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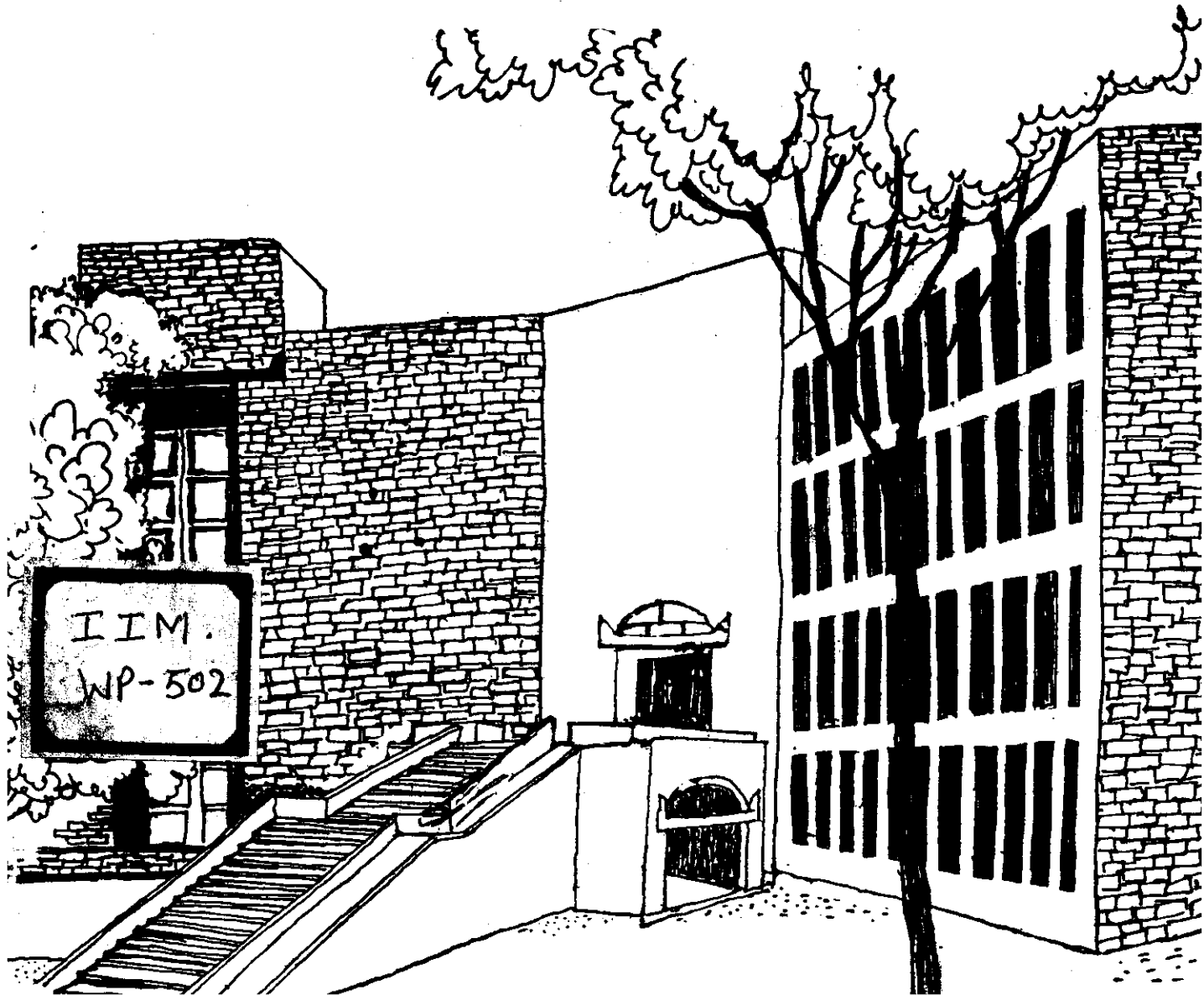
SOCIOLOGY FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

By

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Sociology for Industrual Relations

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My objective in this paper is to present some thoughts on the
role of sociology in the area of industrial relations in the Indian
context[1].  Scholars, practitioners and other observers of industrial
relations, regardless of their disciplinary background and interest,·
have lately shown considerable awareness about the importance of what
are alternatively called 'social', 'sociological' or 'behavioural'
factors in influencing the shape of labour—management relations.  It
is now rare to come across studies, predictions, programmes or sermons
on industrial relations which do not include some reference to social
and cultural factors.  Such references are often couched in broad terms, ·
alluding to socio—cultural reality as constraining influence and solici-
ting help from sociologists to throw more light on this reality to overcome
the perceived handicaps.  Sociologists, on their part, have so far shown
at best a moderate interest in issues of industrial relations.  It will
therefore be useful to reflect on the contribution sociology <u>can</u> make to
the field of industrial relations.  I propose to deal with this subject
in the first part of this essay.  This will be followed by a brief over-
view of the existing sociological literature on industrial relations.
Finally, I shall try to identify some concrete areas and issues which
sociologists should pursue to develop a significant body of knowledge
relating to an important dimension of industrial relations.

## The Scope of Inquiry

The concept of industrial relations has changed over time, as most people interested in the field would be aware. During the early period of institutionalization of trade unionism and industrial democracy in the west, the term industrial relations exclusively covered the norms and institutions relationg to regulation of employment conditions at the workplace. Academically, this field attracted only economists and economic historians who were concerned with the economic consequences of job regulation at the micro and macro levels. Psychologists and sociologists concerned with industrial organization and workers usually neglected or overlooked the facts of job regulation. This continued until Dunlop (1958) persuassively proposed the acceptance of industrial relations as a distinct academic discipline. Dunlop conceived of industrial relations as an identifiable sub-system within society, consisting of actors (employers, employees their respective organizations and government), rules created to govern the actors (rules of discipline, compensation etc.), contexts (market, technology etc.) and ideology (e.g. the democratic framework in some societies). But in this perspective also, the major emphasis continued to be placed on the rules and regulations of employment which were regarded as the output of the industrial relations system. Subsequently, however, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists began to examine issues in job regulation from the various disciplinary perspectives. It was then realized that the classical emphasis on rules and regulations in a static system model resulted in the neglect of a panurama of

behavioural, cultural and political factors which were often as
important as, or even more important than, the formal rules and
institutions characterizing employment relations. In this sense,
the discipline of industrial relations is concerned with the social
actions of people involved in employment relations in concrete
situations and the patterns of cooperation and conflict between
them in relation to the norms and institutions of job regulation
on the one hand and the social, economic and political forces in
the wider society on the other hand.

The usage of the term "industrial relations" needs an explanation.
The meaning of the word 'industrial' was unambiguous as long as employ-
ment relations were regulated by rules and institutions exclusively in
the manufacturing and related sectors which are clearly defined as
industry. However, the sphere of economic activities covered by job
regulations or unionization or both has been steadily expanding to
include not only large and small industry, but commercial enterprise,
all types of services and even agriculture. Some Indian states, for
instance, have already made laws on minimum wages in rural employment
including agriculture and constituted appropriate administrative autho-
rity to enforce these laws. "Industrial relations" should therefore
be replaced by a more appropriate title such as "employment relations"
or labour relations" to convey the inclusion of all organized economic
activity involving an explicit or implicit contract of employment[2].
For the present, however, I shall continue to use the conventional
term industrial relations in its current sense but occasionally use

the other terms synonymously.

Industrial relations, as defined earlier, deserves to be reckoned as a distinct field of inquiry since no other social science dealing with employment relations can claim interest in all aspects of job regulation. At the same time, it is obvious that the normative, institutional and behavioural aspects of employment relations reflect the norms, institutions and behaviour of people in the wider society. Hence, industrial relations must draw upon the conceptual and theoretical repertoirs of economics, sociology, psychology and political science to gain understanding and develop theories regarding the various aspects of the employment relations reality relevant to these disciplines. This however is not merely a matter of sociology assisting industrial relations in emphasizing the role of social (often impressively called sociological) factors,/economic economics emphasizing factors, and so on, to add up to an intellectual agglomeration to be conceived as a discipline in its own right. Each of the contributing disciplines should be able to subscribe a fund of knowledge which can form an integral part of the effort to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the industrial relations phenomena in a society.

Take, for example, sociology which is relevant for the purpose of this paper[3]. Sociology is concerned with relatively durable social relationships among people within the framework of their divisions into groups, classes and categories and the patterns of norms, institutions, values and ideologies which provide models of social behaviour. The various parts of a society are to some extent interrelated and inter-

dependent. It is therefore the task of sociology to study the parts in relation to one another. This should not however blind us to the fact that a society and its parts constitute a dynamic, changing reality. The structure of social divisions, norms and institutions cannot be meaningfully studied except by taking cognizance of the concrete social actions of people, the ways in which they interpret, accept, reject or challenge the structural norms and institutions, the forces which induce the behaviour of acceptance, rejection or challenge, and the nature of authority and power employed at various levels to generate cooperation and conformity.

Moreover, sociology cannot contribute to a substantial understanding of the contemporary social structure unless the various structural components are examined in a historical perspective to identify the social, economic and political forces which facilitate the specific modes of social divisions, institutions and behaviour obtaining at a given time. This historical perspective is crucial in understanding, for example, why trade union leaders in India react to management's paternalism differently than their counterparts in Japan. This dynamic view of the field of sociology is likely to enable the sociologist not only to explain social reality or social issues and problems in a comprehensive manner, but also to predict the behaviour and responses of members of the society in specific situations. Such sociology, let us note, is likely to be socially more useful than the sociology devoted to building models of social structure.

Sociological studies of industrial relations, then, should cover the following areas : (i) the structure of employment relations in the various sectors of the economy, including the allocation of authority and responsibility among employers, managers, employees, unions and government agencies, the legal and organizational norms relating to labour and employment, institutionalized forms of trade unionism, employers' organizations, bipartite and tripartite forums of consultation and conflict-resolution; (ii) the dynamic aspects of the structure of industrial relations - e.g. how workers, unions, government and employers deal with work-related problems and resolve differences; how discipline and productivity are managed in reality; how the various parties influence wage regulation, employee welfare, collective bargaining, conciliation and adjudication; and (iii) the behaviour of the various sets of actors in concrete work-related situations, e.g. employees' reaction to the authority, control and power underlying employment relations; managers' reaction to conflicting pressures from employers and workers, union leaders' reaction to ambitious or enlightened workers. The sociologist should be interested in studying these aspects in relation to one another and, importantly, in relation to the social divisions, norms, institutions and processes within the larger industrial and social structure of which employment relations are a part. Also, as argued earlier, sociology should be instrumental in explaining the current reality of labour relations with reference to social history and tradition.

## The Early Studies

Until mid-1950s, studies in industrial relations in India were undertaken mainly by economists and administrators who were interested in practical issues such as trade union rivalries, labour cost as a proportion of total cost of production, low productivity and loss of mandays in industry. Some of these studies incidentally referred to the social and cultural factors affecting productivity, e.g. maladjustme of workers with industrial discipline and employers' paternalism ▾ Workers' maladjustment was generally attributed to their attachment to traditional institutions like caste, extended family, religion and agriculture. The workers were believed to feel alienated in the urban-industrial environment. Such conclusions were usually reached on the basis of general impressions and crude observation, and therefore lacked substance.

A small measure of sociological interest in industrial relations developed in the mid-1950s when a band of American social scientists launched an inquiry into the patterns of industrialization and the problem of industrial relations in the developing countries including India (see Kerr et al : 1960). One of the major concerns of this study was to identify the role played by the culture of a country in struc-turing its managers and the managed and the "complex web of rules binding the worker into the industrial process, to his job, to his community, to patterns of behaviour" (Kerr et al : 1960 : 8).  The Indian part of this inquiry, undertaken by Myers (1958) covered the whole spectrum of industrial relations in the organised sector.

One of the significant issues included in this study was the degree
of commitment of industrial workers to the industrial way of life in
the background of an assumed conflict between the norms of modern
industry and those of the traditional culture of a newly industriali-
zing society. The intellectual ground for the concern with this issue
in our country was already laid by the generalizations made by earlier
economists and administrators as mentioned above. Myers largely
supported the view that Indian traditional institutions were responsi-
ble for the absence of full commitment among industrial workers to
their work and to the industrial way of life.

This study also took note of some other cultural factors such as
authoritarianism and paternalism among employers and the implications
of these factors for shop-floor labour relations. In the report on
the cross-cultural study, Kerr and his colleagues (1960) brought out
the significance of the nature of the elite leading the process of
industrialization and the colonial legacy of a society for the struc-
ture of industrial relations, apart from the effect of primordial bonds
of caste, family and religion. They explained the phenomenon of
excessive state control over industrial relations and suppression of

protest (by appeal to the national interest) with reference to the
historical fact of the industrialization process in India being led
by nationalist leaders rather than by other elite groups such as the
middle class or revolutionary intellectuals. However, these casual
sociological propositions were not pursued to yield any substantive

analysis of industrial relations, either by the pioneers such as Myers or by the scholars who followed them in studying labour relations in India, especially Dufty (1964) and Crouch (1966).

Scholars like Morris (1960) and Kennedy (1967) however provided some valuable sociological clues to the industrial relations problem. Morris argued on the basis of historical and contemporary data that workers in Jamshedpur and Bombay did not demonstrate any serious lack of commitment and that lack of commitment among workers often arose from employers' interest in unstable employees or lack of economic opportunity. Morris also explained the labour welfare bias of the state in India by emphasizing that the liberal humanitarian tradition of the west entered India at the beginning of industrialization during the 1850s, while the British acquired this bias long after industrialization began. Kennedy, on his part, was struck by India's reluctance to develop effective trade unionism and collective bargaining in industry inspite of the adoption of the western economic and political model. He explained this parado  in relation to cultural and historical factors. In his view, India contains a personality and culture trait which he called 'tendermindedness'. This is defined as "holding high ideals for  human and social betterment along with a belief in the ability  of men to adapt their behaviour to these ideals, (but)....
an inability to put highminded notions and certain kinds of policy choices to the acid test of fact, accumulated knowledge and rigorous intellectual analysis and to accept the consequences of such tests" (Kennedy : 1967 : 11). Kennedy also pointed out that while the normal

process of economic development was drastically telescoped in India, political development had lagged behind and h 'ce government and politicians wanted to retain control over shop-floor industrial relations. The other factors influencing industrial relations in Kennedy's view were (i) the British colonial heritage, 'ii) Indian history and culture, emphasizing spiritualism and a tendency to live with contradictions in policies, (iii) the family system which blunts the edges of individuality and (iv) the caste system, creating a gulf between the elite and the masses, and social blindness among the elite about the problems of the masses.

Meanwhile, sociologists had slowly developed interest in industrial relations. The first major effort in this regard was made by Lambert , (1963). He used as his point of departure the conceptual dichotomy between industrial and pre-industrial cultures and studied the process of recruitment and commitment of workers in different technological settings in a moderately industrialized urban community. Lambert concluded that industrial relations in India ose in a restricted labour market in which workers were often-recruited and rewarded on considerations other than suitability for a job and performance on job. Also, workers' commitment in industry varied according to the degree of compatibility between traditional norms and the norms imposed by technology. Lambert also pointed out that unions and government support demands for wage increase and wage differentials that reinforce the importance of social status (in terms of seniority, formal education etc.) as opposed to merit. Indian culture was thus postulated

as an important obstacle to the emergence of an industrial relations
structure marked by collective bargaining between labour and management
guided by rational economic interests.

This study, in my retrospective view, provided an excellent
opportunity for the growth of the sociology of industrial relations.
In reality, however, sociological studies which followed Lambert's
work became preoccupied with the labour commitment aspect of the subject.
For instance, in my study of social relations in a factory (Sheth : 1968),
I explored the interrelatedness of the various sets of social bonds —
those guided by the techno-economic structure, those oriented to the
traditional norms and institutions, those developed by people sponta-
neously at the workplace and those governed by trade unionism. While
this exploration led me to question the earlier observations on the
effect of traditional institutions on workers' commitment and postu-
late a coexistence of various normative patterns from which workers (and
others) could make choices, I failed to examine my findings for their
industrial relations significance. Other sociologists dealing with
social relations in industry also looked·upon labour commitment as a cru-
cial issue for research (see,for instance, Vaid : 1968 and Sharma 1974).

The concept of commitment was subsequently tied to the concept of
alienation of labour in the technological society as postulated by post-
Marx western social scientists as well as to the theories of motivation
and satisfaction as postulated by the human relations school of social
sciences. The theories of alienation, motivation and satisfaction were
essentially developed and pursued by industrial sociologists and social

psychologists with managerial goals of productivity and efficiency as
the important end-variables. The problem of labour commitment was
therefore moulded within the motivation-satisfaction framework and
the degree of motivation or satisfaction was examined in relation to
social and demographic factors such as caste, religion, family, rural-
urban background, age, education and occupational background. Social
institutions thus assumed for the sociologist the form of static
"factors" which cast their long shadows on people's behaviour which
also constituted a factor (or syndrome of factors). This "factor"
approach in sociological analysis soon caught on to cover various
aspects of industrial relations, including absenteeism, trade union
leadership, workers' involvement in unions, management attitudes etc.
(see, for instance, Sharma : 1970; Punekar and Madhuri : 1967 : Sheth and
Jain : 1968; Mhetras : 1966). Such studies led researchers to draw
implications of their findings for better, more harmonious or more
productive labour relations at the workplace or in society in general.
This type of studies may provide some underst nding of the interconnec-
tions among various organizational and social factors influencing indus-
trial relations, apart from their pragmatic value to managements.
However, their value in terms of understanding the complex phenomenon
of industrial relations is likely to be extremely limited,,because they
hardly take into account the dynamics of the reality of behavioural,
organizational and social forces constituting this phenomenon. The
conclusions and recommendations drawn from such studies are usually too
general and of little value to practitioners of industrial relations.

Some exceptions deserve to be noted. A few case studies of specific issues in industrial relations such as absenteeism, strikes and trade unionism were conducted in a broader sociological perspective than the studies mentioned above and dealt with their chosen themes in terms of the historical, social, and other forces contributing to the industrial relations phenomenon (see, for instance, Bogaert : 1970; Munson : 1970; Dayal : 1972; Dayal and Sharma : 1970; Vaid : 1967). One also occasionally comes across valuable sociological analysis of industrial relations events in academic periodicals such as the Economic and Political Weekly. Most of these studies however are either oriented to managerial problems or journalistic. The information-base of these studies is often weak and fragmented. They have therefore limited value as sociological studies.

In this background of lamentably insufficient sociological research in industrial relations, it is encouraging to note that some valuable assets have been added during the past few years. This is the result of the efforts of a few sociologists who used wide perspectives of sociological inquiry to understand the substance of industrial relations. I shall briefly summarize these studies below and assess their contribution to the field of industrial relations.

## Some Recent Studies

Holmstrom (1976), like several other sociologists in the past, was interested in the problem of workers' commitment to modern industry. He however realized that the earlier studies which were oriented

to the structural view of society and industrial organization had
led the scholars to be oblivious to the divergence in behaviour and
attitudes among workers. When divergence was empirically noticeable,
it was compressed into a few types (e.g. committed, partially comm-
itted, over-committed, uncommitted; conformist vs. non-conformist).
Holmstrom adopted what he calls a dialectical approach to urban
social reality as against the functionalist approach of most rural
sociologists. He took a holistic view of workers' social life. While
he was interested in workers' social background and attitude to work,
he was concerned primarily with workers' understanding of their total
social situation including factory work, interest in union, involve-
ment in the local community and loyalty to traditional institutions
and values. He assumed, and his research helped him to propose,
that workers were not merely passive recipients or victims of the
organizational structure at the workplace and the social structure
outside the workplace. These structures offer choices to individual
workers in conducting their affairs and responding to concrete situa-
tions at work and outside the workplace. Workers from similar back-
grounds and with the same material interests can arrive at sharply
opposed ideological positions.

Accordingly, Holmstrom divided the workers in Bangalore covered
in his study into several types in terms of their intentions for the
future seen in the light of their past. These types are[4] : (i) pater-
nalists, who are guided by an ideology of loyalty to a paternalistic
management; (ii) militant unionists. who are dedicated to the

interests of the 'working class' which is equated with people like
themselves; (iii) those who use the union or politics as an alterna-
tive career ladder either for pecuniary gain or for political power
or for the idealism of service ; (iv) workers from a middle or
lower-middle class family who feel secure in their jobs, expect some
promotion and share an ideology of moderate social reform; (v) workers-
especially unskilled ones without much education for whom there are
no alternatives anyway and little chance of anything better than
promotion by seniority; (vi) those who cling to a job which is getting
too much for them — their promotion is blocked, they are constantly
getting into trouble with the management; (vii) those who sing prai-
ses of the factory they work in though they have no special attachment
.... the conditions are much better than in other jobs they know of....
(viii) factory  owner's kith and kin, several of whom are in supervisory
jobs, not necessarily because they get preference, but many of them
have been  in the factory since it opened; (ix) those who see chances
of personal advancement through their own efforts, and have an ideology
of personal achievement; (x) those who see possibilities of personal
advancement but hesitate to take them because of the risk involved;
(xi) the ambitious, motivated men who see factory employment as a
stepping-stone to better things and for whom there is a loose prac-
tical relation between what they do in the factory and what they
hope to do afterwards; (xii) those for whom the main thing in life
if not their career at all, the career is bracketed away as a rela-
tively unimportant series of incidents in a lifetime, which has

moaning only as part of a larger scenario; (xiii) those who see their interests as bound up with the common interests of some caste or ‑language group or religion, so that their own life chances depend mainly on the fortunes of the group; (xiv) those who belong to the local Lingayat sect and have imbibed the Lingayat tradition – a variant of the Protestant ethic – which includes an ideology of careful ‑work and deserved promotion within the organization as well as a mystical theology and religious and moral universalism.

These types are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Nor are they necessarily testable in other situations. The main lesson emerging from Holmstrom's analysis, however, is that you cannot understand and predict the behaviour of workers as partners in the industrial relations game unless you take into account the complex web of factors contributing to their experience as employees and as members of their community.

Ramaswamy's study (1977) of textile workers in Coimbatore is concerned with workers' involvement in union activities in the background of the theoretical formulations on union democracy which are popular among western social scientists. Ramaswamy questions the fashionable attempts to explain workers' involvement in union work in relation to social factors such as age, sex, education, caste etc. and stresses, like Holmström, the need for understanding workers' interest and participation in unions in relation to their work experience, social experience, union leaders' behaviour, management behaviour and the meaning of the union in terms of their

concrete expectations and needs. The workers studied by Ramaswamy
had developed social, economic as well as political interests in the
background, of a special legacy of political consciousness and ideo-
logy in the region, workers' interest in their jobs, exploitative
management practices and an effective union leadership at the plant
level.

Ramaswamy discovered a mutiplex social, economic and political
bond connecting workers with their union which served them as a
broad-based instrumentality. Union politics was not just a matter
of politicians using the union for their own ends; workers had partly
adopted politics as an end in itself and partly used it to serve
their economic ends. Workers accepted the union leaders only insofar
as they supported and promoted their (workers') multiple stakes in the
workplace and in society. Union leadership was therefore much more
democratic and responsive to members' needs than is generally assumed.
In contrast, another union in the same town and industry depended more
on political aspirations of its leaders and h .ce was under greater
control of the political party with which-it was associated. It was
forced to make alliances with employers at the cost of member intere-
ats in the context of a formidable rival union. This union therefore
was oligarchic in its structure and working. This research served to
place the problems of union politics and democracy in a clearer pers-
pective. Ramaswamy pointed out that the controversy regarding the
role of non-workers (conventionally called outsiders), especially
those with political vested interests, may not have much relevance

for achievement of workers' goals.  Insofar as workers are politically
socialized, they are likely to use union politics to serve their
genuine social and economic interests.

The workers and the unions studied by Ramaswamy cannot of course
be regarded as typical or representative of the reality of unions and
workers in India.  This is clearly borne out by Mamkoottam's study
(1982) of trade unionism among the employees of the Tata Iron and Steel
Company (TISCO) at Jamshedpur.  Unlike the workers studied by
Ramaswamy, TISCO workers were quite apathetic to the union and its
activities.  This apathy is explained by Mamkoottam in terms of a
complex set of social, economic and organizational factors.  The
workers were socially divided according to their caste, regional and
religious affiliations on the one hand, and according to skill and
wage differentials on the other.  These multifarious lines of divi-
sion cut across each other to preclude any effective bond to unite
employees as an interest group.  At the same time, the company's pater-
nalistic style of management and economic affluence enabled it to
provide attractive perquisites and social benefits to employees and
their familites, which reinforced the workers' apathy to the union.
Moreover, the Tatas' image as progressive employers lent them a good
deal of credibility to cover their hostility to unions behind a
facade of an effective relationship of collective bargaining and
participative management in the interest of workers, while in reality
they were hostile to the union and used it to control workers'
freedom and aspirations.

The union leadership, on its part, was riven by factionalism and power struggle among office-bearers hankering after personal glorification. Hence, both collective bargaining and the much-publicized and idealized joint consultative committees were used by union leaders to maintain their internal balance of power and collude with the management to control and discipline workers rather than articulating and promoting their interests. Mamkoottam has presented considerable information to suggest that the management and the union jointly used the institutions of bargaining, dispute resolution, grievance redressal and joint consultation to divide, exploit and victimize workers. This collaboration exacerbated the workers' apathy towards the union and made the latter distinctly oligarchic.

Murphy's incisive study (1981) of the origin, growth and dynamics of trade unionism in the Tamil Nadu textile industry duringthe period 1918-1940 seeks to examine the popular view (supported by many students of trade unionism in India) that Indian trade unions were basically a product of the structure and dynamics of the politics of the nationalist struggle. Murphy argues that the first unions in Tamil Nadu resulted not only from political unrest but also from the debilitating effect of inflation on the workers who sought leadership from outside to fight employers for a better deal. Union leaders were not merely outsiders and politicians -- free agents manipulating a pliable workforce. They had to depend on the support of workers and plant-level leaders for successful trade union activity. The rank and file workers looked for alternative leadership when existing leaders

ignored or betrayed the. The unity and divisions among workers were related to the managerial, technological and economic structure of the employing mills, the social structure of the community around the mill and the relation of jobbers (first-line supervisors-cum-recruiting agents) to the unions. The strongest unions developed among relativel more educated and committed workers in longer-established and finan-cially more viable mills with more rationalized technology. While caste and community played some role in dividing workers into rival unions, these primordial bonds often accentuated or complicated union rivalries rather than serving as the basis for such rivalries.

Uma Ramaswamy (1983) studied the social life of industrial workers in and around Coimbatore in a holistic perspective. Her main concern was with the extent to which the workers had acquired the attributes of the working class as understood in the west. The urban workers, who lived in the main parts of the city, had developed the characteristics of an industrial prolstariat as they were entirely dependent on factory jobs for their economic existence. Their social life in the factory as well as in the community of residence was oriented to work. They were interested in work, resisted unwelcome managerial pressures, actively participated in union work and had developed political consciousness. They aspired for higher incomes and jobs with higher status but were aware of their restricted opportunities to rise in the social and organizational hierarchy. These forces had largely reduced the significance of traditional bonds such as caste. On the other hand, many workers possessed

a distinct status-consciousness in the sense that they looked upon

factory jobs as a necessary precursor to their settling in agricul-

tural or commercial enterprise. The workers living in the suburban

or rural areas showed a clear trend in this direction by involving

themselves or their kin in petty income-generating tasks outside fac-

tory working hours. In the light of these data, the author characterizes

the Coimbatore workers as an industrial working class with a tinge

of Indian culture. The "working class" aspect however is regarded as

constituting the dominant part of their social existence.

One major advantage of sociological studies based on a totalistic

view of social reality is that the researcher often develops interest

and insights into issues which may be peripheral to the main inquiry.

For instance, Ramaswamy's research on workers and unions led him to

examine the factors contributing to strikes and their consequences

for management and workers (Ramaswamy; 1978: 14-40). Contrary to the

age-old managerial and popular views on strikes, Ramaswamy demonstra-

ted that strikes were not always consequent up  workplace relations nor

were they always a result of indisciplined, frustrated or greedy

workers or selfish politicians and union leaders. Some strikes arose

from workers' consciousness of rights or unions' assertion of their

right to represent workers' interests. Some reflected workers'

reaction to management's or union leaders' use of power which  was

perceived as exploitative. Some symbolized workers' reaction to the

action  of government or politicians. Also, strikes often  served to

provide the safety valve to workers' frustrations and hostility

towards management and hence had a positive effect on the climate of industrial relations.

Each of the studies summarized above suffers from limitations. Each study was restricted to a specific industrial community in a small geographical region and hence cannot be claimed as representative or typical of the labour scene in India. Secondly, these studies (except Murphy's historical analysis) were conducted by the method of participation-cum-observation. It is therefore possible to question the reliability and validity of the data underlying the scholar's conclusions in terms of some current norms of methodology in social science. The most significant value of these studies, however, lies in their _gestalt_ approach to the behaviour of workers and union leaders under study. Each actor's behaviour was noticed and analysed as a meeting point of the myriad forces emanating from a variety of institutional sources -- the work organization, the union, the wider, economic and political structures and the traditional social bonds. The actor was perceived not as a victim of these forces or as the torch-bearer of any specific structural unit (e.g. traditional institutions) but as a receiver, interpreter and, occasionally manipulator of the forces to suit his experience, interest and ambition. This approach, I believe, has enabled the scholars to contribute substantial knowledge about industrial workers and unions. Although these scholars were not uniformly concerned with the core issues in industrial relations, one can draw the following lessons in industrial relations from their studies :

1. Workers have a psychological, economic and social stake in their jobs and work organizations.

2. A worker's interest in, and attitude to, work and managerial discipline depends on his economic needs, education, political awareness and the management's use of its authority and power. Acts of indiscipline, intransigence and low productivity on the part of workers cannot be explained adequately unless these are analysed not only in relation to the multifarious social bonds influencing workers but also in relation to the power structure in the work organization, in the union, in government labour administration and between these organizations.

3. The political connections and actions of union leaders are not always detrimental to workers' interests. Workers are likely to use union politics for their economic goals, especially if they are politically socialized. Hence, questions regarding politicians' or outsiders' dominance over workers may not have much relevance for effectiveness of unions in serving workers' interests

4. A union becomes oligarchic and exploitative for workers when union politics or leaders' authority is used to promote the leaders' selfish interests, often with the collusion of an exploitative management, in the face of a fragmented work-force which is susceptible to exploitation.

5. Institutions of joint consultation and participative management may serve management as a facade to exploit, victimize and divide workers with the help of a colluding union.

6. A strike does not necessarily reflect an industrial disputes. Nor do strikes always signify indiscipline or intransigence among workers and unions. Strikes need to be understood in their social and political contexts.

## Possibilities for the Future

The studies I have summarized above should serve us as pathfinders. They should help us to reflect on the capability of sociology to contribute to the understanding of the reality of industrial relations spectrum. In this perspective, let me share my thoughts on what sociology needs to do for industrial relations.

For far too long and too widely, sociology of industrial relations has been equated with sociological investigations into managerial problems — discipline, productivity, commitment, alienation, outsiders in trade unions etc. These studies are usually claimed as unbiased and non-partisan as they are conducted in the spirit of scientific inquiry. We should however recognize that such studies incorporate an implicit acceptance of managerial values of performance, peace and stability of the existing industrial order. It is, of course, true that these values follow from the corresponding value system in the larger society. It is also true that industrial management as well as the sociologists concerned with industrial relations demonstrate a measure of acceptance of the ideas of equality, fairness, social justice, human welfare and participative management enshrined in our social and legal superstructure. Nevertheless, sociologists (as well as others) need to be constantly aware that

work organizations, trade unions and administrative systems involved in industrial relations are basically hierarc _cal structures with uneven distribution of power and control. A sociological inquiry into labour problems may therefore result in partisan sociology unless the problems are examined in terms of the relevant experiences of the people at both ends of the power structure.

This simple yet often overlooked fact has led some western sociologists to develop a radical approach to the sociology of industrial relations. This approach (see, for instance, Fox: 1977) repudiates the pluralist view that trade unionism and collective bargaining represent a balance of power in labour management relations. According to the radicals, collective bargaining and agreements are built upon the foundation of a fundamental inequality between the two parties which tends to be treated as sacrosanct by people in power. On this view, industrial relations need to be studied in terms of the amount of control exercised by workers over the work situation and employment conditions. This approach may imply for the sociologist the substitution of one set of ideologies (the managerial) by another (the working class). However, it enables us to draw the lesson that sociologists who wittingly or unwittingly, accept discipline, stability etc., as their end-variables in research represent a bias for a sectional ideology and that this bias can be at least partially corrected by taking into account the experiences and ideologies of all sections concerned with industrial relations. Only a sociology built on this premise may have some predictive value.

One important dimesnion of the theory and practice of industrial
relations is the assumed dichotomy between employers and employees or
management and workers.  It is necessary to remember that workers and
managers exist at many levels in organizational hierarchies.  White-
collar employees in the commercial and service sectors, technicians,
administrators and professionals contain  several  characteristics
traditionally associated with blue-collar workers.  For instance,
administrators and managers at the mieele levels in industry, business
and government increasingly express a sense of powerlessness and
victimization from various ends—employers, subordinate employees and
trade unions.  Many managerial and technical employee-groups have
formed or joined trade unions whose activities compare favourably with
those ●f blue-collar unions.  While labour law and  employers' policies
make occasional adaptations to this changing reality of the definition
of workers, the sociological understanding of this reality has so far
hardly risen above vague generalizations and prognostications.  The
questions we need to raise in this regard sho .d include : What are
the similarities and differences in the behaviour of the various
categories of workers at the workplace ?  What are their comparative
experiences of the employment situation, managerical control, trade
union structures and activities and traditional norms and institutions ?
There is  limitless scope here for sociological studies on the pattern
adopted by Holmstrõm and Uma Ramaswamy.  Such studies can help us to
derive meaningful implications for comprehending the structures of
industrial relations in a variety of industrial situations.

We also need to stretch sociological attention beyond the industrial situations conventionally holding the favours of scholars in industrial relations. The ties and discords between employers and employees in the informal, unorganized, semi-urban and rural sectors of industry may not be less important, from any point of view, than those in the large, organized, formal and urban sectors. The economic fortunes of the unorganized sector seem to be getting progressively more dependent on the organized sector in consequence of government's policy to decentralize production and encourage small enterprise. Also, the people manning jobs in the organized and the unorganized sectors may be tied by bonds of kinship, caste, neighbourhood and common experience as wage earners. Hence, the workers in the two sectors may set a demonstration effect for each other in terms of behaviour at work, life-style in society and socio-economic aspirations. This trend has obvious implications for the structure and management of industrial relations in the society as a whole. Sociological studies of workers and management in the unorganized sector, therefore, can make valuable contribution to the understanding and predictions with regard to industrial relations at various levels. The broad questions we should deal with in this regard include : To what extent have workers in the unorganized sector developed an identity as a working class vis-a-vis their more fortunate counterparts in the organized sector ? What are their social attitudes, problems, frustrations, hopes and aspirations ? Under what conditions are they likely to be drawn into or keep away from trade unions ?

Trade unions are still often projected as enigmatic, ephemeral
and socially questionable organizations. A large population of
politicians, bureaucrats, employers and managers seem to have mastered
the art of eulogizing the role of  trade unions in industry and society
in public pronouncements and avoiding, manipulating or blackmailing
unions for immediate managerial gains in concrete action.  Trade
unionists, on their part, seem to possess adequate skills in blackmailing
or managing workers and employers in their own interest.  But we have
little sociological knowledge in these matters.  Sociological studies
centred on specific technological, regional, political and social
situations should help us to grasp the real meaning of trade unionism.
What business are unions in ?  What    they have to offer to their
members ?  What do the members expect unions to do ?  What political,
social, economic and historical factors contribute to the varying
degrees of involvement of leaders and members in union activities ?
What conditions prompt managements and unions to collaborate, collide
or collude ?  None of these questions is new or entirely unanswered.
But we need concrete, situational information, analysis and conceptua-
lization.  Scholars such  as Ramaswamy and Mamkoottam have only paved
the way.

Sociological interest in industrial relations at the workplace
has largely  been restricted to issues such as satisfaction and
commitment, as I have mentioned earlier.  There is  room for deeper
sociological (as well as psychological) inquiry  into employees'
interest in and attitude to work[5].  The host of  rules and institutions
regulating industrial relations at the enterprise level — maintenance

of discipline, handling grievances, collective bargaining, wage
structures, conciliation, adjudication, labour welfare and joint
consultation — are usually analysed in terms of broad categories
of actors (workers, unions, employers, labour administration, labour
courts.etc.). Sociological studies may provide broader perspectives
and deeper insights in this core structure of employment relations.
What contribution is made by social, economic and political forces
to the structure of effort-reward relationship in specific social and
technological contexts ? To what extent do status and power influence
the process of implementation of disciplinary norms ? How does the
bargaining process reflect the power structure between managers,
workers and union leaders ? How do legal norms evolve and change in
relation to social and historical forces ? To what extent do conci-
liation and adjudication reflect the social biases of the presiding
officials and the culture of the local community ?

An adequate fund of sociological knowledge in the various
dimensions of the industrial relations phenomenon should enable us to
examine the industrial relations structure as a part of Indian society
and culture. All industrializing, as well as industrialized, socie-
ties adopt optimum productivity as a crucial social objective; and
they should. The structure of industrial relations therefore needs
to be regarded as an instrument in the task of achievement of this
goal of productivity. However, this cannot be looked upon as a neat
administrative exercise in choosing means to match adopted goals.
As Dore (1973, 1975) has suggested, the industrial relations structure

in different industrializing societies tend to develop in different

directions. A late-developing society takes er technological and

organizational characteristics (automation, collective bargaining etc.)

which would have arisen in developed societies long after they took

to industrialization. But the late developer also retains some organi-

zational forms based in its traditional culture. For instance, Japan's

well-known institution of a life-long mutuality of obligations between

employers and employees in a highly sophisticated technological

environment reflects the coexistence of traditional and modern cultures.

Dore goes on to argue that the organization-oriented culture in Japanese

industry may eventually be adopted in the market-oriented western

industry which may need a stable work-force in consequence of rapid

technological changes and scarcity of highly skilled manpower.

Such observations and predictions may not have much value in the

Indian context. However, the type of research and reflections

represented by such studies should provide intellectual inspiration

to the sociologists of industrial relations in India. We need to

organize studies to find out the ways in which the industrial rela-

tions structure reflects elements of (i) the traditional culture,

(ii) the industrial civilization of the west and (iii) the overall

socio-economic conditions in the country at present. Such studies

may provide some clues to questions such as : What is the proportion

of paternalism and professionalism in the various sectors of manage-

ment ? Is there any sense in which paternalism is conducive to

performance and achievement of employees' goals ? What are the

implications of religious, regional and caste chauvinism for industrial
relations if the impression that such chauvin: n is growing in the
country is valid ?   What is the validity in the fear expressed by
a section  of intellectuals that industrial relations in India will
be guided  more by social expediency as perceived by people in power
rather than by market forces as in the west or by the organization-
oriented culture as in Japan ?  How are the varijus sections of the
industrial relations community likely to respond to such expedient
actions in the  short run as well as in the long run ?

In short, the field of industrial relations seems to be as
inviting for the sociologist as it is uncultivated.

## NOTES

1. As I am primarily concerned with industrial relations in India, I shall avoid explicit mention of the Indian context unless such as mention is essential for clarity or comparative statements.

2. I owe this thought to Beyms (1980).

3. This subject has been discussed in the European context by Allen (1971), Bain and Clegg (1974) and Hill and Thurley (1974). These authors have influenced my views in parts.

4. This part has been summarized from Holmstrom (1976). pp.86-121. I have used Holmstrom's language in an edited form.

5. Sengupta (1979) provides an interesting example of insightful sociological research on this subject.

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