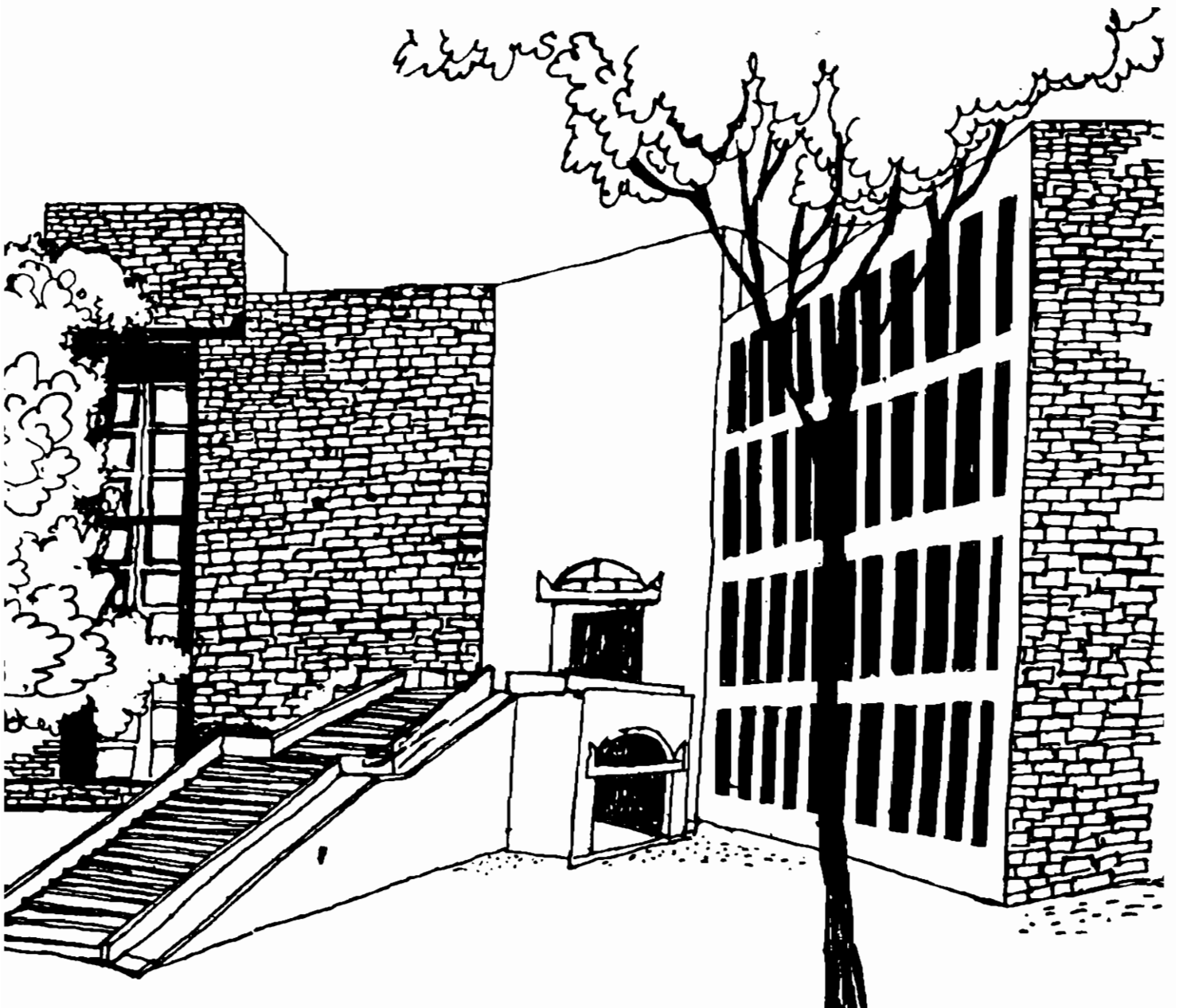




# Working Paper



**TRADE UNION PRAXIS - 1  
(Towards a Sociology of Trade Unions)**

**MACROPRAXIS OF ALIENATION -  
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONTEXT  
AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

By

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONTEXT  
AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## TRADE UNION PRAXIS - 1

(Towards a Sociology of Trade Unions)

### 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Trade union studies from the sociological perspective in the Indian context have been characterized by certain symptoms which can be appropriately diagnosed as a form of politico-economic myopia. The apolitical and ahistorical nature of those studies has yielded a distorted view of trade unions. Trade unions have been projected as if they are phenomena which are insulated from larger industrial relations, politico-economic and historical processes.

The central focus of this work therefore is to make an attempt to develop an adequate conceptual framework from the sociological perspective for understanding the role of trade unions in society. And the key to the development of this perspective is the concept of trade union praxis.

The term "praxis", drawn from Marxian writings, has been interpreted in different ways by different authors. Kappen<sup>1</sup> (1983) sees two distinct patterns emerging from the plethora of interpretations one neutral, the other value laden. Praxis in the neutral sense means the totality of sense experience which includes both action and passion, perception and need, the whole of man's relationship with his environment through seeing, touching, hearing, feeling, loving, willing, acting and

suffering. Praxis, in the value laden sense, derives from the historical dialectic phases: the praxis of alienation, the praxis of disalienation and the praxis of humanised social systems. Kappen's perceptive interpretation of praxis has been taken as a basis for developing the sociological perspective on the praxis of trade unions. Trade union praxis or the role of trade unions in society can be conceptualized as a function of three interrelated processes - the praxis of the alienation of the working classes, the praxis of disalienation, the praxis of humanised patterns of socio-economic organization. The working classes, as the subjects of history therefore should be actively involved in the praxis of alienation and disalienation as history evolves in the direction of the praxis of the liberated man under more humane, more just, more egalitarian patterns of society.

The praxis of alienation of the working classes has two conceptually distinguishable elements-the macropraxis of alienation and the micropraxis of alienation. The macropraxis of alienation of the working classes includes the socio economic formation in a given context and the concomitant industrial relations processes within which trade unions live, move and have their being. An understanding of the socio-economic formation and the role played by industrial relations structures and processes is vital for enhancing the understanding of trade union praxis from the sociological perspective.

The micropraxis of alienation also has two conceptually distinct dimensions - the manner in which work itself is organized to generate surplus value and the manner in which the working classes experience alienation from work. The understanding of the micropraxis of alienation therefore, on the one hand involves the analysis of the structure and processes of work organizations in a given politico-economic context. On the other hand, the analysis of the modalities of the alienation of the working classes is also important to enhance the understanding of the praxis of trade unions.

The alienation of the working classes impels them to participate in trade unions. It is this involvement in trade unions which activates the praxis of disalienation of the working classes. A critical analysis of trade union processes become vital to understand the role of trade unions in the praxis of alienation and disalienation.

The analysis of the praxis of alienation and the praxis of disalienation will form the basis for refining the definition of trade union praxis or the role of trade unions in society.

## **1.2. THE MACROPRAXIS OF ALIENATION**

The purpose of the rest of this part towards gaining a critical understanding of trade union praxis is to analyze the macropraxis of alienation.



The discussion on the macropraxis of alienation is divided into three parts:

- \* Part one will be an examination of the relevant portions of the Constitutional vision which is the basis of the superstructure which Indian society has given to itself.
- \* Part Two will be a general overview of various definitions of Indian society in order to gain a sharper understanding of the Indian socio-economic formation.
- \* Part Three is a critical evaluation of industrial relations theories with a view to developing an appropriate theoretical perspective for analyzing trade union praxis in the Indian context.

### 1.3. THE CONSTITUTIONAL VISION

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The Preamble to the Constitution of India was a conscious statement of vision which the nation gave itself in the wake of its political liberation from direct British rule and as a mandate for the course of its future development. The goal of establishing a "sovereign, democratic republic" spelt out in 1949 was further expanded to read a "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic" in 1976<sup>2</sup>. The Preamble also promises social, economic and political justice; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the integrity of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

The elaboration of the broad principles contained in the Preamble in the numerous Articles of the Constitutions show that several democratic rights related to work organizations and worker

organizations have been conferred . Art. 16, for instance, provides equality of opportunity in matters of public employment . Art. 19 gives freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and freedom to form associations. Art. 24 prohibits child labour.

The Directive Principles of State Policy are further elaborations of the socialist and democratic thrust of Indian society. Art. 38 exhorts the state to establish a social order in which social, economic and political justice inform all institutions of national life. It further states that the state should minimize inequalities in income and also eliminate inequalities of status, facilities and opportunities.

Art. 39 spells out the constitutional vision in unequivocal terms. It says that the State should direct its policy towards securing:

- a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to serve the common good.
- c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.

- d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- e) that the health and strength of workers men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations not suited to their age and strength.
- f) that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Thus it is evident that promotion of common good, eschewing of the concentration of wealth, rejection of all modes of exploitation of workers, women and children are some of the major measures advocated by Art. 39.<sup>8</sup>

Art. 41 states that the state should exert itself to make provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.<sup>9</sup> Art. 42 directs the state to ensure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.<sup>10</sup> Art. 43 exhorts the state to secure for industrial, agricultural and all other workers a living wage, a decent standard of life, full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.<sup>11</sup> Art.43A says that the state should secure the participation of workers in the management of industry.<sup>12</sup>

The vision which Indian society has given to itself as contained in the Constitution is founded on three basic ideals - democracy, socialism and secularism. The fundamental rights conferred on every citizen and the broad guidelines given to the State within the framework of the Directive Principles of State Policy are not only attempts to operationalize the basic ideals but also the very basis of the rights of employees and employers in the Indian context. However, the creation of the kind of society envisaged by the Constitution does not take place in a vacuum but in a concrete politico-economic and sociocultural context. The analysis of the Constitutional vision cannot be divorced from the analysis of socio-economic realities. And more so when the very purpose of the exercise is to develop a perspective for industrial relations in a given context.

#### 1.4 INDIAN SOCIETY : A POLITICO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

The basic question therefore still remains : What is the true face of Indian society? The attempt to answer this basic question has been the subject of serious debate both among academic theorists as well as among political activists. Since the praxis of worker organizations is inextricably linked with the definition of Indian society, a brief overview of the theoretical diversity on this question is warranted.

Academic theorists have engaged in serious research on the above issue as evidenced by the mode of production debate. Alice Thorner reviewed major contributions on the issue and came to the

following conclusion: "What, we may now ask, has been clarified in the course of the past dozen years of debate, and what remains controversial? First of all, there would no longer appear to be any doubt that capitalism today dominates Indian agriculture as it was generally seen to dominate industry at the time the discussion began".<sup>13</sup> Does this imply that Indian society is subject to capitalist development? "Here, the answer is less evident since India's capitalism has emerged in a particular colonial setting, markedly different from the conditions in the metropolitan countries where capitalism was born".<sup>14</sup>

Although there is general consensus about the adoption of the capitalist path to development in the Indian context, certain other features of Indian society complicate the definition of Indian society in relation to the mode of production. Its caste based social structure, its feudal agrarian relations, its colonial past, the tension between fundamentalist and secular forces, the conflict between regional and nationalist elements become important considerations in the process of evolving an adequate definition.

Hamza Alavi has this to say about the relationship between feudal or semi-feudal landlords and the capitalist. "We counter, all too often, an a priori assumption that there is a conflict of interest between the feudal or semi-feudal class of landlords and the bourgeoisie. Such assumptions are premised on a conception of the co-existence, in dialectical opposition, of a "feudal mode of production" and a "capitalist mode of production", so that

such a class conflict is assumed to exist, a priori. Facts are forced into the mould of theoretical assumptions .... Nor is there any evidence of conflict between the so-called 'Capitalist farmers' and the so-called 'feudal landowners'. We find that the big farmer strategy has served the interests of the bourgeoisie, and the interests of the landlords and the rich peasants coincide, in that respect at least.<sup>15</sup> Dwelling on the relationship between big Indian capitalists and foreign capital, he says, "A new kind of structural dependence between the big Indian bourgeoisie and imperialist bourgeoisie has been developing ..... The new basis of the relationship is in the form of technological collaboration .... In the post-colonial situation, there is a new basis of the subordination of the big indigenous capital by metropolitan capital, and within the hierarchical relationship, there is a convergence of interests between the big Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialist bourgeoisie, a basis which is radically different from that which determined the subordination of the 'comprador bourgeoisie' to the imperialist bourgeoisie in the colonial situation when some contradictions between the rising Indian bourgeoisie and imperialism came to the surface."<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between the feudal remnants, Indian bourgeoisie and foreign capital has also been discussed by Sau.<sup>17</sup> "The feudal remnants and the rich peasants consume as much of the industrial goods as the urban population and provide a steady and cheap labour supply to the industries by their exploitation of agricultural workers. The bourgeoisie, on the

other hand, utilizes cash crops for domestic industry or for exports and greatly contributes to a fast rising demand for foodgrains. And the flow of technology to the Third World moreover benefits both the domestic and foreign bourgeoisie. Though there are spheres of possible discord among the ruling classes, this is basically how the alliance for underdevelopment functions".<sup>18</sup> Sau again has said, "Landlords and rich farmers, the big bourgeoisie, and the foreign capitalists are the three main ruling classes in India. There is a remarkable degree of convergence in their class interests".

It has often been pointed out that the mode of production debate has not given due importance to the ethnic diversity of the social structure in the Indian context.<sup>19</sup> Thorner commenting on this lacuna says : "Early interventions in the debate were largely limited to economic issues. Later papers have paid increasing attention to elements of consciousness and culture, with special reference to caste. One of the weaknesses of Marxist studies on India has been precisely a failure, perhaps even an unwillingness, to deal adequately with this basic facet of Indian society". Thorner quotes from a report of the Atyachar Virodh Samithi in which it is contended that the caste system is an effective method of economic exploitation. The caste structure reflects land ownership patterns and with the growth of capitalism, social tensions also escalate sometimes leading to caste riots. Caste affiliations also retard the development of class consciousness. Thus, the picture which emerges is that Indian society is characterized by the progressive social

transformation along the capitalist path to development with landlords, Indian and foreign capital in control. There has been a convergence of class interests among these diverse constituents both in the colonial as well as the post-colonial periods. There has also been the resurgence of movements to protect and promote the interests of ethnic entities.

When it comes to political activists, there are variations in the definition of Indian society. Rightist parties like the Congress profess a form of democratic socialism. As evidence of its socialistic inclinations mention is often made of Nehru's writings, the abolition of privy purses, land reform legislations and its policy of nationalization. The concept of mixed economy has projected the landlord, private Indian capital, foreign capital and state capital as the major catalysts of economic development in India.

The parties committed to socialism differ in their definitions of Indian society. The Communist Party of India (CPI) sees the state in India to be controlled by the progressive national bourgeoisie with a subordinate role for the big bourgeoisie and the landlords. The party advocates the formation of a broad national democratic front incorporating the working classes, peasants, urban middle classes and the non-monopoly national bourgeoisie and adopts an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, pro-democratic posture. There have been periods in the history of the CPI in which it has taken a pro-Soviet and a pro-Congress stance.



The year 1964 saw the split in the CPI which led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The CPI-M defines the Indian state as an instrument of the landlord-bourgeoisie combine under the leadership of the big bourgeoisie who are characterized by the progressive collaboration with foreign finance capital in the pursuit of the capitalist path to development. The CPI-M considers the bourgeois - landlord combine as anti-progressive and advocates the formation of a people's democratic government consisting of agriculture workers, poor peasants, middle peasants, urban middle classes under the leadership of the industrial working classes. Non-monopoly bourgeoisie and rich peasants are not excluded from the people's democratic front which has the mandate of ushering in a people's revolution in the process of adopting an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal stance.

Marxist-Leninist groups in their characterization of the bourgeoisie classify them in terms of the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie. The comprador bourgeoisie serve the interests of foreign capital as well as domestic feudal interests and are at variance with the interests of the national bourgeoisie. Both in the colonial as well as in the post colonial stages of Indian society, the CPI(ML) contends that the state has been controlled by the comprador bourgeoisie who are subservient to imperialist interests. The first task of the masses according to this Marxist school would be to organize struggles against the feudal - comprador - imperialist combine which does not even allow independent capitalist industrialization to take place in the Indian context.

Recently, the Bharatiya Janata Party has emerged as a major political force infused with the objective of establishing a Hindu theocratic state which would have elements of democratic freedoms, welfare capitalism and a policy of positive secularism. The National Front which is now in power is built around the ideals of setting up a democratic, secular, socialist state.

The brief overview of the attempts made by academic theorists and political activists to define Indian society and the synthesis of various views reveals the following pattern:

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The Indian Socio-economic formation

Ideology	Hinduism	Socialism	Marxism-CPI/CPM/CPI-ML		
Ethnicity	Region	Religion	Caste	Linguistic	
Mixed Economy	Private	State	Joint		
Plural Property Relations	Sole Prop.	Partner-ship	Fvt.Ltd.	Jt. Stock State	Jt.Sector MNC Coop.
Multiparty System	Cong.I	National Front	BJP	Left Parties	Regional Parties

---

- \* The debate is characterized by ideological pluralism in which Marxist ideology as well as liberal right ideologies coexist. Marxist ideology itself is pluralist in the sense that there are several strands of Marxist view points in debate with each other.
- \* The Marxist perspective needs to incorporate the reality of ethnic plurality within its framework. Ethnic identities

revolving around caste, tribe, religion and language are inextricable realities in any attempt to characterize the Indian socio-economic formation. There is also the awakening of ethnicity in which identification with the immediate ethnic grouping takes precedence over identification with a nationalist feeling.

\* Ideological and ethnic pluralism has resulted in political pluralism in which different ideological and ethnic entities seek expression in the democratic process through the mechanism of political parties.

\* The influence of both capitalist as well as socialist ideologies and experiences which was available to the Constitution Makers as well as successive regimes has had its impact on the design of the Indian Socio-economic formation. If capitalist society is considered the thesis and if the socialist system is viewed as the antithesis, then the synthesis that is the Indian socio-economic formation resulted in the "Mixed Economy" model. Several forms of property relations have co-existed as well as competed with each other in the Mixed Economy System in India. Different forms of ownership have been experimented with - sole proprietorship, partnerships, private limited ownership, joint stock ownership, state ownership, co-operatives, joint sector ownership (state and private promoters) and multinationals.

If there is an underlying thread of consensus running through ideological, ethnic, political and economic plurality, it is

the commitment to the freedoms enshrined in the fundamental rights clauses of the Constitution. Political parties of various ideological strands, ethnic interest groups, trade unions, employers' and trade associations have demonstrated this commitment although conflict of interests between different contradictory constituents has led to the infringement or curtailment of freedom.

The theory and practice of industrial relations therefore has to be seen in the context of the Indian socio-economic formation characterized by ethnic pluralism, economic contradictions as well as a vibrant commitment to the democratic ideal. The search for an appropriate industrial relations perspective has to take into consideration the complexity of the Indian situation.

#### 1.5. TOWARDS A RELEVANT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PERSPECTIVE

Several systematic attempts have been made by industrial sociologists and industrial relations theorists to develop theoretical perspectives to analyse industrial relations and trade unionism. One of the most comprehensive and substantive effort to draw together various approaches to industrial relations and trade unionism is to be found in the work of Michael Poole (1984). He begins his work with an acknowledgement that trade unions play a pivotal role in society today. "The gradual transformation of industrial societies from their earliest elemental foundations has been accompanied by a phenomenon of great moment : the rise of associations of labour

to a position of considerable prominence in the institutional structure of modern communities"<sup>20</sup>. The recognition of trade unions as important components of the institutional framework has led to interest in research on the subject : "..... There has been a noticeable quickening of attention in academic circles themselves in the formulation of systematic models of trade union growth, structure and policy."<sup>21</sup> This has led to numerous analytical frameworks "on the trade union question ..... but there have been remarkably few attempts to draw together the main strands of classical and modern approaches to labour theory....."<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, Foole sets for himself twin objectives : ".....First, it will be our concern to review the principal debates on the theory of trade unions within the cognate fields of enquiry of industrial relations and industrial sociology respectively; and second, of no less importance will be our endeavour to advance existing theoretical propositions....."<sup>23</sup> . He then proceeds to classify existing theories into two broad categories:

1. Early theories of the labour movement
2. Contemporary perspectives on the labour movement.

Foole's discussion of early theories of the labour movement draws heavily upon Perlman's Labour Union Theories of America.<sup>24</sup> Perlman distinguished five basic approaches to analyzing trade unions:

1. Trade unions as moral institutions flowing from Christian Socialist traditions.
2. Trade unions as radical institutions flowing from Marxian theoretical and methodological premises.
3. Trade unions as defence mechanisms flowing from the discipline of psychology.
4. Trade unions as "business" associations claiming neoclassical economics as the source of this tradition.
5. Trade unions as political organizations engaged in the balance of power between organizations, employers and governments.

In the Indian context too, similar early approaches to trade unionism are discernible in the labour movement. Most of the early inspiration for the organization of labour came from religious sources. The origin of one of the first formal trade unions in India, the Madras Labour Union established in 1918, has been traced to religious discourses held near the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras. The congregation of workers of the Mills for religious discourses slowly led to the move for organizing workers to redress workers grievances and to alleviate worker problems. During the period 1920-1947, there is evidence of radical trade unionism inspired by Marxian ideology. Industrial Psychologists have tried to analyze trade unionism in terms of the frustration - aggression theory of workers

involvement in trade unions. Early theorists have even advocated a 'politically - neutral business union' model for acceptance by Indian trade unionists. There have also been the socialist brand of trade unionism with its emphasis on trade union power in order to neutralise employer and state power.

Poole goes on to discuss contemporary perspectives on trade unions along the following lines:

1. Systems Models of labour relations
2. Liberal - pluralist approaches to trade unions
3. Radical contributions
4. Structural analysis
5. Institutional and organizational approaches
6. Culturalist or subjectivist models.

The discussion of these perspectives leads Poole on to what he calls sign-posts for future researches <sup>25</sup> :

1. The importance of attaching or assigning weights to the main determinants.
2. The need to distinguish a series of dependent as well as independent variables in the field of enquiry.
3. A preliminary outline of hypothesized relationships between the complex ensemble of independent and dependent variables; and
4. The role of knowledge in enhancing human subjectivity in all contexts but not least in so far as trade union action is concerned.

Key dependent variables have also been identified by him. "Indeed it is evident that at least seven main dependent variables should be isolated for analytical purposes :<sup>26</sup>

1. Trade union growth
2. Trade union structure (especially morphology)
3. Internal Structure (administration and government)
4. Perceptions of unions and of unionism.
5. Differential rates of participation in unions.
6. Interaction relations within unions encompassing relations between rank-and-file members, representatives and leaders.
7. Relationships with employers and managers, the state and the legislature.

The survey of various analytical approaches, the identification of key dependent variables and the discernment of the future thrust of research in the area makes Poole conclude that "whatever may be the future of the labour movement, its ultimate contours will be shaped less by the exigencies of structure or so

called contradictions of modern political economics than by a series of conscious decisions that will not only impinge upon the concrete manifestations of union character but also, more especially, upon the prospects of enhancing these civilized values which alone can enable the free development of all socially useful potentialities and which encourage the concomitant creation of truly humanitarian social orders ...."<sup>27</sup> :

It might be useful at this point to recall that Poole's



contributions are being discussed in the process of searching for a relevant industrial relations perspective in the Indian context. While it must be admitted that Poole's work is an important effort in the direction of evaluating the state of theory in the field of industrial relations, the reservation about his conclusions revolves around the statement that value-based decisions and not the contradictions of a politico-economic system will ultimately determine the role of the labour movement in the years to come. The reservation in accepting the proposition stems from the empirical fact that trade unionism and industrial relations are not apolitical phenomena which can be divorced from a given socio-economic formation in its given moment of historical evolution. For instance, Ross <sup>28</sup> has said that a trade union is "essentially a political agency operating in an economic environment".

The analysis and synthesis of industrial relations theories should not be divorced from the dynamics of a given socio-economic formation. Industrial relations and trade unionism are therefore essentially political processes. Analytical frameworks which do not take the reality of the political process of industrial relations would be inadequate and incomplete and would not only distort reality but also distort the explanation of reality.

Industrial relations theory cannot be viewed merely in terms of "early theories" and "contemporary theories" but more appropriately in terms of 'apolitical approaches' and 'political approaches'. It would be relevant here to point out that this

classification applies only to industrial relations theories and not to industrial relations itself. Industrial relations as pointed out earlier is essentially political but industrial relations theorists may or may not incorporate this insight in their analytical frameworks. If they do not, the approach may be defined as 'apolitical' and if they do, the approach may be defined as 'political'.

It might be useful to examine some significant approaches to the analysis of industrial relations in order to be able to develop a relevant industrial relations perspective in the Indian context. Some of the approaches which will be examined are :

- Dunlop's Systems Model
- The Pluralist Approach represented by Flanders, Clegg and Fox
- Weber's Social Action approach.
- Lenin
- Trotsky
- Michels
- Marx and Engels
- Hyman

The credit for applying the systems concept to industrial relations goes to Dunlop. <sup>30</sup> It is within this perspective that Dunlop analyzes industrial relations systems as a subsystem of the society. "An industrial relations system at any one time in its development is regarded as comprised of certain actors, certain contexts, an ideology which binds the industrial

relations system together and a body of rules created to govern the actors at the work place and work community.

The actors are : 1. a hierarchy of managers and their representatives in supervisions, 2. a hierarchy of workers (non-managerial) and any spokesmen, and 3. Specialized government agencies created by the first private agencies (created by the first two actors) concerned with workers' enterprises and their relationships.....

The significant aspects of the environment in which the actors interact are : 1. the technological characteristics of the work place and work community, 2. the market or budgetary constraints which impinge on the actors, and 3. the locus and distribution of power in the larger society .....

The actors, in given contexts, establish rules for the work place and the work community, including those governing the contacts among the actors in an industrial relations system. This network or web of rules consists of procedures for establishing rules, the substantive rules and the procedures for deciding their application to particular situations. The establishment of these procedures and rules - the procedures are themselves rules - is the centre of attention in an industrial relations system.

If further element is required to complete the analytical system: an ideology or a set of ideas and beliefs, commonly held by the actors, that helps to bind or to integrate the system together as an entity" .

The brief description of Dunlop's approach to industrial relations shows a definite preoccupation with rules and rule-making and thus shows a concern for order and for containment of conflict. This approach has influenced several researchers like Anderson<sup>31</sup>, Blain<sup>32</sup> and Goodman<sup>33</sup> to mention but a few.

There have been several criticisms of Dunlop's Systems approach to labour relations but in the context of this study an important criticism has been that this approach does not give due importance to the nature and the forces shaping conflict. This should not be taken to mean that Dunlop is absolutely silent about the reality of conflict but it is obvious that the focus is more on the question of the containment of conflict through rule-making rather than on how conflict is generated.

Flanders<sup>34</sup> is yet another industrial relations theorist who evolved his pluralist approach to union-management relations drawing from the theories of Durkheim<sup>35</sup>, Chamberlain and Kuhn<sup>36</sup> and the Webbs.<sup>37 & 38</sup> The emphasis on job regulation through rule-making could be traced to Durkheim's pre-occupation with ethical standards and social conduct. Closely linked with ethics was the importance given to the function of the division of labour in maintaining a moral order. The social consequences of the breakdown of social order by "rulelessness" or "normlessness" were poignantly conceptualized by introducing the term "anomie" into sociological literature. The Webbs in their theorizing about trade unions had stressed the 'economic' functions of trade unions. Flanders did owe a debt to the Webbs

but he went beyond trade union economism to a view of trade unionism with social and political purposes while being engaged in the process of job regulation. Involved in this process are various institutions—government, employer organizations and employee organizations. In this voluntarist - pluralist approach, job regulation through collective bargaining become a major preoccupation. The entire thrust of this approach is oriented to the containment of conflict through institutionalization and regulation of the structure and process of union-management relations.

The pluralist approach has also been developed by other British theorists notably Clegg<sup>39</sup> and Fox<sup>40</sup>. Clegg is an advocate of a pluralist approach to industrial relations, but he, however, acknowledges that there is no equality of power between bargaining partners. Clegg made an attempt to compare pluralism and Marxism in relation to the study of industrial relations<sup>41</sup>. Although Clegg has called into question the usefulness of the pluralist approach in understanding trade union behaviour, he has attempted a very interesting analysis of the role of trade unionism in the context of collective bargaining<sup>42</sup> processes.

Fox advocated the radical pluralist approach to industrial relations drawing upon Durkheimian and Marxian sources. Fox made a distinction between 'unitary' and 'pluralist' conceptions of industrial organizations, the former recognizing only one source of legitimate authority whereas the latter concept accepts the reality of several interest groups invested with power<sup>43</sup>.

Fox, however, recognized an unequal distribution of power within and without the enterprise because "unlike the pluralist, the radical does not see collective organization of employees into trade unions as restoring a balance of power (or anything <sup>44</sup> approaching it), between the propertied and the property-less" .

The search for an appropriate industrial relations perspective <sup>45</sup> for this study finally brings us to Weber's has defined sociology as the science of social action. "Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a casual explanation of its course and consequence". In relation to industrial relations, the social action approach has paid considerable importance to the question of control in the context of increasing rationalization and bureaucratization. Closely related to Weber's concern related to control in organizations <sup>46</sup> was his concern with "power of control and dispersal" . Thus a trade union in Weber's scheme of things has both economic purposes as well as the goal of involvement in political and power struggles. Some of the major orientations in the Weberian approach have been to analyze the impact of techno-economic and politico-organizational changes on trade union structure and processes, to analyze the subjective interpretations of workers approaches to trade unionism and finally to analyze the power of the various components of the industrial relations environment - government, employers, trade unions and political parties. Thus

the Weberian approach gives theoretical and operational importance to "control" as well as to the power struggle to control work organizations - a power struggle in which all the actors in the industrial relations drama are caught up.

Marxian analysis of industrial relations and trade unionism has also taken several forms broadly categorizable into "pessimistic" and "optimistic" approaches<sup>47</sup>. The pessimistic approaches were represented by the writings of Lenin, Michels and Trotsky while the optimistic line of thinking was represented by Marx and Engels. These two approaches represent two variants of the Marxian analysis of trade unionism under capitalism.

Lenin was emphatic about the limitations of trade union consciousness in his "What is to be done?"<sup>48</sup>.

"We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without; the history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc."<sup>49</sup>. Thus trade union consciousness confines itself to a struggle with individual employers with a view to improving the economic lot of employees in specific industries. But this cannot be the sole aim of the working class movement. It could be a concomitant aim but the main thrust of the working

class movement would be the struggle against all forms of exploitative structures and processes. This can only be achieved by developing a social democratic consciousness through a process of political struggle with exploitative structures and processes. "Social democracy leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organized political force"<sup>50</sup>. Social democratic consciousness thus will lead to the establishment of a new social order. But this consciousness, according to Lenin, does not flow from the worker organization because working class organizations are capable only of trade union consciousness. Social democratic consciousness can come only if the working class joins hands with the intellectuals. "The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a neutral and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia"<sup>51</sup>. Thus the spontaneous working class movement will develop only trade union consciousness unless the movement



is oriented towards the development of social democratic consciousness under the guidance of the socialist leadership of intellectuals.

"Hence it follows that not only must social-democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but that they must not allow the organization of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness"<sup>52</sup>. The working class movement is characterized by trade union consciousness only unless the movement is politicized through a process of critical reflection and struggle against oppressive structures. Thus trade unionism, in the Leninist scheme of things by itself, is a far cry from the socialist development of a social democratic consciousness among the working classes.

<sup>53</sup>  
Trotsky has also expressed himself rather categorically on the limited role of trade unions under capitalism. Trade unions came into existence as the capitalist mode of production began to dominate the economic system". The trade unions were formed during the period of the growth and rise of capitalism. They had as their task the raising of the material and cultural level of the proletariat and the extension<sup>54</sup> of its political rights". Trade unions therefore had as their goals the protection of the economic, cultural and political rights of the working class in the context of capitalism.

History demonstrates, however, that the advancement of capitalism goes hand in hand with the immiseration of the working class". Capitalism can continue to maintain itself only by lowering the standard of living of the working class"<sup>55</sup>. Under these circumstances, then what are the options open for trade unions? "Under these conditions, trade unions can either transform themselves into revolutionary organizations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers"<sup>56</sup>. Trade unions can commit themselves to a radical transformation of society with a view to establishing a socialistic order or can, as it were, become an arm of capital by adopting the strategy of politics or collaboration with exploitative structures and processes. And Trotsky's analysis concludes that trade unionism per se has adopted the latter strategy and has become a tool in the hands of capital in the process of oppressing the working classes. "The trade union bureaucracy, which has satisfactorily solved its own social problem, took the second path. It turned all the accumulated authority of the trade unions against the socialist revolution and even against any attempts of the workers to resist the attacks of capital and reaction"<sup>57</sup>. Not only was the socialist goal lost sight of but even worker resistance to capitalist dominance over production structures and processes was eschewed by trade union bureaucracy. "As was said, the trade unions now play not a progressive but a reactionary role. Nevertheless they still embrace millions of workers. One must not think that the workers are blind and do not see the change in the historical role of the trade unions ..... The workers say to themselves : The Trade unions are bad, but without them it might

be even worse. This is the psychology of being in a blind alley"<sup>59</sup>. The working class is painfully aware that trade unions are reactionary but they are also aware that there appears to be no other alternative. A kind of helplessness and inevitability sets in. According to Trotsky, the "psychology of being in a blind alley" is even more disastrous for the working class. Meanwhile, the trade union bureaucracy persecutes the revolutionary workers even more badly, even more imprudently replacing internal democracy by the arbitrary action of a clique, in essence transforming the trade unions into some sort of concentration camp for the workers during the decline of capitalism"<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Michels, familiar with democratic reality in socialist parties in Europe, came to the conclusion that few citizens were interested in the common good. Based on participant observation, he came to the conclusion that only a minority of members in political parties take part in making decisions. This in turn leads to the "oligarchic" power of the leadership and apathy of the membership. It is this line of analysis which prompted Michels to enunciate the theory of the "iron law of oligarchy". Michels also extended his analysis to trade unionism and said that the "iron law of oligarchy" also applied to the structure and process of decision-making in trade unions.

The "pessimistic" Marxian analysis has been discussed above drawing mainly from the writings of Lenin, Trotsky and Michels. The "optimistic" analysis of trade unionism in the context of

production processes and production relations is represented by Engels and Marx. "In all branches of industry trade unions were formed with the outspoken intention of protecting the single working-man against the tyranny and neglect of the bourgeoisie. Their objects were : to fix wages and to deal, on mass as a power, with the employers, to regulate the rate of wages according to the profit of the latter, to raise it when opportunity offered, and to keep it uniform in each trade throughout the country"<sup>61</sup> . Thus the trade union started out as a "power" to counteract the power of the employer especially in securing for workmen fair wages. Thus trade unionism does have a function in capitalist society, a function of protest against exploitative functions in society. Then, what is the role of trade unions? What do trade unions do under the capitalist system?..... They must protest against every reduction, even if dictated by necessity : because they feel bound to proclaim that they, as human beings, shall not be made to bow to social circumstances, but social conditions ought to yield to them as human beings : because silence on their part would be a recognition of these social conditions, an admission of the right of the bourgeoisie to exploit the workers in good times and let them starve in bad ones<sup>62</sup> .

Marx in his writings also sees a role for trade unions in the context of the capitalist mode of production processes and relations although he is also keenly aware of the limitations of trade union action. "The first attempts of workers to associate among themselves, always take place in the form of combinations.

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss unites them in a common thought of resistance-combination"<sup>63</sup> . Workers form unions to struggle against capitalist employers. However, trade unions have to transcend these limited aims. "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself"<sup>64</sup> . Thus the capitalist system has created the capitalist class and the working class. Worker organizations have to organize the working class not only to maintain and enhance wage levels but also to carry on a class struggle against the capitalist class. "In the struggle, .... this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends becomes class interests. But the struggle of class "against class is a political struggle"<sup>65</sup> . Worker combinations should become class conscious and should carry on a political struggle with the capitalist class in the thrust towards creating a classless society. This is the Marxian vision of worker organizational processes. But Marx, however, is conscious about what actually happens to trade unions in the capitalist system. "Trade unions work well as centres of resistance against encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to guerilla

war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system"<sup>66</sup> . Trade unions under capitalism seem to be committed to maximising wages and other benefits from capital instead of questioning the very system of wage labour under capitalism.

It is in this "optimistic" tradition that Hyman has enunciated his analysis of industrial relations and trade unionism. Trade unions, in Hyman's writings, "represent workers" response to the deprivations inherent in their role as employees within a capitalist economy - opposition and conflict cannot be divorced from their existence and activity"<sup>67</sup> . Thus, in Hyman's analysis the politico-economic structure within which trade unions function plays an important role in understanding the modalities of trade unionism. Within a capitalist economy, trade unions are in conflict with employers because of the inherent deprivations. Any analysis of industrial relations and trade unionism should therefore be sensitive not only to the structure of the political economy but also to the deprivations and socio-economic inequalities which are inherent components of the capitalist mode of production. This perspective immediately reveals the limitations of some of the approaches to industrial relations discussed earlier especially those oriented to the control and containment of dissension and difference.<sup>68</sup> Dunlop has said that rule-making is central to the government of work

relations. He has said explicitly that "the establishing of these procedures and rules - the procedures themselves are rules - is the centre of attention in an industrial relations system". The entire industrial relations system in this approach appears to be geared to bringing every foreseeable event under a procedural or substantive rule, thus reducing or eliminating any form of imbalance in the system. Thus neither politico-economic structures nor socio-economic inequalities are called into question.

Hyman's approach also is at variance with the liberal-pluralist approach represented by Flanders. "What is the substance of a system of industrial relations?" Nothing could be more revealing of the past neglect of the subject's theory than one simple fact. Not until recently has it been explicitly stated that a system of industrial relations is a system of rules"<sup>69</sup>. The formulation of rules and the implementation of rules appear to be the bread and butter of industrial relations. "These rules appear in different guises : in legislation and in statutory orders; in trade union regulations; in collective agreements and arbitration awards in social conventions, in managerial decisions, and in accepted custom and practice"<sup>70</sup>. Employers, government, employee organizations and the judicial system interact with each other in the process of rule-making. "The study of industrial relations may therefore be described as a study of the institutions of job regulation"<sup>71</sup>.

Flanders emphasizes rules, job regulation, institutions of job regulation - indicative of the 'order' orientation of this

approach to industrial relations. Hyman's analysis of industrial relations points to the inadequacy of the above definitions of industrial relations. Hyman has reviewed the substance of the systems approach and the pluralist approach in the context of the capitalist politico-economic structures and the inbuilt socio-economic contradictions thus : "First, it diverts attention from the structures of power and interests, and the economic, technological and political dynamics of the broader society-factors which inevitably shape the character of relations between workers, employers and their organizations. Second, the emphasis on institutions carries with it a danger of reification : it becomes easy to ignore the real active men and women whose activities are industrial relations. Third, the notion of regulation conceals the centrality of power, conflict, and instability in the processes of industrial relations".

Hence, the structure of power in the context of industrial relations given the reality of the conflict of interests in the capitalist economy becomes a crucial factor in the field of industrial relations. "The starting point for examining the radical view relates to the distribution of power. Like the pluralist interpretations, it emphasizes the gross disparity of power between the employer and the individual employee". But whereas the pluralist would see the restoration of balance of power between employer and employee through collective worker organizations and collective bargaining, the radical insists that the imbalance remains nevertheless given the conflict of interests between those who control work processes and those who



are controlled. "An increasing power struggle is therefore a  
74  
central feature of industrial relations" .

The concept of power is a subject of considerable theoretical and operational debate but in the theoretical perspective of this study, Hyman's definition of power "as the ability of an individual or group to control his (their) physical environment and as part of this process, the ability to influence the decisions which are and are not taken by others" has been found to be appropriate .  
75  
Those who own or control the work organization wield considerable power over work organizational processes and over work relations. It is in this context that the distinction Hyman makes between two aspects of power - "power for" and "power over" is again useful with reference to the theoretical perspective of this study. "Power for" is conceived  
76  
as power used in the service of collective interests" . But where relationships of conflict exist power is typically wielded  
77  
by one individual or group over others .

The field of industrial relations in the context of the capitalist politico-economic structure and the concomitant socio-economic inequality becomes a struggle between those who control and those who are controlled, a struggle between contradictory processes, a struggle between conflicting interests. At the heart of the struggle for power is the thrust towards control over work processes. Managements irrespective of whether they are in the private sector or in the public sector, generally claim the prerogative to control workers supported by a battery

of political, legal, social and economic sanctions. It is to neutralize the power of the management over the worker that worker organizations come into existence. Worker organizations thus strive to generate power for the workers in the context of management power over the workers. This process involves a relationship of conflict of interest which has far reaching consequences for the manner in which industry and society are structured.

"Trade unions-workers' collective organizations - are thus first and foremost a source and medium of power : and processes of power are central to their internal and external relations" <sup>78</sup> . Trade unions therefore represent power for the worker and are engaged in a struggle against management power over workers. However, it must be remembered that trade unions represent "workers' response to the deprivations inherent in their role as employees within a capitalist economy" <sup>79</sup> . Given the structure and processes within the capitalist economy, "opposition and conflict cannot be divorced from their existence and activity" <sup>80</sup> . Hence, when we discuss the power of workers' collective organizations, "the differential distribution of control over and access to resources and sanctions, both material and ideological" <sup>81</sup> in the context of a capitalist economy, should be borne in mind. Trade unions may have power but the awesome power of the employer in the politico-legal framework of a capitalist economy should not be lost sight of. "The starting point for any realistic analysis must be the massive power imbalance between capital and labour. This derives from the very fact that the

productive system is in the main, the private property of a tiny minority of the population, and that profit is its basic dynamic. Confronting this concentrated economic power, the great majority who depend on their own labour for a living are at an inevitable disadvantage" .<sup>82</sup> The economic dominance of those who own and control production over those who sell their labour for wages is further reinforced twice. "First, capital normally has privileged access to the coercive sanctions of the state. In the everyday relationship between employer and worker, the law underwrites a contract which authorizes the former to give orders and obliges the latter to obey. In less routine circumstances, where the collective power of labour seriously threatens employer interests, governments typically intervene to restore the normal imbalance .... Second, unequal economic and political power gives a crucial influence over processes of ideological formation : legitimating its own predominance and inhibiting effective challenge on the part of labour"<sup>83</sup> . The capitalist economy in league with the state and ideological processes enforces dominance over labour. Worker's collective organizations, however, do exert a countervailing influence on capital. "They constitute a challenge to the 'rights of capital': first, to hire labour in the cheapest market : Second, to deploy, manage and control labour irrespective of workers' own wishes and aspirations. Individually, few workers have the power to assert their interests against those of the employer. Collectively,<sup>84</sup> they can exert greater influence" . This argument constitutes Hyman's "optimistic" approach to worker organizations. This does

not mean he is not realistic because he is quick to admit that "the countervailing power of union organization, at its most successful can only partially redress this imbalance"<sup>85</sup> .

It is because of Hyman's perspective of analyzing industrial relations within the politico-economic totality and the capital - labour dichotomy that he goes on to call into question certain assumptions of the systems and the pluralist approaches to trade unions as manifest in the writings of Dunlop and Flanders. Hence, he redefined industrial relations in a capitalist economy as "the study of the processes of control over work relations and among these processes, those involving collective worker organization and action are of particular concern"<sup>86</sup> (Hyman 77 : 12) .

The brief overview of major industrial relations perspectives shows that while pluralists and others look at industrial relations and labour legislation as processes of regulation of labour-management relations within a narrow institutional framework, the Marxists focus on the nature of the socio-economic formation within which the processes of labour-management relations evolve and operate. While it is important to look at specific legal provisions and procedures in specific industrial relations systems, equally important from the analytical point of view is the question of whether the socio-economic formation within which industrial relations exist is antagonistic or non-antagonistic.

The survey of the political and apolitical approaches to industrial relations shows that :

- \* The concerns of the "political" approaches to industrial relations revolve around
  - \* Macro social questions like the politico-economic purpose of society.
  - \* Issues like the class characteristics of the state, conflict between the classes, the exploitative elements of economic and industrial structures and systems, private versus state ownership, the role and voice of the working classes, the need for change of political power.
  - \* The protection and promotion of the rights and interests of the working classes and their organizations by the use of various means available to the working classes.
- \* The concerns of the "apolitical" approaches revolve around
  - \* Micro organizational questions at the strategic, functional and operational levels of the enterprise or the industry.
  - \* Procedural issues like devising laws and rules to regulate working class organizations and action at the strategic, functional and operational levels of the enterprise or the industry.

Substantive issues like competitive advantage market orientation, productivity, technological dynamism take precedence over concerns related to collective organization and action or larger politico-economic purposes.

It may be said in conclusion, therefore, that the kind of polarizations in evidence in the empirical reality of industrial relations is also in evidence in the theoretical frameworks which have been devised to analyse industrial relations. However, recent developments in socialist systems have raised many issues related to state ownership of capital, marketization in socialist economies, free enterprise as a determinant of productive efficiency in socialist economies, privatization of ownership as well as the opening up of socialist markets for foreign investment. If the capitalist system is viewed as the thesis and the socialist system as an antithesis, there appears to be a global trend towards a synthesis of the productive efficiency of the capitalist system with the humanist vision of the socialist system.

#### 1.6 CONCLUSION

The development of an appropriate industrial relations perspective for the Indian context is dependent on the

Constitutional Commitment as well as the complexity of the socio economic formation. The pattern which emerges from the earlier analysis is as follows :

1. The three pillars of the Constitution of India are democracy, secularism and socialism. While basic democratic rights have been conferred by the section on Fundamental Rights, the operationalization of the terms secularism and socialism are contained in the Directive Principles of State Policy.
2. The Indian socio-economic formation is a complex phenomenon characterized by ideological pluralism, ethnic diversity, mixed economy, plural property relations and multiparty democracy.

3.1 Industrial Relations in the Indian context is a complex structure consisting of

- \* The State and its Agencies
- \* Employees and their organizations and political affiliates
- \* Employers and their organizations

3.2 The role of the state in industrial relations is one of evolving policies and instruments

- \* To regulate employer-employee relationship
- \* To manage the contradictions which arise in employer-employee relationship
- \* To build consensus between the state, society, employers and employees.

3.3 The role of the employers in industrial relations is one of evolving policies and systems at the strategic, functional and operational levels.

- \* To control workers and their organizations in order to facilitate the strategic, functional and operational interests of the firm.

- \* To elicit commitment from the workers and their organizations in order to facilitate the strategic, functional and operational interests of the firm.

3.4 The role of employee organizations in industrial relations is to protect and promote worker interests as well as the interests of the affiliates of the worker organizations through

- \* Confrontation strategies

- \* Cooperation strategies

4. Industrial relations in a democratic framework thus becomes a continuous process of struggle for control over the workplace and of the political system in which

- \* The state orients its strategies on the contradiction-consensus continuum

- \* Employers evolve strategies on the control-commitment continuum

- \* Employees respond with strategies on the confrontation - cooperation continuum.



A deeper understanding of industrial relations would be facilitated if there is an awareness of the modalities or the politico-legal framework of industrial relations in the Indian socio-economic formation. An examination of the key legislative enactments, therefore, would reveal in sharper focus the profiles of the employer and employee rights in the context of industrial relations.

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