ABSTRACT


Kanpur became an early centre of modern cotton textile industry in India, with Elgin Mills and other factories established, under European ownership and management, in the last quarter of the 19th century. All the remaining major textile factories were established, within the first half of the 20th century which also saw the intrusion of Indian capital (e.g. J.K. Group) (Chapter I). In terms of employment the mid. 1940s saw the industry at its peak. After Independence the level of employment in the textile mills became stabilized, tending towards decline (Chapter II). Towards the late 1960s the Kanpur mills entered a period of crisis leading to a take-over of most of the mills by the Government’s National Textile Corporation in early 1970s (Chapter I). While under Public Sector retrenchment was avoided, the health of the industry could not be restored. Employment began to decline, its rate accelerating in the 1980s, as employees retiring or leaving, were not replaced. By 1990 employment was about half of what it had been in 1945 (Chapter II).

By 1970, all basic elements of existing factory legislation in India were in place, governing hours of work,
minimum wages, provident fund and bonus, procedures for settlement of industrial disputes (including conciliation and adjudication), trade unions etc. (Chapter III). These were generally applied in Kanpur, partly because the factories being large (and later as Public undertakings) could not practice evasion successfully, and partly because trade union movement in Kanpur has been fairly strong.

While the industry ran at considerable loss in the 1970s and the 1980s real wages showed an upward trend at least until about 1985, under the impact of Government Order and Awards on wages and bonuses. Wage differentials by skill were not large, a ratio of 1:2 being maintained between highly skilled and unskilled jobs) and inter-factory variations were also limited (Chapter IV). A sample survey, on the basis of a questionnaire answered by 64 workers, indicated that the housing situation remains unsatisfactory with most workers paying high rents for small living space, sometimes without a tap of running water; but electric light and ceiling fans are generally available. Government and cooperative housing accomodate 14 percent of those queried and about a similar proportion of workers own their houses. Workers did not have any complaint about space allowed to them at work and the working hours, but most of those queried complained about atmospheric pollution and high noise-level in the factory (Chapter V).
Since 1970, trade union functioning has been marked by fragmentation and inter-union rivalries. All India Union organisations are augmented by numerous independent unions. Even the larger unions have financial problems, membership fees being small. Labour conciliation/adjudication settlements have become an additional source of income. Since 1970 BJP led unions have greatly expanded their strength (Chapter VI).

Declining employment and transfer of mills to public sector control do not seem to have affected the intensity of labour disputes, 1980 seeing the peak in man-days lost through strikes (58,065) but 1974 with 54,974 and 1988 with 49,901 were not far behind. Modernisation, as it affected workers' jobs, was successfully obstructed by them. The field of industrial disputes now encompasses the use of legal machinery set up for conciliation and adjudication. Individual workers, undoubtedly, find relief through these proceedings with regard to wages and unfair disciplinary action, but the procedures are assuming the garb of normal litigation with quasi-professional lawyers appearing from both sides (Chapter VII).

With 1990 the twilight of the Kanpur cotton-textile industry had arrived, and it is likely that it would not survive until 2000; as factories close with "golden
hand-shakes" for their workers. An absence of a firm and far-sighted national textile policy and lack of efficient management skills, in both the private and public sector are largely responsible for this tragedy, which would leave many thousands of the textile workers at Kanpur without employment and cause so much waste of capital and labour (Chapter VIII).