1973, p.172.

on the working groups²².

This obviously requires a wide range of adaptations for the the individual worker to the regulated work rhythm of the factory life - temperamentally as well as socio economically with the factory symbolising affluence, luxury, economic security & comfort. The break appears when there is a gap between these expectations and the reality. Before analysing these it is necessary to look into the pattern of recruitment of the workers into production process generating this change.

"It (i.e the industrial process) involves the setting and enforcing of rules concerned with the recruitment of a labour force, with the training of that labour force in the myriad skills required by the advanced division of labour, with the locating of workers in some appropriate pattern of geographical, industrial and occupational dispersion. It involves the setting of rules on schedules of work and on method and amount of pay, on movement into and out of work and from one position to another. It involves rules pertaining to the maintenance of continuity of the work process.... the attempted minimization of both individual and of organized revolt, the provision of a view of the world, of ideological orientations, of beliefs through the introduction of some checks on the individual insecurity inherent in an industrial order²³. The recruitment process thus entailed

22. Op. Cit., Kerr, p.205.

23. Ibid., p.185.

a variety of requirements to make the worker adapt to an industrial way of life, to inculcate work behaviour specific to the production process. In short, the recruitment system encompass a set of values and norms universal to any industrial set up.

In the colonial period, and in the early years of industrialization, recruitment was generally confined to the 'jobber' power bloc. There were no state agencies for the engagement of industrial labour. Popularly known as 'sardar, mukaddam or maistry', the jobber, combined in one person a formidable series of functions. He was not only the recruiting agent, but also the one responsible for hiring, firing, training and granting of leaves etc. They constituted a link between the village and city, as well as between workers and the management. They even formed work groups belonging to some kin group or village, so that workers had a familiar social environment. Basic idea was to extend his patronage, inside and outside the mill. His gang was not merely a section of the industrial workforce, it was a unit of urban society, with economic, social and political functions. "He was the means by which the old society mingled with the new, migrant villagers coming into a gang through jetty or kinship connections could be employed in the functional group..."²⁴. They were basically middle men entrepreneurs, their role being unique with the dual function of recruitment as well as enforcing discipline and thereby extracting work on the shop

24. Op. Cit., Newman, p.28.

floor, the role perhaps being necessary in the early years of industrialization. Being middlemen, he used opportunities to benefit his ends, like the use of bribe. The workers had to bribe the jobber to get himself a job, to retain the job, to obtain promotion and even receive his wage. Under this type of recruitment, efficiency was thus considered secondary, connections, influence and in fact capacity to pay were more important.

It can be concluded from the above analysis that the "true character of the mill labour did not lie in written regulations, it cannot be found in the formal statements of the employers association. It can only be seen in the subtle and elusive relation which existed among human beings in the mills²⁵. Though the discipline in work organisation was flexible, separate sphere of arbitrary regulations existed which made it impossible for the working class to accept formal rules of factory discipline at a later stage.

However, formal rules of factory discipline was circumvented by the managing agency system resulting in total mismanagement of labour utilisation. The labour wage, being on the piecework basis were not affected by the slack discipline. Since agents got their commission on the basis of production, they were not interested in the rationalization of production. The work performance was controlled by withholding of wages and dismissal without notice. The managing system being interested only in

25. Op. Cit., Morris, p.142.

short term benefits, it was not necessary to impose time or work discipline. The institutional arrangements however, had its adverse consequences on the workforce as on production. Absence of fixed rules and regulations resulted in loopholes in the exercise of administrative functions - generating laxity among the workers and the management. Arbitrary dismissal from employment generated a sense of insecurity among the employees and therefore one questioned their "commitment" to industrial life.

Today, when recruitment has become more selective than random, there still exists insecurity among the workforce in the unskilled, semi skilled, and specially in the 'contract' category. With the rationalization of labour and production, the jobber system is abolished, but the system still continues. The labour contractors in 'mines' and jute industries still dominate the factory environment by its arbitrary rules. The entire process not only affects creation of a stable workforce but also in terms of commitment to industrial life. Further, the relative security (i.e. appointment, dismissal, wage benefits) applies only to permanent employees and not to trainees, temporary recruits and badlis, a reserved labour force which serves as a stand by to fill in the vacancies caused by absenteeism. Temporary workers and badlis have no job security, and they may not even be given the same rate as permanent workers for doing the same job.

We need to inquire, within the given context - what is commitment then. Volumes have been written stating that the

formation of an industrial labour force, combine not merely recruitment and training but also its commitment to an industrial way of life, to a set of values and norms. We need to see how far organizational set up, industrial structure helps in the process. Is it merely a moral conformity? Does socio cultural background or demographic characterisation have their impact on commitment?

In the recent years, the economic development of a society has been linked to the level of labour commitment in industries. Lack of economic development is generally linked (though not always) to the worker's lack of attitudes and behaviour, demanded of an industrial way of life. The studies dealing with labour market behaviour then seem to concentrate on a single set of concept that can be identified by the term 'commitment' "a short hand for a cluster of notions about Indian factory labour"²⁶.

The development of a committed labour force takes place it is argued "when workers no longer look on their industrial employment as temporary, when they understand and accept the requirement of working as part of a group in a factory or other industrial enterprise and they find in the industrial environment a more adequate fulfillment of personal satisfaction than they enjoyed in the village or rural society"²⁷. Commitment in this sense also involves the structuring of the labour force"²⁸. Much

26. R. Lambert, The Transformation of an Indian Labour Market - The Case of Pune, Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1986.

27. Op. Cit., Myers, Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India, 1958, p.36.

of the literature available on the subject seem to be more speculative than empirical which are mostly anthropological field studies. Interestingly, we find most of the studies on the recruitment - commitment thesis have been developed in situations closer to the agrarian end of the continuum. Low level of attachment to the jobs followed by high rate of absenteeism, low morale and a general lack of discipline in the factory, are linked to the village origins of the workers who bring pre-modern attitudes and values into the factory. Thus, it's conceded that they inhibited the growth of an efficient and dedicated workforce. This conception however has generated a great amount of currency in the general sociological literature about labour in the developing countries.

The workers have been placed at different points along a continuum to their factory and opinions vary considerably. At one end, "the village nexus" in which the workers are still considered to have strong links, and which inhibits their transformation into an urban industrial proletariat has been emphasized. The more specialised and recent studies on industrial workers, mill hands are placed a little further along the continuum. Charles Myers speaks of partial commitment of the Indian factory workers²⁹, pushed from the village due to shrinking economic opportunities with continuing village ties³⁰,

28. Op. Cit., Kerr, p.163.

29. Op. Cit., Myers, p.43.

30. Op. Cit., Prabhu, p.49-106.

reinforced by a repellent push from the cities. On the one hand, "the impersonality, inhospitable physical conditions of work' and psychological isolation"³¹, resulting in absenteeism and low turn over, on the other hand, the agricultural background and ties of the workers are seen as producing "irresponsible attitude to work. The Indian factory worker has a tendency to throw up jobs on the slightest provocation because he is not solely dependent on it for his livelihood"³². In short, then village nexus is seen as the cause for absenteeism and high rates of labour turnover whether it is a reaction to the city or is an assertion of peasant independence. Both interpretations conclude that the Indian worker is uncommitted or partially committed.

Other writers would put some what less emphasis upon the continuing village ties, moving the workers even further along the continuum³³, Morris. D. Morris speaks of "The Myth of the Paradise Lost" and "mystique of urban horrors" to emphasize that factory workers who migrate from the rural areas are not so unhappy as they are often presented. The disagreement is however, due to different levels of generalization and of taking different subsets of data from a wide variety of situation and times in India.

The Indian working class, as has been projected in the process of its formation, does not fit into the rubric of Clark

31. Op. Cit., Myers, p.44.

32. Ibid., Myers, p.76. Also See M.SUR, Indian Industries growing pains, Industrial Welfare, London 1953.

33. Op. Cit., Lambert.

Kerr's definition of a committed worker³⁴. He is seen as partially accepting the discipline of the industrial capitalist society and therefore an amorphous mass of peasants refusing to crystallize into an urban proletariat. Though it is possible to resist factory discipline (Luddism, for instance), this does not imply that these workers are not a proletariat.

According to Moore and Feldman - "Commitment involves both performance and acceptance of the behaviour appropriate to an industrial way of life³⁵. This conceptualization demands acceptance and internalisation of norms and values of the new social system and productive organisation. By its very notion, it then involves an absolute standard by which to measure "acceptance". The ideological characteristics of a 'committed' labour is one who requires less supervision, has a disciplined and predictable behaviour as will be reliable in times of social crisis. In that case, protests against work conditions and property relations is seen as a reaction to industrialism itself. As a result of this rigid pigeon hole framework, the sociologists have failed to look into the exact nature of the ties of labour with their village and hence into the effect of industrial discipline to the Indian workforce and analyse the working class movement in general.

34. Op. Cit., Kerr, "Committed worker is one who stays in the job and who has severed his major connections with the land. He is a permanent member of the industrial working force, p.172.

35. Wilbert E. Moore and Aarnold S. Feldman, Labour Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas, New York : Social Science Research Council, 1960. p.1.

The notion of commitment encompasses not only a moral conformity, but also involves a psychological acceptance. Attitudes are seen in a purely behaviorist sense, excluding completely human creativity and choice. The method of behaviorist psychology then results in drawing out statistical correlations abstracted from the historical and social situations of living men.

Further, a distinction between 'commitment to industrial work and commitment to regular attendance at work³⁶ is essential. Absenteeism is more often then linked with commitment. In measuring the degree of commitment to permanent job, absenteeism refers to willful non attendance at work. The Simla Annual Survey of Industries define absenteeism as the failure to report to work. These varying interpretations results in inflating the actual degree of absenteeism. This is rather a one sided explanation, justifying actions only in terms of production relations. Absenteeism is also a form of labour protest, against the form of industrial society and not backward looking negative approach against industrialization. In India, the intolerable working conditions, erratic management policies and a fragmented labour market generated protest in whatever form possible - absenteeism was the individual reaction of the workers to the factory system. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

36. A. Howe, "High Absenteeism and High Commitment", EPW, 1969.

Coming back to the discussion on commitment, one thing is important to note that the development of commitment has to do not merely with attitudes of workers, but also with the strategies of industrializing cities. Morris in his study of the Bombay Cotton Mills and the Jamshedpur Steel Plant, concludes that the degree of labour commitment to Industry were more a result of managerial policies and market forces than of the psychology of workers or their involvement in the traditional social structures of caste, kinship and village. Commitment, I believe, is related more significantly to factors intrinsic to work than to the social background of workers solely. Vaid, Sharma and Holmstroms' study³⁷ revealed that commitment improved steadily with the increase in skill. The correlation between work technology and level of commitment existed independently of such factors as caste and religion. Further, there seem to be a marked difference in its degree in factories which provided labour welfare facilities, well paid wage and offered job security. A.K. Rice³⁸ in his study of an Ahmedabad Textile Mill showed that absenteeism was not uniformly high among workers and was subject to reduction by changing the internal organization of the factory. The alleged incompatibility between agriculture and industry is also a consequence of the distinctly western

37. B.R. Sharma, The Indian Industrial Worker, Delhi:Vikas, 1974; V.N. Vaid, The New Worker Bombay : Asia, 1968; M. Holmstrom, South Indian Factory Workers Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1976.

38. A.K. Rice - Productivity and Social Organisation : The Ahmedabad Experiment, London: Tavistok Publication, 1988.

perspective from which commitment theorists look at the relationship between the two. His preference for agriculture does not rule away other avenues of getting away from the wage labour.

One then needs to have a discussion on the migratory cycles of the Indian working class. Migration which has important link to the workers' village ties, there is need to distinguish between target workers, seasonal workers and long term workers.

Target workers - are temporary visitors for immediate purpose³⁹ may be marriage, festival or his extreme dismal economic situation. However the duration of the visit is generally determined by the immediate need for income from industrial employment. They constitute a break with the rural background in quest for economic security and better living and may be a first step towards further migration to industrial work.

Seasonal Workers - They generally venture the nearby industrial town during slack agricultural seasons to supplement their agricultural earnings. They mostly belong to the unskilled category of industrial labour.

Long term Workers - This type has no economic link with the village and are based in the industrial cities - one who has severed his connections with the village to become a permanent member of an urban or industrial workforce. This requires an

39. Op. Cit., Kerr, p.177.

adjustment to all the industrial aspects of urban living and industrial employment.

Quite interestingly Clark Kerrs links commitment to the duration of a worker's stay at the workplace. He distinguishes four stages on the continuum of behavioral change which mark the transition of the worker from village society to industrial life viz. (i) the uncommitment worker (ii) the semi-commited worker (iii) generally committed worker and (iv) the specifically committed worker. The wage differentials between the agriculture and industry in this case can be an important index for locating the kind of workers migrating to the cities, for low wages compel the worker to leave his family behind and also force him to maintain his link with his village in order to substantiate his income from land.

Thus a complex of interdependent variables determine worker's behaviour inside and outside the mill gates and to a certain extent makes generalization difficult.

Finally we shall discuss the structure of the Indian working class before analysing the emergence of the new working class.

"The formation of the working class into a "class in itself" presupposes a historical process of social transformation during which a motley collection of agricultural workers, artisans, crafts men and other floating elements of society, not only acquire a definite position within industrial production, but are

also integrated into a cohesive force of wage labourers sharing common interests. From this view point of capital, the process creates a disciplined work force in industry, work has to be broken into the punctual, regular and painstaking execution of specialised jobs. A new work ethic has to be developed⁴⁰.

In a developing economy, there exists a gap between the initial recruitment of labourers to man the mill and factories and their development into a labour force, which accepts the factory discipline and urban living. This is specially applicable to the Indian context where industrialization was not followed by the modernization of the society. As previously pointed out in this chapter, the profile sketched of a typical Indian worker is that of a semi proletariat - semi peasant character interested in his work in a factory set up, resisting adjustment to the life that goes with an industrial employment.

This notion is shared by both Indian Marxists and the functional sociologists that till 1930's Indian industrial workers did not form a proletariat. It is true that the Indian workers lacked a craft tradition which is crucial no doubt, in the initial stages of its formation. There still exists weakness in defining the working class in terms of its linkage with land, social and religious rites - these attributes does not make the working class a non proletarian or a semi proletariat.

In the Marxist framework, classes are seen in an antagonistic position to each other. The consciousness of man is shaped by his

40. Op. Cit., Kerr, p.185

social being and that of the worker by his position in the production relations. "The proletarian is without property. His relation to his wife and children have no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relation.... law, morality religion are to him so many bourgeois prejudices behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests"⁴¹. Central to the Marxian theory of class is the notion that industrial workers form the proletariat. The working class is a class of labourers, who live only as long as they find work and who find work only so long their labour increases capital⁴².

The question arises whether the Indian industrial worker can fit into this scheme of class definition. In the first case while the major source of subsistence is admittedly wage labour, in most cases, this is not their only source. The combination of wage labour with a variety of other occupations complicate their class position⁴³. Further workers in India, do not constitute a wage earning class like the factory workers of Western countries. Employment relations are not clearly defined. They "alternate from being unemployed and being available for work to being self employed in a trade and not being available for hire, on one hand and on the other from activity on the land in their

41. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel, Selected Works, Vol.I and II, Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1979, p.118.

42. Karl Marx, Capital Volume I, Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1967, pp.752-4.

43. Uma Ramaswamy, Workers, Union and Community, Delhi :OUP, 1983, p.147.

native village, and then back to industrial or commercial employment or unemployment.

Another question arises, whether Indian working class can be accredited with class consciousness. Most of the studies reveal that workers are in constant conflict with the management at the shop-floor level, their interest being dramatically opposite. They are in conflict over machine speeds, exercise of authority, reward and punishment, rules and regulations". "They conflict in the context of the shop, the factory and the entire industry. But these difference are in the nature of adhoc skirmishes over limited and specified goals, rather than a conflict between the warring classes⁴⁴.

Uma Ramaswamys' study of the Coimbatore workers state that the workers are not ideologically opposed to private ownership of the means of production. Neither do they have the aspiration for collective ownership of the mill, which they consider to be a specialised task.

To most developmental theorists as Clark Kerr, Moore and their colleagues, the combination of industrial employment and agriculture is a transitional stage in the evolutionary process, one which hinders workers to develop into a full fledged industrial man. On the other hand, it can be argued that an Indian worker is "distinctly industrial and uniquely Indian". He combines several attributes which are distinctly and universally

44. Ibid., p.148.

industrial, which Indian society has in common with other developing societies and yet others which are specifically Indian⁴⁵.

To sum up, there exists various definitions of the working class or proletariat. Sociological class analysis places populations to social class position and attributes consequences to them e.g. demographic rate, various pathologies - generally empiricist descriptive categories. On the other hand there is the treatment of class only in its subjective manifestation. Working class exists only as certain attributes in the minds of the people. Thus the proletariat exists only if workers exhibit certain ideal type behaviour pattern i.e. commitment.

The new worker is a reality, especially in the organised sector. According to the National Commission on Indian Labour⁴⁶, the workers are with distinct urban characteristics and social mobility. The social composition is no longer restricted to certain castes and communities. If not anything else, socialisation at the work place, in the slums and in the labour colonies, tends to reduce caste distinctions. Lastly these workers have high aspirations for growth and promotional prospects than the older workers.

45. Industrial way of life has its own origin in the work sphere, in the sense that he sells his labour for a wage. Industrial life however has been used in a limited sense. He is Indian in his desire to be in village, an aspiration which dominates the workers horizon.

46. Report, Indian Workers - Adaptation to Changes 1969, Ch.4.

The working class has a social and political existence of its own, outside the direct control of the capital. "It protests and submits, rebels or is integrated into bourgeois society, sees itself as a class or loses sight of its existence, in accordance with the forces, that act upon it and the moods, conjectures and conflicts of social and political life. Since in its permanent existence it is the working part of the capital, its occupational structures, modes of work and distribution through the industries of society are determined by the process of accumulation of capital. It is seized, released, flung into various parts of the social machinery and expelled by others, not in accordance with its own will or self activity, but in accordance with the movement of capital⁴⁷.

In terms of quality, the new working class was clearly distinguished from the old migrant worker and represented a new structural differential within the working class. However 'new worker' has been more often than not, vaguely defined. Ignoring any difference between the old and the new; it has been defined only in terms of value preferences. The new worker is defined in the sense of being a fresh recruit to the industry rather than in a structural sense. The newness lies in that he is literate and this is his first experience to organised employment, of supervision and of discipline.

The National Commission of Labour 1969 identifies the new trend in industry but sees the essential characteristics of the

47. H. Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital, New York : Monthly Review Press, 1974, pp.137-138.

new working class in its commitment or performance. It can be argued that by 1920s' it is possible to speak of a proletariat and in the intervening 60 years this proletariat had acquired a tradition of struggle and a distinct working class culture. With the changing industrial landscape of the country, growth of new industrial townships and dispersal of activity a process of industrial "culturation of the working class has set in"⁴⁸.

The present character of the Indian worker does not mean a barrier in developing as a proletariat class but is an adoption to the below subsistent wages and surplus labour market of a colonial economy. Unlike the peasants, the Indian factory workers did not resort to fight but established a tradition of strike. With the emergence of a socially and politically aware group with a polygot character, 'conflict', 'protest' and rebellion have become synonymous. The situations in which they strike at, their forms of conflict will be focused in the following chapter, which would deal more explicitly with certain, hidden and intricate features of the mill hands.

48. N.C.L., p.34.

CHAPTER-II

PROTEST AND MOVEMENTS - A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The concept of 'protest' is an extremely general idea and often involves definitional problems. More often than not, by becoming ideals, words obstruct in the process of understanding. Definitions often end up in dispute among themselves over the meaning of words. It is, necessary, therefore to refer to individual instances and the usage of the term by various sociologists and social scientists as well as certain characteristics that goes with any protest activity, individual as well as collective. Far from being a random area of unrelated responses, peoples' beliefs and attitudes about kinds of behaviour, we call protest, forms a coherent area of thought that is at once both complex and simple.

A protest, resistance or conflict (as per its contextual usage) says much more than merely reducing the participants to arithmetical abstractions making them victims of the situation. It might be argued, as in the previous chapter, the need is to study the everyday life and material conditions of the people involved. From a theoretical stand point, more substantially an event like a 'dharna or riot' may tell us more about the reality of social relations and mass consciousness. "A crisis is a time of testing of religious beliefs, of social relations and of institutions. Crisis heightens social realities, they rarely

transcend them"¹. The basic thesis is that the causes of conflict remain inherent in the structure of social and economic relations.

In the present chapter we will deal in detail the basic elements that go with protest activities, both at the level of consciousness as well as behaviour. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with individual cases of protest movements. An attempt will be made to have an insight of the peculiarities of industrial conflicts as particular instances.

Since the term encompasses a wide area of socio-political relationships, it has been expressed differently by various sociologists and writers. According to Norman F. Cantor, "Protest is an attack on the prevailing system in an intellectual or is an organised way. It is based on every man's desire to be free. This feeling is above any reason, tradition or power"². "It is necessary", says Clutterbuck, "to maintain a fair rate of change in the face of entrenched interests in any society, both to further the will of the majority and to attain equity for minority"³. Sometimes the word "unorthodox political behaviour"⁴

1. Ranajit Guha (ed.), "Famine in Peasant Consciousness and Peasant Action, Madras, 1876-78", in Subaltern Studies, Vol.III, Delhi : OUP, 1985, p.4.

2. Norman F. Cantor, The Age of Protest : Dissent and Rebellion in Twentieth Century, Allen and Unwen, London, 1970, p.xiii

3. Richard Clutterbuck, Protest and the Urban Guerrilla, London: Cassell, 1973, p.4.

4. Allan Marsh, Protest and Political Consciousness, Vol.49, London : Sage Publications, 1977, p.13.

is used for protest activities, arguing that like any other emotive word in popular usage, 'protest has been worn almost featureless and is rendered unsuitable as an object for scientific calibration. Emphasis is laid on the distinction between the presence or absence of normative rules which positively sanction and facilitate the conduct of orthodox politics⁵. This kind of explanation, however restricts itself to the narrow usage of the term. It needs analysis in a much wider context. The expression of an intention to behave in a particular may have social and political causes. Protest potential becomes concentrated among certain kinds of people who occupy certain social locations and become shaped by critical configuration of social experiences and basic psychological dispositions.

In general terms, however, an act of protest includes the following steps - the action expresses a grievance, the action is intended to draw attention to the grievance, the action is further meant to provoke ameliorative steps by some target groups and the protesters depend upon some combination of sympathy and fear to move the target on their behalf. It ranges from relative persuasion to relative coercive combinations, but always include both. Protest target consists, almost invariably, of some agent or institution of authority.

Furthermore, if we consider that protest involves 'no' to any injustice or incomprehensible condition, it affirms the

5. Op. Cit., Marsh, p.14.

existence of a border line. One may protest because he categorically refuses to submit to the conditions which he considers to be intolerable and also because he is confusedly convinced that his position is justified, or rather because on his own, he thinks that 'he has the right to'⁶.

A protest can be on one hand a sporadic, episodic and a spontaneous act and an organised, calculated and predetermined act on the other, depending upon the situation. It can be an individual exercise as well as collective activity. It may be registered as a complaint, objection, disapproval or as a display of unwillingness to the acceptance of an idea, a course of action or a certain social condition. It can be a symbolic gesture in the form of street theatres, music etc. or may take the form of a generalized intellectual dissent in art and literature. It is in a way related to a sense of injustice. It cannot be inflamed until and unless a grievance, real or imagined exists. Moore too argues that injustice or a sense of injustice are the bases of popular conflict⁷.

The studies on the subject tend to concentrate on an 'articulate minority', the people most likely to leave historical records. It can also be a 'silent' reaction of 'unnoticed' actors and of the backstage participants. The existence of those

6. Albert Camus, 'The Rebel' Tr by Anthony Bower, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p.19.

7. Barrington Moore Jr., Injustice, The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, New York: White Plains, 1978, p.22.

who seem not to rebel is a warren of minute, individual, autonomous tactics and strategies which counter and inflict upon the visible facts of overall domination and whose purposes and calculations, desires and choices resist any simple division into the political and a political spheres"⁸. It may be the outcome of exposure to the materialistic and other benefits which an anticipated better life can produce. Protest activity may also be the direct result of institutional failures to accommodate the immediate and local demands⁹.

Contrary to organised activity like a trade union movement, protest may also mean ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless groups like foot dragging, dissemination, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorances, slander, arson, sabotage and so on¹⁰. They require little or no coordination or planning, making use of informal ways often representing an individual self help. Any direct symbolic confrontation with the authority is generally avoided. This is all the more glaring in peasant groups, grappling under a feudal set up, disorganised and spread over a wide region. Thus Marc Bloc observes that in comparison to the millenarian movements, peasant struggles, though not very dramatic, were long sustained with patient and silent struggles stubbornly carried on by rural communities to

8. James Scott, Weapons of the Weak, Everyday form of peasant resistance, London : Yale University Press, 1985, p.12.

9. S.K. Srivastav & A.L. Srivastav (ed.) Social Dev. & Social Movement, Chugh Publications : Allahabad, 1988, p.105.

10. Op. Cit., Scott, p.13.

avoid claims on their surplus and assert their rights to the means of production. In the Third World societies, it is rare for peasants to risk an outright confrontation with the authorities.

In place of land invasion, they prefer squatting; in place of inviting they prefer desertion, in place of attack on public or private grain storage, they prefer pilfering and when such stratagems are abandoned in favour of more quixotic actions it is usually a sign of desperation¹¹. The social structure of the peasantry however demand such low profile techniques, the peasantry being a class lacking a formal organization and spread out across the country as an amorphous group. Another feature of these 'Everyday Forms of Resistance' are that they are not exhibitionist for they make no headlines. There is rarely any dramatic confrontation. It is only very rarely that the perpetrators of these 'petty acts seek to attract attention to themselves. Their safety lies in their anonymity. Where the everyday resistance most strikingly departs from the other forms of resistance is in their implicit disavowal of the public and symbolic goals. Where as institutionalized politics is formal; overt and concerned with systematic defining change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert and concerned largely with immediate, de-facto gains.

Protest cause is generally very specific in nature and

11. Op. Cit., p.26.

centered around a particular issue^{12a}, however there may be protest movements which are large and ill defined. But initially there has to be consciousness of some injustice which is being meted out to certain section of society. It may not merely be collection of individual acts as behaviour. However partial or imperfect their understanding of the situation are gifted with intentions and values and purposefulness that conditions their acts.

The relationship between 'thought and action', to put it very mildly, is a complicated issue, ".....neither intention nor acts are unmoved movers". Acts born out of intentions circle back, as it were, to influence consciousness and hence subsequent intentions and acts. Thus acts of resistance and thought about resistance are in constant communication and in constant dialogue. Secondly intentions and consciousness are not related quite in the same way to the material world as behaviour is. It is possible and common for the human actor to conceive of a time of action which at that particular moment, may be either impractical or impossible. The realm of consciousness gives us a kind of privileged access to the lines of action that may become plausible at some future date. We cannot understand "everyday struggle" without a reference to the intentions, ideas and language of those human beings.^{12b}

12a. S. C. Malik (ed.), Protest, Dissent and Social Reform : A Conceptual Note, Simla : Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977, p.29.

12b. Op. Cit., Scott, p.36.

Ranajit Guha, thus stresses that to acknowledge the peasant as the member of his own rebellion is to attribute a consciousness to him. Hence the word protest has been used by him synonymously to consciousness which informs the activity of the rural masses known as conflict, dispute, revolt etc. using their Indian designations like dharna, bandh etc.¹³ It may however mean a rejection of the idea of spontaneity. For Gramsci, there is no room for pure spontaneity in history, which may then conclusively mean a failure to recognize the element of consciousness in the apparently unstructured movements of the masses. "The error drives more often than not from two inter-changeable notions of organization in the sense that it has a conscious leadership.... some well defined aim, a programme specifying the components of the latter as particular objective and the means of achieving them¹⁴.

Very often the spontaneous activities are linked to the question of rationality - acts which are spontaneous in their nature, especially in relation to industrial conflict. The argument given is that the very spontaneity which commonly characterizes their outbreak is evident is that they are emotional outbursts unrelated to any planned strategy. It is true that very often they are more or less spontaneous outbursts against 'injustice'. But to act spontaneously is not necessarily

13. Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Modern India, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1983, p.4.

14. Op. Cit., p.5.

to act irrationally. If an action is decided upon the spur of the moment it may indicate deficient rationality only where its haste has caused faulty judgment. And indeed, some situations which demand immediate response then deliberation is by itself scarcely rational.

PROTEST AND DISSENT - Dissent is an important aspect in any protest activity. Dissent against the institutional system prevailing at a point of time in a particular society is necessary for protest to be effective. The legitimacy of an institutional order reduces the desire for protest and dissent. It involves the articulation of differences and thus absolves the need to rise up against the system. When it assumes the dimensions of a thorough going public attack on the privilege system, it assumes the proportion of a movement. Protest movements are not contained in any consistent or denominational gathering forums where the internal dissent may be voiced and settled. Briefly thus, protest subsumes action and action in turn subsumes in historical term, publication, the requirement for which is leadership, ideology and some form of organization and following.

Dissent on the other hand, may be individual or it may be shared, but so long as it remains primarily at the ideational level and does not pose an active threat to the establishment it may not be classified as protest. Dissent becomes meaningful only when it has the backing of a group - a concerted action to bring

about change. Here the role played by symbols and the creation of new symbols becomes important. A clever manipulation of symbols is very crucial for kindling protest, dissent and change.

An element of challenge and defiance is thus an essential part of protest. A combination of threat and appeal serves to gain attention and to create the required sense of urgency necessary to overcome the resistance to acknowledge protest¹⁵.

However, protest in turn is based on dissent, as an ideology i.e. it has to have a context in terms of its positive contents and criticisms which otherwise becomes deviance. Deviance is not protest for it believes in what it violates, even at its most idealistic level, it is an act against an individual and not a system, because it may be based on a sense of personal grievance which has not been abstracted to a level of a cause. It may or may not express a generally understandable grievance¹⁶. Dissent expresses dissenting factions within the existing situation and it only registers disagreement. Protest is a formal declaration of dissent and represents a confirmed state of opposition and conflict. Generally protest and dissent form a part of confrontation, resistance, opposition, and conflict which are expressed in such different models as demonstration, agitation, revolt etc. Dissent and protest in their formative aspect form a part of the ideology of a movement. Dissent and protest, far

15. Ralph H. Turner, "The Public Perception of Protest" - American Sociological Review, Vol.34, No.6, Dec.1969.

16. Ibid.

from being sporadic and disjointed, shape themselves into an ideology as a symbolic system, which searches for new sources of legitimacy and rationalizes activity and motivation. Finally, protest and dissent, while they may represent different phases are not mutually exclusive, but are complementary in nature.

PROTEST AND IDEOLOGY - The concept of protest, discussed above is that of a collective activity, a movement, a sustained pursuit of shared interests which is either organised or spontaneous. A movement which starts off as a spontaneous activity in the beginning may become organized later on. The process of mobilization includes meetings, campaigns, demonstrations etc. which are expressive of interests and beliefs. It is rather an imperative to realize that interest, which is immediate in terms of motivation and demands, is rooted in a more fundamental belief system which we call ideology.

Ideology not only provides the motivating force but also defines aims and objectives of a movement. It consists of a set of ideas which specify discontent, prescribe solutions and justify change¹⁷. It is the role of ideology which crystallizes and intensifies discontent leading to protest action. Ideology performs certain functions. It intends either the disruption of the central institutional and value systems, or a conflict with them or the denial of the claims of these systems by withdrawing from them.

17. Joseph Gusfield, "Study of Social Movement", Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, New York : Thomas Y. Crowell, Collier and McMillan, 1968.

Ideology demands an involvement. It moves men into action and brings new hope, meaning and assurance to a collective group. This belief system is carried forward in its involvement with a protest movement by an efficient and stable leadership. Ideology, organization and leadership are interrelated and their perception are complementary rather than conflicting.

Ideology refers to more than a doctrine. It links particular actions and mundane practices with a wider set of meanings and by doing so, lends a more honourable and dignified complexion to social conduct. Because, it is the link between action and fundamental belief, ideology helps to make the moral basis of action more explicit. The real basis of ideology, Marx points out is the material conditions of life particularly manifest in social relationships through the division of labour and productive power¹⁸. Thus protest is a collective and action involves factors such as agents of protest, reasons of protest, modes of protest, ideology and a general orientation towards change. Ideology as a symbolic system projects self images of the concerned group. It helps towards the codification of beliefs and myths in order to define their aspirations and responses to reality. It also fulfills the need to interpret the surrounding and thereby related to the issue of identity - the way in which a group perceives itself in relation to other relevant groups and vice versa - i.e. a sense of relative deprivation.

18. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, New York, 1931.

PROTEST AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION - Protest movements result from a feeling of relative deprivation and not of absolute deprivation. The living conditions in the slums of Western industrial societies would seem luxurious to most of the inhabitants of the shanty town of Africa and Latin America. People measure their lot not against any absolute standard but in relation to those enjoyed by others and to their own expectations.

Although the concept of relative deprivation was used by Karl Marx, it gained in importance in the study of protest movement in the forties. There have been two distinct trends in the development of the concept. First - It was initially used by the authors of "The American Soldier" to denote the feeling of an individual who lacks some status or conditions that he thinks that he should have or even generally being determined by reference to what some other person or group has¹⁹. Second - the concept is widely used in sociological research where it is usually assumed for operational purposes. The value standards are set by reference to some group or status with which an individual does or likes to identify with. It is more generally recognized however that value standards can have other sources. An individual's point of reference may be his own past condition and an abstract idea or the standards articulated by a leader as well as by a reference group. It is an actor's perception of a

19. Op. Cit., Malik, p.30.

discrepancy between his value expectations and their value capabilities.

Aberle, Gurr and others, however concede that a position of relative deprivation alone will not generate a movement²⁰. The structural conditions of relative deprivation provide only the necessary conditions. The sufficient conditions are provided by the perception of the situation and of the capabilities by certain leaders that they can do something to remedy the situation.

Smelser, however, developed a theory of collective behaviour which may be called strain theory²¹. He posits that structural strain occurs at different levels of norms, value mobilization and situational facilities. While strain provides the structural conditions for the crystallization of a generalized belief. Both strain and generalized beliefs determine the emergence of collective action through precipitated factors.

The Relative Deprivation Theory, however offers a more satisfactory explanation of the genesis of movements for it motivates the people and mobilizes them around certain issues. Secondly, it explains the change of orientation of movements

20. T.R. Gurr, Why Men Rebel, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1970.

DAVID, I. ABERLE, "A Note on Relative Deprivation", in SYLIA L. THRUPP (ed.) Millennial Dreams in Action : Essays in Comparative Study, The Hague : Montane 1962.

21. Niel J. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behaviour, New York : The Free Press, 1963, p.44.

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° rather°than°looking at movements as adaptive mechanisms restoring the functional unity and equilibrium.

PROTEST AND VIOLENCE - As far as protest movements are concerned, elements of violent behaviour seems to be an integral part. Cantor argues that protest uses violence but is strictly controlled and specific in its purpose - designed to shock and bewilder the elite and advertise a grievance²². Here the element of violence is implicit in any protest activity. Basic contention made is that protest is an outgrowth of social, economic and political conditions and violence when it occurs, is not planned but arises out of an interaction between protesters and the responding authorities.

When violence and disorder are identified as social protest, they constitute a mode of communication rather than a form of direct action. All are expressions of outrage against injustice, whose magnitude and duration is sufficient to communicate to the observes the exceptional means employed to make a point of protest.

Violence is defined as the intentional use of force to injure, to kill or to destroy. Protest may be quite forceful without being violent. The point here is neither to applaud not to condone the use of force but merely to recognize that it differs from violence.

22. Op. Cit., Cantor, p.XIV.

In line with the tendency to see violence as a quality of those individuals and of groups who challenge the existing arrangement than of those who uphold them, though some groups today see all instances of contemporary demonstrations and protest as violence. Such an equation, obscures the very important fact that protest takes various forms - verbal criticism, written criticisms, petition, picketing, marches and also non-violent confrontations. Some of these forms are violent, others are not. Still others are hard to classify. Some protest may begin peacefully and depending upon the response may end up violently.

Every social structure creates its own types of protest and styles of expressing them. The 'desertion' by Assam tea planters in the early years of independence, demonstrates a unique instance of avoiding discontent. Desertion by labourers used to take place in a mass scale and was initially the commonest form of escaping the brutalities of life in the plantation. It was however, termed as absconding and was considered a serious offense under the existing labour laws. A study of the history of protests however provides an appropriate lesson to the efficiency or limitation of different kinds of protest.

Thus, the characteristics of a society shape the ethos and shape of the movement. Therefore an adequate framework for study of any movement should take into account the historicity, the elements of social structure and the future vision of society in

which they operate and it is the dialectics between these which provide the focal point for the analysis of social movement²³.

The labeling of movements follows various typologies. Movements are often classified on the basis of participant identity - left, right or centre; primordial loyalties such as religion, caste or linguistic groups; civil collectivities - as peasant, students, working class; territorial anchorage - locality in which they originate and operate. M.S.A. Rao distinguishes between three levels of structural changes and the types of movements-reformist, transformative and revolutionary²⁴. Partha Mukherjee based it on the quality of change - accumulative, alternative and transformative²⁵.

It is important to note, however, that any classification is bound to remain inadequate for every movement tends to acquire new features in its course. Classification merely provides broad outlines for further analysis. Protest movements in India are more complex and difficult to comprehend as its nature and form varies at different levels of the social structure. It is therefore, necessary to identify the diverse elements which are

23. T.K. Oomen, "Sociological issues in the Analysis of Social Movements in Independent India". Sociological Bulletin 27(1) 1977.

24. M.S.A. Rao, "Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements" in M.S.A. Rao (ed.) - Social Movements in India, Manohar Publication, Delhi, 1972.

25. Partha Mukherjee, "Social Movement and Social Change - Towards a Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework", Sociological Bulletin 26(1), pp.39-59.

involved in the movement to determine, for what reason, at what levels and in what form do all or some of these elements get united in a moment of crisis. Any movement have is their inception a condition of unrest and derives their motive power from dissatisfaction and an urge to better there conditions. Besides its specific nature in particular cases, a social movement may generally include, a shared value system, a sense of community, norms for action and organisational structure. For Neil Smelser there are certain conditions that make societies, institutional systems susceptible to outbreak of collective behaviour. These conditions are (a) structural strain, (b) growth and spread of generalised beliefs, (c) special precipitating factors (d) the mobilisation of participant and (e) certain facilitating processes in the social control system. These conditions are however not static, rigid variables. It takes specific form and content in particular category of conflicts.

We will discuss now certain aspects of industrial conflicts in their particularistic aspects, and in their nature and content. Industrial relations encompass a wide area of socio-economic relations within the industry, a vast variety of routine personal interrelationships which exerts a profound influence over all others that is to say, the decisions taken by employers and managers in opening or closing a workplace, determining the type and level of production, introducing particular forms of technology and work organisation, allocating

a specific distribution of profits etc. When there is a breakdown of communication in a work relation industrial conflicts take place.

Because of the basic difference of interests between the management and labour, conflict seems to be endemic in any industrial society. Most industrial jobs are repetitive, monotonous, difficult, dirty and even dangerous²⁶. They may diverge on such issues as - maintenance of high levels of productivity and wage, and the profitability of enterprises. Disagreements however, do not necessarily arise only over wages and conditions of work. It revolves round such a wide range of issues such as job assignment, work methods, safety, hiring, firing and participation in decision making.

One may however, inquire - how far is it useful to apply the same level of the term to such wide a range of behaviour. The usage of "industrial conflict" as an all embracing definition is because these different forms of action often appear to reflect similar causes, or to represent alternative responses to similar grievances and deprivations. The various types of expressions of discontent are to some extent interchangeable and are likely to be affected by the strength, solidarity, traditions and determinations of different employee groups. Moreover efforts to suppress specific manifestations of conflict without removing the

26. E.A. Ramaswamy and Uma Ramaswamy, Industry and Labour : An Introduction, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1981, p.130.

underlying causes of unrest may merely direct disorder into different channels²⁷.

While organised and unorganised' conflict may arise from similar objective conditions and manifest similar genuine grievances, their significance both for workers and management constitute a considerable contrast. Individual sabotage e.g. luddism, indiscipline and different types of 'with drawal from work' typically constitute spontaneous individual action as reactions to uncongenial work situations. Such unorganised conflict generally do not reflect deliberate strategies to remedy the source of grievance. It may well originate from a generalised sense of dissatisfaction rather than a consciousness of a specific grievance and hence may not be conceived as an industrial conflict at all. "Collective action, by contrast normally involves a deliberate attempt by change the situation which gives rise to conflict. It is a purposeful activity designed to achieve some concrete improvement. Organised conflict is thus a form of practice, a tranformation of labour from the passive and reactive role assigned within the capitalist social relations of production to an active and initiating one". This explanation, takes conflict in industry as a collective activity, negating almost individual unorganised attempts and this may be one of the causes of the failure of industrial relation systems in Indian and towards the establishment of a

27. Op. Cit., Hyman, p.188.

peaceful work relation in the industries. They fail to realise that unorganised conflict multiplies the everyday expression of discontent.

Conflict is the result of the interaction or the lack of interaction between workers and the employers and not simply the making of workers. Furthermore, industrial peace is defined negatively as the absence of overt conflict. Surface calm may only be indicative of oppressive conditions of work and the employees' ruthless pursuit of his self interest. Discord can simmer over long periods before it explodes and becomes visible to the outsider. Hence conflict, including its manifest forms can be properly understood only through a study of the entire relationship between labour and management.

There exists various interpretations of the basis of conflict and hence there are many theories on the subject. We will trace the general outlines of these theories to have a deeper insight into conflict formations.

Classical Marxist Theory - The fundamental historical process of change and development in human society was explained by Marx, as a consequence of a broader social conflict. Industrial conflict is therefore seen as a part of the socio-economic process. His concern was not with any particular industry or firm but with the basic inequalities generated in the society.

Marx's basic contention starts from the fact that the society is divided into two classes, the capitalists and the proletariat, created by relations of exploitation and domination in production. Antagonism and conflict are the very essence of Marx's concept of class the basis of which lies in the capitalist mode of production. It essentially stems from the determination of the capitalist class to extract as much work as is possible from the suppressed classes and vice-versa, i.e. from the attempts of these classes to change the terms and conditions of their subjection or to end it altogether. Conflict which is inherent in the system, takes various forms of which "eruptions, outbursts revolts and revolution are the most outward manifestation of permanent alienation and conflict"²⁸. It is not a matter of problem to be solved but of a state of domination and subjection to be ended by a total transformation of the conditions which give rise to it²⁹.

For Marx, an to this situation lies in the transformation of the proletariat from a class in itself to a class for itself. In The Poverty of Philosophy he writes:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for the mass a common situation and common interests. The mass in this is already a class as

28. Ralph Milliband, Marxism and Politics, London : OUP, 1977, p.18.

29. Op. Cit., p.17.

against capital but not yet for itself. In the struggle.....
this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class
for itself. The interests it defends becomes class interests³⁰.

In the course of a united struggle which presupposes a
consciousness of interests that the proletariat becomes a 'class
for itself'. In the Marxist notion, proletarian class
consciousness may be taken to mean an understanding that the
liberation of society and the dictatorship of proletariat can
take place with the overthrowal of capitalism. "It is in this
sense that proletarian class consciousness is also a
revolutionary consciousness"³¹.

Marx also talks of alienation in the process of exploitation
of the wage labour. Instead of being an expression of his
creativity, it becomes an instrument of exploitation. The
labourer is alienated from himself because his labour is no
longer a form of self expression or an end in itself, but is a
mean to an end. The argument is that even if the real wages may
have risen, yet the workers would remain mere "cogs in the
machine, over which they have no control". It is this progressive
alienation from the process of production which intensifies class
conflict³².

30. Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, London, 1936, p.145.

31. Op. Cit., Miliband, p.33.

32. J.A. Banks, Marxist Sociology in Action : A Sociological
Critique of the Marxist Approach to Industrial Relations,
London: Faber and Faber, 1970, p.16.

It is to be noted, however, that the inevitable transformation of the society as a result of class upheaval, has become a major weakness in the Marxist theory of conflict and there has been a tendency to pick up a debate with Marx explicitly or implicitly. It nonetheless, brings into focus the dynamics of economic relationships which exists between the labourers and the capitalists.

Pluralist Theory - According to the pluralists, conflict is not located in the fundamental structure of the capitalist system of production. They are believed to take place within a broader system of consensus. In the most formal sense, written into the notion of pluralism is an idea of competing social forces which constrain and check absolutism. At the level of the total society, it finds advocacy in 'Durkheimian theory which emphasizes the development of the intermediate groups between the state and the individual in order to avoid the evils of domination or of anomie. Competition being the core of social life for Durkheim his major intention was to regulate it properly and enhance human freedom. Kornhauser, arguing in similar lines says that the presence of such intermediate groupings promotes stability and defends liberal democracy against mass society on the one hand and totalitarianism on the other.

On industrial relations, the pluralist perspective assumes 'a roughly equal balance of power between the employers and the workers organized in trade unions and sees industrial relations

and problems as pathological³³. For Kerr, the relation between the managers and the managed in a complex industrial society is an acute problem. Opposed to the centralized power in society, he wants industrial relations to proceed autonomously. This implies managers and the managed coming together to the formation of rules and institutions for conflict regulation. He prefers an overtly organized and voluntarily accepted forms of conflict regulation to individualistic or group conflict of a covert nature such as sabotage, restriction of output, or absenteeism. "Hence essentially conflict which is open and institutionalized is seen as a safety valve which serves to maintain a free society"³⁴.

The primary orientation of this approach is towards the normative and institutional regulation of the collective bargaining relationship between employers and union within capitalism ignoring the element of conflict and opposition inherent in unionism. Further it sees firm as a miniature democratic state and assumes that the management is running the organisation in every ones' interest. Goldthrope thus contends that "the liberal pluralist approach is managerial in its priorities and conservative in its implications"³⁵.

33. J. Clarke and L. Clements (ed.), Trade Unions Under Capitalisms, London : Fontana - Collins, 1977, pp.132-134.

34. J.E.T. Eldrige, "Industrial Conflict : Some Problems of Theory and Method" in Johan Child (ed.), Man and Organization, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973, p.161.

35. Clark Kerr, Industrialism and Industrial Man, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.130.

The institutional pluralists. Fox and Crouch, attacks the pluralist view vehemently. They do not see institutional conflict as pathological. They concentrate on formal institutions and believe that the inevitable conflicts can be contained through proper institutional means. Further most versions of pluralism start from the assumption that conflict is inevitable and natural and by treating conflict as a contained and limited phenomenon. The logic of analysis is to move away from a focus on what Hyman calls the 'material basis of conflict to an assessment of how conflict is organized and channelised. This approach insulate a pluralist model of industrial relations from the wider social structure thus leaving untouched any analysis of contemporary industrial relations. Though lacking a view of the basis of conflict, pluralist perspective tend to focus only on the concrete forms of conflict that are collectively organized and can be useful in the evaluation inter-group and organized clashes.

Unitary Approach - According to this perspective, it is believed that work organizations are unified bodies in which everyone shares the same goal. The managerial prerogative is legitimized by all members of the organization. The assumption of fully shared interests shapes the unitary attitudes towards all work group 'custom and practice' or union rules which the management experiences to be seriously irksome³⁶. Within this

36. Alan Fox, "Industrial Relations : A Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology" in Op. Cit., John Child, p.185.

frame of reference, management goals and practices are seen as 'rational. It is argued, that as long as the employees' behaviour is congruent with the goals and policies of the organisation it is rational. This approach was advocated by Human Relations School. They incorporated the 'team' or family work attitude in the organization. Conflicts is then regarded as rather unnecessary, the result of a misunderstanding or mischief, in other words as pathological. Further, in their attempt to keep the managerial world ordered, it is contended that force could be applied against few misconducts by means of coercive power if necessary". In other words, the notion of the unitary perspective includes the hypothesis that the manager holding it are disposed, at times of special stress, crisis, or emergency, an attempt to fall back on the coercive means of enforcing their will if challenged"³⁷.

The unitarist view is certainly inadequate as the basis of conflict. It is not clear why a general and a normatively based view of what firms ought to be like is contradicted by concrete practice based on acceptance of shop floor organizations. It is perfectly possible to believe that firms are really based on shared interests while also accepting that in the real world in which he operates there are concrete benefits to be gained from formalizing arrangement by agreeing to a closed shop.

This perspective, however poses a purpose and contains an element of truth that is to say, there are substantial areas of

37. Ibid, p.187.

co-operation in work relations. Worker do not always, go on a strike. Managers can devise means to generate a sense of loyalty to the firm, for example through schemes for participation and profit sharing. The firm may have an idea to remove a "them" and "us" approach on the shop floor. This is however not to be seen as simply the result of manipulation of the workers. There is a very real sense in which workers stand to gain from arrangements that promote co-operation. It is not to suggest however that harmony is a natural condition in the industry but the need to incorporate certain issues identified by the unitarists. It thus recognizes the importance of both consensus and conflict.

Radical Perspective - It developed as a critique of pluralist theory, to provide a sociological account of workplace relations. It stresses on the endemic nature of conflict and on the fact that its sources lie beyond the reach of institutional functioning. It does not assume that institutions will be able to channel conflict and there is an over arching normative order. The radical theorist³⁸ are critical of the role of trade unions in the western capitalist societies. There is a wide agreement that industrial workers have failed to develop the revolutionary

38. David, Lockwood, Social Integration and System Integration. Explorations in Social Change, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

John Rex, Key Problems of Sociological Theory, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

Frank Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory : A Bourgeois Critique, London: Lavistock, 1979.

class consciousness, which Marx considered as prerequisites for the overthrowal of capitalism.

According to their, class consciousness can develop only if the various aspects of the life of the workers form an integrated whole. There has to be an essential unity between his work, family life, industrial activity and political life. What has actually taken place is distintegration instead of integration.

Radicals pin their hopes on the outbreak of unofficial shop floor protest by workers. Unofficial protest is interpreted as a sign of the division between the worker and his union. However, rather than having specific attributes of its own, it was characterized more by its rejection of particular levels of Marxism and pluralism. It has a strong tradition but this tradition is methodological rather than theoretical.

The radical approach has one central weakness, it lacks a means of explaining why conflict is endemic. Either conflict is equated with observable manifestations of discontent or an attempt is made to specify the basis of conflict independently of any observable indicator. It has some difficulties in linking conceptual analysis to patterns of concrete behaviour and to 'individual actions in particular, a problem which it shares with much writing in the tradition of labour process theory.

Nonetheless, the radical perspective has considered several important issues such as the nature of power, the effort of bargaining and the indeterminacy of the labour contract.

To sum up, all these approaches are concerned with the understanding of relationships within the workplace. It deals not only with conflict and control in the work place but also discusses specific forms of behaviour and how the social organization of work gives them their shape and significance. This is however not only to suggest that a study of conflict concentrates only on the subject. A structural antagonism between labour and capital does not mean that antagonism cannot be removed at all or it can be simply removed. The basic premise is to understand workplace behaviour within a broad social framework and to have an insight into specific forms of protest both at the shopfloor and outside.

CHAPTER - III

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS - MODES OF PROTEST

An analysis of industrial relations system is closely guided by both conflict and cooperation. In this chapter we will deal with the ways in which industrial workers manifest their discontent, the distinction between different modes of protest and in what ways are the modes of protest conditioned by factors other than economic.

The industrial worker, as has been stressed that for the most part works harder than he likes at tasks which are frequently arduous, usually monotonous, and sometimes dangerous. On the job he is nearly always subject to the direction of higher authority. His income is seldom sufficient to cover what he thinks his needs are. The natural state of the industrial worker therefore is one of discontent. The question arises as regards what form these discontents take. Kornhauser writes however, that the general object of study is not the labour dispute, the strike or the lockout, but the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between industrial owners and managers on the one hand and the working people and their organisations on the other¹. It thus encompasses a wide variety of activities. Clark Kerr contends, that "its means of expression are as unlimited as the ingenuity

1. A. Kornhauser et.al (ed.), Industrial Conflict, New York: McGraw Hill, 1954 p.13.

of man"². He further goes on to define the responses to discontent mainly as a reaction to industrialization. The responses of the new workers may be a covert withdrawal of effort or overt action by isolated individuals or groups; and concerted action may be a temporary flurry or may involve continuing organization. The total of these negative reactions and responses to the impact of industrialization on the work force is drawn together under the term "worker protest"³.

The process is not merely historical in nature but is largely a process of socio-economic, of political and psychological growth and also includes conditional aspects. If one speculates deeper it becomes ambivalently clear that industrial relations do not exist in a vacuum. It is a part of the wider social system. The work behaviour in the form of strikes, gheraos and other militant protests are the logical responses to the circumstances in which the workers find themselves. Similarly, labour indiscipline, absenteeism, low productivity, low turn-over and even industrial accidents "can represent the conscious or the unconscious responses to discontents which derive from identifiable features in work situations"⁴. It may not necessarily be a manifestation of pre-industrial cultural values or of class struggle. The work

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2. Clark Kerr, Labour and Management in Industrial Society, New Year: Doubleday, 1964, p.115.
 3. Clark Kerr et.al., Industrialism and Industrial Man, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
 4. Richard Hyman, Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction, London: Mac Millan, 1975, p.187.

behaviour of employees in general reflects their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their economic, organizational and socio-political situation of the enterprises they work for.

There exist many ways of protesting which then seem difficult to classify in a single syndrome of 'protest behaviours' and some of them are highly ingenious. People tend to place examples of protest behaviour like boycott, dharna on one hand and mild forms such as signing petitions and marching peacefully on the other along the same single continuum. At the other end are extreme forms like deliberate damage to property and the use of personal violence. Between these extremes are ordered demonstrations, boycotts, strike and similar activities. The surprising thing is that such widely differing groups such as students, working class, all fall along the same continuum, come under the same order and differ from each other only to the extent in which they endorse, approve and think it to be effective. They assess each example of protest separately, according to several dimensions of attitude and in relation to several different hypothetical situations. The dimension remains basically constant, differences being only of degree.

It is however necessary to relate the patterns of protest with the specific time period in which it takes place. For example, during the pre-war period, there was very little direct attack on the authority, even though the conditions in the mills were quite intolerable. It was however not that the mill hands were used to such spates of tedious, arduous and continuous

labour but there was not organised movement against such working and living conditions. This does not mean that they did not express themselves in other undemonstrative ways. They would rather leave work altogether, go back to their villages and shift to some other mills. Further they would define their own notion of time. In this slackening of the workplace and in the flouting of regular work discipline from the watchful scrutiny of the manager, one can infer a defiance of the norms of rule and authority in the mill.

Protest by workers was not absent in the pre-war period but was rather inconspicuous, individualized and fragmented in character. Richard Newman, however writes that till 1920, there was a continuing absence of protest over matters such as working conditions, hours of work, the demarcation of functions, of recruitment and dismissals and in the welfare schemes. He contends that this is due to mill hands' lack of commitment to industrial life⁵. However remote and impractical it was for the labourer to return to his village he seldom felt it necessary to fight for reforms in his urban environment. Thus the workers' attitudes to industrial relations were also shaped by the composition of the work force.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, individualized feelings of discontent need not always be dramatic - it can also take the form of a creative art like poetry. Thus

5. Richard Newman, Workers and Unions in Bombay 1918-29 Australia; Australian National University Monograph on South Asia No.6, 1981, p.67.

the feelings of the workers are captured in a poem published in 'Pratap'⁶ 1920.

हम तो कुली मजदूर हैं । मालिक जनाब हजूर हैं ।
अनाथी तथा वे क्रूर हैं । किस गर्व से वे घूर हैं ।
हम पिथ रहे हैं दिन रात हैं । करते न हम से बात हैं ।
कैसी अनोखी बात है । हर चाल में शैजात है ।
कैसा हमें उपहार है । कैसा हमारा प्यार है ।
हम माँगते आहार हैं । देते हमें वे मार हैं ।⁷

We are merely 'coolies' and they-the employers are the 'Babus'.

They are nothing but unjust and cruel, proud and arrogant.

Day and night we sweat and labour, and they don't even consider it worth talking to us.

Their cunningness knows no bound, strikes us at every step.

What love, what reward do we receive! what an irony! we ask for food, we get thrashing instead.

The above poem reflects that workers main concern need not always restrict itself to wages i.e. economic gains but deals more deeply with the question of 'self respect', fair treatment and their resentment against the inhuman physical tortures that they are subjected to and to their loss of dignity. It is against the brutal work situation, and when their dignity is trampled that they complain against, resent against the

6. 'Pratap' dated 26.1.1920.

7. Bhagwati Charan Verma - "Garib Mazdur", Pratap, 1920.

system. It is their sentiments which reflects their discontent of their situation⁸.

Though no organised activity was much prevalent during the pre war period and more specifically, till 1920s, there may have existed a disruption of the normal work behaviour during a riot and in instances of violent activities. But 'machine breaking' culture was, however, never a part of work ethics in India. The very work place, the factory system meant a disruption of the earlier pattern of life for the workers drawn from a rural peasant background - a new pattern of work ethics as opposed to his former mode of labour. Another poem published in Pratap reveals such sentiments.

मैहनत से मुझे अंग अंग चूर हो रहे हैं। जाते सुबह से शाम तक जी-स्वपाते हैं।
दिन भर लड़ते जान पसीना बहाते हैं। गुरुदो गुरुदो से नरे जब पर आते हैं
नर पेठ रोटीओं भी नहीं लाभ पाते हैं।

By toil and hard work, each and every fiber of my
body is aching.

Morning till evening we work, throughout the day we
sweat it out.

Covered with filth and dirt when we reach home, we don't
even get even a morsel of food - a bread to eat - this is our
fate, our destiny⁹.

In such circumstances even though there existed no outward

8. Leader - 14.12.1919.

9. Sudarshan Chakr, 'Mazdoor Ki Holi - Pratap - 1.3.1920.

symbol with which workers could identify themselves, yet the workers made efforts to unify themselves through a common feeling of distress and suffering. In her thesis on Kanpur mill workers, Chitra Joshi¹⁰ has most exclusively stated that in Kanpur, mill workers would adopt a symbol with which they could identify themselves and internalise it in their understanding of the situation.

रंग विरंगे ध्वजा उठाने, लाल लाल जब जान न पाये ।
उलन मीन उन को मंडा, जूता लना टनरी डंडा ।

The workers carried different coloured flags, the 'red flag' being unknown, unfamiliar to them till then. The workers of the woolen mill would use flags of wool while that of tannery would tied a shoe at the top of a pole.

Individual responses to discontent, however should not be reduced to undisciplined violence. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, spontaneity does not necessarily mean irrationality. Spontaneous activity is not totally unplanned, unorganised, mindless and irrational. It can also emerge in a situation even where there exists an organised trade union, when workers tend to loose their faith in the capacity of trade unions. In 1975 when the unions had failed to secure the workers demand, gheraos as a form of protest became popular.

10. Chitra Joshi, "Kanpur Textile Labour: Some Structural Characteristics and Aspects of Labour Movement", Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1982.

In the 1920s, most of the resistance also took place because of the existence of feudal relationships between the employer and the employee. The 'labour power' was seen merely as a commodity to extract profit and not a human ingredient. Moreover the master worker relation exhibited itself in very many different ways¹¹. It would be rather wrong to deny that the same does not exist today. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that with the coming up of strong trade union organizations, the management has strived towards more peaceful equations.

Individual protest and resistance are thus quite difficult to classify in a continuum for they do not follow a particular set pattern of activity to a specific situation. This does not mean that these responses are insignificant in the analysis of working class discontent. The passive expression of discontent may also result in poor productivity, poor time keeping, absenteeism and more often than not withdrawal from work. They may not necessarily lead to the amelioration of the situation, towards a better work condition, but a way to avoid the unfavourable work conditions. This is where, they differ most significantly from collective action; but here the action is not merely a means of withdrawal from a stressful and uncongenial situation it also represents a calculative attempt to apply

11. Dipesh Chakraborty, Rethinking Working Class History, Delhi, OUP, 1939, "the babu - coolie relationship would have been represented many times in many different ways, in manners of speech and dress, in body language expressive of hierarchy, indeed, in the entire range of the semantics of domination and subordination (and hence resistance).....", p.144.

pressure in order to change the situation"¹².

The individual instances of withdrawal from work or absenteeism can also result in desertion by the workers as was quite evident in Assam tea plantations during the pre-war years. B.R. Sharma states that the internal administration of an organisation is responsible for absenteeism. The work milieu is very important since a large proportion of the workers' daily life is spent at the workplace. The atmosphere in the plant affects his attitude towards his work and either persuades him to attend regularly or keeps him away¹³. Though often it is attributed with the lack of commitment on the part of workforce, it is also a form of protest, both as individual and collective forms.

We however, need to have a deeper insight into more organised collective responses to conflict - a deliberate, organised attempt on the part of worker to change the situation giving rise to conflict. Most of the organized activities are carried through specific trade unions to which workers are affiliated. Lawrence Daly says that a trade union movement is by origin and definition a protest, a reaction to political and industrial exploitation. Its foundations are the aspirations of the workers who want security and freedom.

STRIKE - A strike is a social phenomena of enormous complexity which in its totality is never susceptible to complete

12. Op. Cit., Hyman. p.187.

13. B.R. Sharma, "Absenteeism : A Search for Correlates", Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.5, 1970.

description, let alone complete explanation¹⁴. It is the most dramatic and the most studied manifestation of industrial discontent. It is a democratically accepted form of protest behaviour which workers resort to in order to pursue their demands. "All wheels stand still if your mighty arm wills it, a German workers' song says of the working class. And so it is in reality"¹⁵. In times of strikes, says Lenin, "-he (workers) states his demand in a loud voice, he reminds the employers not only of himself and his wages alone' he thinks of all his workmates who have downed tools together with him and who stand up for the workers' cause, fearing no privation. Every strike means many privations for the working people - hungry families, loss of wages, often arrest. Despite all these sufferings, they are ready to stand by their conviction"¹⁶.

Technically a strike is "cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any industry acting in combination or a concerted refusal under a common understanding of any number of persons who are or have been so employed to work or to accept employment"¹⁷. Symbolically, however, it is far more complex, varied and subtle than just collective withdrawal of labour. Minimally, it is a gesture of protest or of non-co-operation- an

14. A.N. Gouldner, Wild Cat Strike, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1955 p.46.

15. V.I. Lenin, 'On Strikes', in T. Clarke and L.Clements (ed.), Trade Union Under Capitalism, London: Fontana, 1977, pp.58-59.

16. Ibid., p.59.

17. Section 2 (q), Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

articulation of discontent with the existing conditions and systems. It also represents a group action, a collective action, an effective means of collective bargaining, directed towards pressurising an agency to alter the situation. It is a weapon wherein the strength of the workers lie. There have been instance wherein strikes have grown from a simple protest to a "battle against oppression" and the first step towards social revolution. The psychology of strikes in all cases differ and so do their content, form and direction. Further, a strike may be a last resort action or it may be a warning to a future danger.

The strike target may also vary from case to case. It can be directed towards the management of a plant, an employer's association, a trade union of workers, or of the government. The issue might be associated with work place conditions, with the society in general and even with governmental policies at the international level. Thus strikes change their form, fulfill different functions, mean different things to different people at different points of time and incorporate different phases of organisational and ideological growth. Because of the complexities of strikes, there exist many explanations both at the aggregate level and at the microlevel. The point of consensus in these prevailing studies is the exist once of three elements in a strike operation :-

- (i) the desire for a strike
- (ii) the capacity to strike, and
- (iii) the perception of chances of success

The degree of discontent, dissatisfaction as well as their choice of methods of settling disputes determine their desire to strike work. The dissatisfaction level reflects the gap between their existing status and their original needs, aspirations and expectations. More the gap greater is the impatience with the existing status quo, and the greater the desire for strikes.

The choice of action depends upon the attitude of a group involved in the settlement of disputes. It is their perception which determines their mode of protest. Where the group is socially, culturally and ideologically opposed to take recourse to 'non-peaceful', and even 'violent' ways, they may wait till other means for conflict resolution have been experimented before choosing for strike activity. In such a situation a strike is used as a last resort weapon and here public opinion plays an important role. Though the right to strike has been legally accepted in most countries including India it is not viewed as a legitimate or as a desirable activity. As V.L. Allen points:

Strikes take place within a hostile environment even though they are a common everyday phenomenon. They are conventionally described as industrially subversive, irresponsible, unfair against the interests of the community, contrary to the workers' best interest, wasteful of resources, crudely aggressive, inconsistent with democracy and in any event, unnecessary¹⁸.

18. V.L. Allen, Militant Trade Unionism, London, 1966 p.27.

Placed on the lower scale, even the justification of strikes by workers depend upon the approaches of the opponents, viewed mostly as an act of indiscipline and impatience. Popular opinion invariably goes against strikes even when they are sought to be justified as a last resort for self defense.

J.E. Cronin however feels quite differently. He believes that:

Strikes are not the defensive actions of desperate and downtrodden men and women. They are instead the means of communication and sources of political and economic leverage most readily available to industrial workers and as such do yeoman services as flexible tools. Most strikes are essentially creative acts of an offensive kind, not sign of weakness but of collective resources, not of resignation but often of a hopeful and heightened sense of self worth raised within a context of a institutionalized social inferiority.¹⁹

Workers and trade unions conforming to such views can be expected to be more strike prone considering it to be a convenient and an effective weapon.

Not only ideological differences but also the workers past experience as well as the opponents sensitivity and their attitudes towards workers and their issues, influence the

19. J.E. Cronin, Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain, London, 1979, p.9.

formation of the workers attitudes regarding the choice of methods of protest. When the system is closed, unreasonable and autocratic, people tend to be more convinced about the efficacy of a strike activity. It means that neither the conditions of dissatisfaction nor the attitude towards strike is static, they are made and remade time and again. The conformity between the industrial setting and institutions on the one hand and the structure of industrial employment and the socio-economic developments that govern the workers' aspirations, attitudes and thinking on the other, are equally important in identifying and assessing the desire for strike. It is to be noted that this not the only variable for then it would mean a narrow view of industrial relation institutions confining them to the formal bargaining structure. We have to identify the various components and relate them with a perspective wider than this.

Since strike is a collective action directed against someone, a decision towards such effect also means the capacity to bear the inherent costs and risks. They have to cope not only with the economic repercussions but also with the general hostility surrounding them. Where they lack this capacity, there may be some desperate wild cat efforts to withdraw labour but they will neither be frequent nor widespread. It is at this junction that unions play a significant role by coordinating the strike action and converting the individual action to an institutional effort. It is generally agreed upon that if the other factors remain the same, strikes increase with

unionisation.

Lastly, another important variable in the understanding of strike is the assessment of the opponents capacity vis-a-vis their own by the strikers. The capacity of the management or of the government to absorb the costs incurred by the strike should be relatively less than the workers' own capacity to absorb such costs. The assessment is however based on the past experience and a careful analysis of the work place situation. The basis of evaluation is however necessary to take the initial decision as well as far keeping the morals of the strikers high during the strike.

Thus the three variables above provide an overall framework in order to understand, explain and predict strikes. The dynamics of strikes are linked to some extent to the inter play of these three variables. It is however not tangible that all these variables will work together at the same time as any one of them may override the other two and may turn out to be the decisive factor. For example, in the process industry, the nature of technology is such that they are highly vulnerable to sabotage. Unscheduled closures of the plant can lead to heavy production losses and hence the perceived threat of sabotage can make the chances of strike abnormally high. While, there are instances where one finds the desire to strike being so intense that such considerations such as whether the capacity to strike exists or whether the chances of success are at all there are

totally insignificant. In a study conducted by Sandeep Pendsey²⁰, in 1980, it was found that in Maharashtra and specially in Bombay, the strike rates are high because the workers feel that there exists number of issues which are of utmost urgency and which can be realised only by direct action. This frustration among the workers together with their disenchantment with the legal machinery, their urgency to get solutions and management's indifference to their problems resulted not only in high rates of mandays lost but also in high incidences of violence.

Thus a strike may be the result of a calculated strategy or of spontaneous outbursts in the shop floor. Its aim may be to demonstrate workers' resentment or to wage a sustained battle against the management.

There are however various forms of strike. Apart from the normal strikes related directly to the strikers' working conditions, there are sympathetic strikes, political strikes, hartal and bandhs whose objectives generally are not so directly apparent. Then there are the sundry variants of the strike techniques. They are the so called stay in strike, hunger strike, token strike, besides the well known go slow and picketing. The stakes of the workers in each case differ, the moods differ and so do the material or social conditions which lead them. A one day token strike is not only quantitatively but also qualitatively quite different from a strategically planned

20. Sandeep Pendsey, "Industrial Violence: A Case Study", Economic and Political Weekly, No.11, March 15, 1980.

general or indefinite strike. While one is normally an attempt to exert moral pressure on the opponent, the latter is directed more towards gaining compliance through the use of economic or political power.

Sympathetic Strike - In such a case the workers go on a strike in sympathy with other workers on strike not only from their own plant but also from different mills and not necessarily for their own specific grievances. It is more as a "gesture of accord with the strikers in another industry with whom they do not have a direct economic relationship and hence are unjustifiable normally."²¹ They are strikes within the meaning of Industrial Disputes Act (Banchey Lal vs State of U.P., A.I.R. 1959, Allahabad 614) but not under Bombay Industrial Relation Act where the stoppage of work is not in accordance with the industrial disputes (R.M.M.S. vs India United Mills Dye Works 1951 (II) L.L.J. 142).

General Strike - A strike is a general strike when it is undertaken not by a particular body of workmen against a particular master but by workmen generally irrespective of the master - against all masters. The object of these strikes are very often political or at least pre-dominantly political. It should be noted that a general strike falls within the definition of 'strike' in the Industrial Dispute Act. 'Bandhs and Hartals' also fall in this category of strike.

21. V.B. Arya, Strikes, Lockouts and Gheraos - Law and Practice, Calcutta: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1967, p.15.

Token Strike - Due to economic compulsions involved in undertaking full swing strikes of short duration, usually a few hours or a day may be undertaken by workmen to stage a token protest. "This may serve as a preliminary step to strike action or as an sample of the shape of the things to come," that is as a warning. The stop work meeting during the working hours is a variation of this technique.

Stay in Strike - In such a strike, employees remain at the work place but do not work. It is also known as 'sit-down strike', 'pen down strike' or 'tool-down' strike. Previously, such strikes were regarded as unjustified and illegal for it was argued that there exist an element of trespass on the property of the employer. These decisions were based mainly on the American concept of sit-down strikes as stated by Ludwig Teller in his well known book "Labour Disputes and Collective Bargaining" and the United States Supreme Court's decision in the well known Fansteel Case. (National Labour Relations Board vs Fansteel Metallurgical corporation (1939) 306 U.S. 240, L. Ed., 627). Ludwig Teller defines a sit down strike as occurring "whenever a group of employees or others interested in obtaining a certain objective in a particular business forcibly takeover the possession of the property of such business, establish themselves within the plant, stop its production and refuse access to the owners or others desiring to work. A sit down strike should more accurately be defined as a strike in the traditional sense to which is added the element of trespass by the strikers upon the

property of the employer". In the Punjab National Bank's case, the Supreme Court, however held, contrary to the trend, that a stay in strike per se would not be unjustified and illegal. The main reason for this conclusion was that the definition of 'strike' in the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947 does not clearly state that it is confined to action outside the place of work and stay-in-strike falls squarely within the definition of strikes. The Act does not say that a stay in strike is not a strike. Hence the Supreme Court has conferred to the workmen the right to "seize and hold" the property of the employer in order to force them to come to terms with their demands.

Go-Slow - It is another variant of the strike technique, though it is not included in the statutory definition of a strike. However, in such cases, the normal work pace is disrupted, without any stoppage of work. The Labour Appellate Tribunal in a particular case (Tirestone Tyre and Rubber Co. vs Bhoja Shetty 1953 (I) L.L.J., 599) condemned "go slow" in strong terms, describing it as an "insidious method of undermining the stability of a concern which is not a legitimate weapon in the armoury of labour".

Gherao - Gherao is a collective militant movement primarily localised in the industrial environment of West Bengal²². It engulfed Bengal in 1967 soon after the installation of the new

22. Nitish. R. De, "Gherao as a Technique For Social Intervention", Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, Vol.V, January 1970, p.207.

government in the state. The workers took resort to such activity encouraged by the policy of West Bengal Govt. which stated 'non-interference on the part of the police in "legitimate" trade union activities including "strikes" and gheraos. The movement re-emerged in 1969 with certain new characteristics absent in the earlier phase.

Militancy in an industrial context, signifies a combative attitude of the persons concerning their grievances and a disposition to take a direct action, formally or informally, to overcome them²³. In a case of gherao workers rather than pursuing conciliation and consensus, take recourse to direct confrontation with their target.

Gherao literally means confinement and the technique essentially consists in confining management staff in their rooms or at their places of work. It has been described by a state High Court Justice as follows:-

"Gherao is a comparatively new form of demonstration which is being resorted to by labourers in this country. Generally, it assumes the form of keeping the management or the managerial staff of industrial and other establishments in wrongful confinement thus depriving them of their personal and other liberties. Occasionally it assumes the form of physical surrounding of such establishments, thus shutting of the access

23. Abha Chaturvedi, *Managing the Divide Concerns in Industrial Relations*, Pune: The Times Research Foundation, 1985, p.42.

of the management thereto thereby depriving them of their right to property. The last mentioned form may be described as encirclement in depth, so deep that the encircling persons overrun the establishments themselves and shut out the management. Once commenced, gheraos further tend to degenerate into criminal activities, for example, wrongful restraint, trespass, mischief, annoyance, intimidation and words. The object of both the forms of Gherao is to coerce the management and make them concede to the demands of labour²⁴.

The emergence of this form of protest reinforced the assumption that industrial organisations operate within the framework of an open system and are thus inevitably exposed to pressures from the immediate socio-political and economic environment. It reflected a distrust in the process of bargaining and managerial insensitivity to the human environment of the enterprise which correlated to the intensity of gherao in the late sixties.

Eventhough there exists a variety of opinion on gheraos, there is an underlying consensus in the understanding of the concept. Very often one tends to inquire into certain facts, internal to a gherao and other similar militant phenomena.

(1) What is the meaning of this form of protest as a confrontation between workers on one hand and authority on

24. Justice B. Banerjee in *Jay Engineering Works Ltd. Versus State of West Bengal*, in the Indian Law Reports, Calcutta Series, Calcutta: West Bengal Government Press, Volume II, 1967.

the other?

(2) How far is it effective in its role in the social ferment?

First - Gherao involves the confinement of selected managerial or supervisory personnel by a group of their workers with the intention to blockade the formers ingress or egress to and from the place of gherao i.e. office, workshop or even residence. The dictionary meaning of the word is also on similar lines. Wilson opines that the word gherao is "derived from the Hindi word gherna" which means to surround, an enclosure, a fence or a bound hedge"²⁵. Platt too writes that gherna means to circumfer enclosing line or body, siege, blockade, to surround²⁶. The word gherao is also found in three Bengali dictionaries compiled by Jnanendra Mohan Das, Chalantika and Biswakosh with similar meanings.

Second - The purpose of gherao is to exert pressure on the management, to threaten them and instill into them a feeling of fear, helplessness and insecurity with a view to coerce them to accept their demand and to settle upon the them the 'desired' terms. The element of violence is however implicit in the process of intimidation and inculcating fear. The degree of violence may however vary according to the situation. Generally, the besieged persons are allowed neither to move out nor to personally communicate with anyone outside. In addition to the

25. H.H. Wilson, A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms, Calcutta: Eastern Law House, 1940, p.276.

26. Platts Dictionary, Urdu, Classical Hindi and English.

limited 'trade' objective, both pro and anti gherao groups agree that gherao contribute to the broad revolutionary objectives of the working class. Those who oppose it say that gherao promotes lawlessness, has in it the seeds of anarchy and is a tool of revolution. Those who justify it do not deny this potential of gherao. Whatever may be the opinion, one point is implicitly clear that it reflects the failure of industrial relations system. The legalistic framework drawn upon to resolve an industrial conflict is seen as a major obstacle to the workers' fulfillment of their goals and expectations.

Third - It involves a handful of persons. Unlike in a strike where the workers are called upon to come out en masse resulting in the suspension of work at the establishment. A gherao on the other hand does not aim at work stoppage, though at times it may necessarily be compelled to do so. An idea of gherao is a short and swift action, and any prolongation of it is always to the advantage of those opposed.

Fourth - It is seldom unorganised. Occasionally however, it is possible for the workers to get excited in the course of a demonstration and may gherao a particular officer. Even in such cases, planning and organization follow if the desired results are to be achieved. Swift action, short duration, and quick results are the basic attributes of a gherao. This requires proper timing, deep thinking, careful consideration and concentrated approach. Finally one of the essential features of

gherao is a high degree of tension both at the place of action and at the workplace. Depending upon the purposes and the situation prevailing in a plant at a given point of time, a gherao may be peaceful, coercive or violent. The form that a gherao may take is conditioned by several factors such as the organizational climate in the plant, history of collective bargaining and union relation and the managerial styles of the firm or of its principal officers.

The significance of the movement is that, it is symbolic of the challenge to the legitimacy of the bureaucrats, their patrons and of the politicians in power. Gherao has seriously called into question the kind of human relationship implicit in a bureaucratic fabric in which impersonality and dehumanisation are an inescapable human destiny²⁷. It has challenged the "island" existence of the managerial class, their insensitivity and lack of concern for the working class as well as the lack of competence among them to resolve human problems. It has challenged the legitimacy of the authority of the superior classes. This is however, not to justify all acts of indiscipline and violence of the workers. The core point is that a proper direction, leadership, and commitment are imperatives for any movement to be successful and which necessarily need not lead to sabotage and violence.

Demonstration- The Chambers dictionary defines a demonstration as

27. Op. Cit., De, p.205.

an expression of feelings by outward signs, a public expression of discontents, as by mass meeting, a procession etc. Very often it is being expressed by wearing a badge, making a speech etc. The purpose of demonstration is not intended to achieve the objective immediately. It is more of a symbolic gesture. Literally, it means to demonstrate, to dramatise one's grievances in order to make it understandable to the target or to the concerned group. It is intended to be a non violent, non coercive gesture on the part of the aggrieved party. It however comes under legal bounds when at times it takes recourse to violent means. In a nutshell, it is an en-masse activity operating within the bounds of industrial legality intended to bring out a positive change in the existing situation through peaceful means.

Picketing - Picketing is the act of marching to and fro before the premises of an enterprise involved in a dispute generally accompanied by the carrying and display of a placard or banner bearing a statement in connection with the dispute. It is a form of persuasion, free from any threat or force where a group may tell its grievances to others and appeal for support from them and to induce others to stop working. Thus the element of picketing involves:-

- (a) posting of strikers at or near the place of work.
- (b) dissemination of information concerning the labour dispute.

- (c) stopping the workers from working by verbal persuasion, by exhortion and appeal to their group loyalties and sentiments.
- (d) inducing people not to have commercial or other dealings with the offending manager.²⁸.

Dharna - It is another technique wherein the aggrieved persons sit down at the entrance to a plant or an office and refuse to move until their grievances are attended to. No attempt is made to prevent ingress or egress to and from the premises. It is one of the most popular and conventional way of protest.

To conclude, there exists various modes of protest which the working class undertakes at various points of time, both in their individual and collective capacity. It is however, difficult to analyse which mode is the most effective for it is guided by situational conditions. Workers action takes the form of refusal and revolt, of open and negotiated disputes, of the consciousness of belonging to a culture and to the social milieu of a movement. The merit of an effective industrial relation system lies not in generating but containing the discontents arising therein. In order to explore the content of strains and relationships between the key variables causing it, one must examine both the internal working of the system and the environmental factors - social, economic, cultural and political and their impact on the constituents of the system.

28. Op. Cit., Arya, p.24-25.

CONCLUSION

In our discussions in the preceding chapters, we have placed protests within a broad socio-economic framework reflecting on their specific nature, mode, and content analysing their real basis. The idea has not been to visualise protest behaviours as isolated events or as disruption of normal work rhythm, but to identify certain complex variables which go along with such activities, an enquiry into basic elements of protest both at the level of consciousness as well as behaviour.

In the first chapter, a general profile of the Indian working class has been sketched which is seen as forming the background for the following two chapters. From our studies on the subject, we find that in the early years of industrialization there has been a sharp polarity between rural and urban life. The absence of successive phase of industrial development, the ruin of subsistence economy with the subsequent overcrowding of agriculture resulted in surplus labour migrating to the cities in search of urban industrial employment for their economic betterment. Besides land, family and caste structure also posed as 'push' factors. In the later years the interplay of the institutional factors weakened with diverse socio-economic conditions.

The 'push' factors, however, were countered by the 'pull' factors generated by the formidable, alien, mechanistic and the impersonal atmosphere of the urban industrial life creating

problems of maladjustment for the workers from the rural areas. We found that independent decision was replaced by managerial authority, inherent status by acquired status and flexible work atmosphere by tight occupational routine work. The gap between these two polarised life styles and the work atmosphere affected the permanent nature of their job, compelling them to shift to their villages, in the early years of the formation of the Indian working class.

Instability, in the early years were further generated by the method of recruitment i.e. the "jobber system". We see that the jobber was not only a link between the recruits and the management but also embodied in himself status, power and influence, a means by which traditional society mingled with the new. In the absence of proper managing agency system, the working class was exposed to the erratic discipline of the jobber. What we find, therefore, in this period i.e. till 1920's, is that it is characterised by instability and disruptions, with struggles sometimes in support of the jobber, and sometimes against him.

In our study it was revealed that given the nature of the work-force, commitment becomes a rather controversial issue as industrialization demands acceptance of certain norms. Since the origin of the workers were traced to traditional village societies, it was generally concluded, that this inhibited the growth of a dedicated work force. They had the hangover of this

preindustrial values and norms which was exhibited in their work lives in the factories. The measurement of commitment entailed the permanency of the workers in the mills as well as their personal satisfaction. We have argued that it involves not only moral conformity but also psychological assumptions involving human creativity and preferences. It is also linked to the managerial policies and the market forces. It is concluded that it is related more significantly to factors intrinsic to work than to the social background of the workers as a social reality and hence to perceive their attitude and behaviour within that frame and not as institutional operations.

It is further concluded that working class characteristics need not be reduced to structured manifestations as merely projecting certain types of attributes. The 'new worker' with their high aspirations, class consciousness exist with a social and political existence of its own outside the domination of capital. However we have been able to draw only a brief outline as not enough empirical studies on the culture, life styles and ideas of the modern proletariat are available.

In the second chapter, in understanding protest as a concept, we see it as a reflection of social reality and mass consciousness, a phenomena which is inherent in social and economic relations. Rather than being merely an emotive response to the system accelerating change, the attitude and the intention towards such an act is shaped not only by institutional failures

but also by past experiences, social and political causes and more importantly, a sense of injustice. A sense of dissatisfaction is at the core of any protest activity.

Protest entails a wide gamut of expressions from persuasion to coercion, sporadic to organized and from individual efforts to collective activities. We see that protest activities need not be only overt acts of dramatic display of grievances, but also a silent recourse to their own 'everyday' weapons to counteract the calamities of domination. It is argued that it is not possible to understand these acts without any reference to their intentions, ideas and languages of the human beings who undertake them. Importance is being attached to the consciousness of these workers.

The forms of expression however are conditioned by specific situations and by the social structure in which it operates by the agents who undertake them and by their socio-economic background. Hence any analysis of protest movement involves a multiplicity of variables inherent in the entire system. Further we see that any classification remains inadequate given the complexity of the Indian social structure.

Within this background, industrial conflicts and protest activities at the 'plant' level is perceived as a breakdown of communication in the work relations. Different forms of conflict may represent various responses to a similar discontent. These

forms are interchangeable and depends upon the employee groups and are not rigid categories. Each form has a different significance for the management and for the worker. We find that the studies on the subject tend to concentrate more on the collective form neglecting altogether individual instances, and has been identified as one of the causes of the failure of industrial relations.

The intention has been to have a deep insight into the subject and to explore the various basis of conflict and unrest. Suppression of outward expressions would not remove the underlying causes of tension. The various theories on the issue provides explanation on the probable causes of industrial conflict whose roots are embedded in the institutional arrangements, as well in the social structure. In our discussions, it has been concluded that conflict and consensus should be seen as operating simultaneously in a work place and not as separate factors which act negatively but as an expression of consciousness at the shop floor.

In the third chapter, we have discussed in detail the different modes of industrial protests including individual instances as symbolic gestures of discontent. The divergent behaviour and attitudes as expressing opposition and discontent are seen as affecting work place relations. Whether it is a strike or a lockout or a gherao they are responses of the situation in which the workers find themselves, and not

necessarily as a reflection of the pre-industrial culture.

There is however a distinct difference in the nature and style of protest in the pre-war period and the Later years. Direct confrontation with the authority was not always as prominent as now. Eventhough the in-plant conditions were poor, organized activities were almost nil. They however reacted in their silent retreat from the work situation which affected production and general functioning of the mills. It has been seen that absenteeism need not always be a lack of commitment but a form of protest too.

A study of organised activities like, strike, gherao, dharna, picketing etc., reflected a complex interplay of various elements i.e. group activity, ideology leadership as well as arrangements inside and outside the shopfloor. The primary intention of any protest activity is to bring about a change in the existing system or at least as an amelioration of the present situation by applying various forms of pressure tactics.

The purpose to study protest and its subsequent expressions has not been to justify or to applaud a particular act but to understand the roots of tension essentially in industries to envisage a peaceful worker-management relation. This is possible only under mutual trust, understanding and positive co-operation between the employers and the employees. Of course, some conflict will always keep occurring, but not necessarily should it always lead to antagonism and distrust. The general spirit

should be to sort out issues rather than settle the scores. Such an understanding requires conscious and constant effort on the part of management, unions and workers to build relations. Necessarily this entails a willingness on the part of each party to appreciate the needs and aspirations of the other while expressing one's own requirements and expectations.

Further, to extract maximum efficiency from the workers, they should be treated as equals. The attitude that the managers 'should think' and 'they should perform' creates a strict hierarchical structure creating a formal environment. This does not mean the flouting of discipline but to create a cordial work atmosphere where each one's dignity of labour is recognized and respected. The concern for each other is the most important step for an amiable relation at the shopfloor. This work can be seen as a prologue for further studies on protest and struggles of the Indian working class and for a conceptual understanding of the subject of labour management.

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