



## **Industrial Labour: A Theoretical Perspective with Reference to the Structural Functionalism and Conflict Theory**

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### **Abstract**

Process of production is the main focal point of every industry. So in the process of production the role of both human as well as material resources are considered to be very important. The human resources in the industry cannot be deal in the same way as machines. History has witnessed that the labour in the industrial context are always subject to face discriminations and exploitation in the hand of management or so called bourgeoisie. The workers, particularly in a manufacturing unit are working within an environment which in many ways put impact on their thoughts, emotion, attitude and even on their overall personality. In sociology different social scientists have studied the concept of labour, labour welfare and labour issues. So in this paper the researcher tries to study the concept of labour in the industry from the perspective of classical sociological thinkers.

### **Introduction**

India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. India has the privilege of large number of workforce in the world. However, in the passage of time, the mode of employment and occupational structure in Indian society is being changing rapidly<sup>1</sup>. India is gradually moving towards industrial economy from the traditional agrarian economy. Although we primarily depend on agricultural economy, but it is realized that without industrial development our dream

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<sup>1</sup>. Swain, B.K. (1991) Changing Occupational Structure in Vidarbha, India. Himalaya Publishing

House, Mumbai.



to become a developed nation will not be possible. Keeping this in mind the government is being taking many positive steps to encourage and to establish more and more industries in India. Keeping in view of the rapid increase in the workforce in the industries, the government is focusing utmost importance to labour welfare. The need of the labour welfare was realized by the government very back in the year of 1931 by setting up The Royal Commission of labour<sup>2</sup>. In its Karachi session in 1931, Indian National Congress passed a resolution on the philosophy of labour welfare and its necessity in fundamental rights and economic programme.

Welfare is a concept is so comprehensive and vast that it leads to various interpretations. The labor investigation committee of the government of India mentioned in 1945 that “For our part we prefer to include under welfare activities anything done for the intellectual, physical, moral and economic betterment of the workers whether by employer, by government or other organizations, over and above what is laid down by law or what is normally expected as part of contractual benefits for which the workers may have bargained”. In order to achieve labor welfare in industry the participation, cooperation and efforts of everyone is required. The government, society in general and the employee and employer in particular should come together to make a better working conditions in industrial setting in which a worker feel comfortable, secure and empowered.

Labour welfare in industrial context includes the activities like outing, games & sports, cultural activities, recreational activities etc. which can improve and uplift the moral and mental health of the workers. The improved facilities at the work place can generate confidence among the workers in management and administrative staff; hence, industrial peace and harmony can be maintained. When workers problems are heard properly and are solved by the management then the workers realize their duties towards enterprise. Basic facilities lead the workers to remain mentally and physically satisfied which lead the worker to start taking much interest in his work, which leads to greater efficiency. Hazardous working conditions like lack of proper ventilation,

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<sup>2</sup>. Report of the Royal Commission of Labour in India, June 1931



noise and vibration caused by the machines, dust, hotness etc. are the main factors which seriously affect the health of the worker. Therefore to maintain the health of the workers and to save the worker from health hazards periodical check-up and medical-facility is needed. Thus when the worker is healthy, he will naturally work hard.

### **Definition of Labour Welfare**

Different thinkers, intellectuals, authors, social scientists have given their own definition and interpretation on labour welfare, which will help us to understand the concept of labour welfare, its major elements and characteristics.

Oxford Dictionary defines Welfare is the state or condition of doing or being well. The term is cited when some action is necessary for enhancing individual or group welfare.

The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines welfare “as the voluntary efforts of the employees to establish within the exiting industrial system working and sometimes living and a cultural condition of the employees beyond what is required by law, the custom of the industry and the conditions of the die market”.<sup>3</sup>

According to S. T Edward “One can byes a man’s time, his physical presence in a particular space, even a few muscular movements, but enthusiasm, initiative, loyalist and devotion to duty cannot be bought. They will have to be created through right employer-

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<sup>3</sup>. The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences



employee relations, provision of constructive opportunities for satisfying the major motivating desire of human action”.<sup>4</sup>

H.S Kirkadely says “Whole field of Welfare is one in which much can be done to combat the sense of frustration of the industrial workers, to relieve him of personal and family worries, to improve his health, to afford him some sphere in which he can excel others and to help him to a wider conception of life’.<sup>5</sup>

### **Industrial Labour: A Theoretical Perspective**

History has witnessed how workers in the industries have been gone through hardships and difficulties<sup>6</sup>. With the Industrial revaluation in the west a new era of human society had emerged in which a gradual shift had taken place from agrarian economy to more complex and sophisticated industrial economy. It had changed the structure and composition of society. The concept of urbanization had become popular, people started to move from remote villages to urban cities because of industries. Hence the concept of industrialization and urbanization became popular. Industrialization and urbanization required large number of workforces for the process of production. As a result of rapid industrialization large numbers of problems raised in the society, especially with labour working forces. The society had neglected the issues and concerns for workers. It had never cared for the worker’s welfare and development. The labour

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<sup>4</sup>. Edward, S.T. (1953) Philosophies of Labor’s Welfare in India, Journal of Social Work, Department of Publications, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay.

<sup>5</sup>. Kirkadely, H.S. (2014) Industrial Relations in Conditions of Full Employment, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup>. Hobsbawm, E.J. (1999) Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the present day. Penguin Publication, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition.



forces in the industry were never witnessed any positive changes in their social role and status. They had been always discriminated in every aspect of their life. The world they live in has always remained confined and their activities therein. Safety and security in industrial setting were never a concern for the industry. Workers were working in the industrial setting by risking their lives.

In the past few decades the situations of industrial settings have changed significantly. The concept of welfare and development of the workers is given utmost importance. Different laws and acts have come for the welfare of the workers. However, certain sociological theories explain the concept of labour, industry, welfare of the labour working in the industry, problems in the industry, role of the industry for the development of the society etc. The theories developed by the structural functionalists are a kind of the early sociological theories which consider society as a system of interrelated parts in which the parts perform different but unequal roles for the maintenance of the society. The structural functionalists have a conception of a society constituted not only by dissimilar roles carried out by the individual members but also by the corresponding positions, groups and institutions which are structurally and functionally related to each other. This implies that there is a strong structural and functional coordination among the various parts of the society. The society functions smoothly because its various parts function without showing any inconsistency towards each other. The key idea of structural functionalism is that the functions must be performed if the society is to survive. Structural functional approach in the context of the present study can be interpreted in a way that individual labour as a part of the industry is working for the maintenance of social order and harmony. For them social order is more important and individual is subordinate to social order and should contribute to maintain the social order and harmony.

But the conflict theorists look at the society from an opposite point of view. For them the various unequal roles, their corresponding positions, groups and institutions in society do not work in coordination with each other as they fail to realize similar opportunities. They are rather found in constant conflicting relations with each other. In a system of stratified relationship in which the individual members perform different roles with different positions, they have hardly



any chance to realize similar opportunities and values of the society. Thus for conflict theorists, a system of social relationship leads to a relationship of conflict when one benefits and other suffers from such relationship. Karl Marx is the chief architect of this school of thought. Marx has seen industrialization as the symbol of capitalism, in which the bourgeois always exploits proletariat<sup>7</sup>. For Marx the capitalist society is based on the concentration of the means of production and distribution in the hands of a few, political power becomes the means by which the ruling class perpetuates its dominance and exploitation of the masses. He also advocates that the entire life of the worker including his social, economic, educational and family life is controlled and manipulated by the capitalists. The workers even feel oppressed and depressed in industry. The theory of alienation is the best example of it. The workers in the capitalist society are alienated from their productive activity. In such a society they do not work for themselves in order to satisfy their own needs. Instead they work for the capitalists, who pay them a subsistence wage in return for the right to use the workers in any way they see fit. The workers are alienated not only from the productive activities but also from the object of those activities (the product). Marx also states that the workers in capitalism are alienated from their fellow workers. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their own human potential. The workers don't have any right to make decision even the product made by him. In this way he becomes the slave of the product he made himself. Even in the present day the concept of alienation can be applicable to industrial setting. Now a day it is still a major challenge for the industrial administrators to deal with this above mentioned concept. Different mechanisms are being planned and implemented in order to develop a working situation in which a worker feel confidence and becomes very much involve with the industry in which he is working, with the workers with whom he is working and most importantly the product he made in the industry.

The Relative deprivation theory of R.K Merton seems to be one of the recent sociological theories which aptly explain the situation of workers in society. The theory of relative

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<sup>7</sup>.Ritzer, George.(2011) "Sociological Theory". McGraw-Hill Publication.



deprivation states that when people compare themselves with others and find that their situations are worse than those who are above and somehow better than those others who are below them, they feel relatively deprived.<sup>8</sup>The relative deprivation theory in the above sense applies to the situations of workers studied in the present context of research. It is believed that the more the workers feel deprived the more they organize themselves into groups and movements to collectively fight against the injustice and oppression. Relative deprivation theory in sociology has been applied to the study of social movement, change and mobility. The more the workers feel deprived of economic resources, privileges of power and status and decision making in the greater becomes their resentment against system and the more they are involved in the group they form for self-development, change and empowerment. The Trade union, Laws and Acts, private organizations like NGOs protecting the interest of the workers are the direct manifestations of worker's alienation, deprivation, oppression, exploitation and hence resentment against the system as understood within the context of the theoretical backdrop elaborated in this section.

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<sup>8</sup>. Merton, Robert King.(1957) "Continuities in the theory of reference groups and social structure."

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