EPILOGUE

The proceeding chapters try to unravel a particular aspect of early Indian economic life, namely industrial relation. It was pointed out earlier that the two key terms 'industry' and 'Industrial relation' are used here not exactly in the sense of their modern connotations. The term 'industry' denotes mainly crafts (including handicrafts) and some manufacturing enterprises. Since industrial relation in its modern sense can not be expected to be present in a pre-industrial society, this particular expression has been used in this thesis principally in the sense of employer-employee relationship.

Apart from the problem of concepts, the major problem in carrying out this thesis was the paucity of relevant documents. Available sources of information are spatially and temporally scanty, moreover most of the data are gleaned from theoretical legal treatises (Arthásāstra and various Dharmasastras). Whatever meagre information is collected, refers more to an idealised condition than to an actual industrial setting.

Notwithstanding these problems relating to concept and data, results of the survey and analysis of existing
evidence may highlight some essential features of industrial relation in ancient India. Though the economy of ancient India was firmly rooted to agriculture, there was considerable scope of craftwise and manufacturing enterprises as is evident from our discussions in the chapter entitled 'Types of Industries and their Development'. This chapter also highlights elements of changes in the industrial economy of ancient India (c. 2360 B.C. to 600 A.D.).

The employer-employee relationship has been discussed in two separate chapters: Industrial Relation in Guild Organisation and Industrial Relation in State Enterprise. One of the salient features of industrial activities of ancient India is guild (sāni, jana, pūra, samgha) organisation. This particular corporate body was an association of persons following a common craft or trade. From the 6th century B.C. to the 6th century A.D. guilds engaged considerable prominence in economic life. The Key to successful industrial organisation was the spirit of cooperation and equality among the members of a guild. Legal treatises repeatedly recommend not only harmonious relation among members but also sharing of the capital, work-load,
profit and loss of an industrial guild. Since the law books indicate that guild regulations were often treated in an equal footing with rules and regulations of the government, the efficacy of such guild laws in maintaining harmonious relation, spirit of co-operation and equality among members can not be altogether doubted. As the Dharma-sāstras increased stringency on guild-laws with the passage of time, it may be inferred that the necessity of strengthening the corporate character of guilds was more and more felt. Regular deposits of cash were permanently endowed with guilds by moneyed-men, including kings and nobles. This may have provided guilds with the vital supply of capital, which was corporate in nature. Members of the guild consequently may not have to be individually responsible for collection and augmentation of funds/capital. But any loss of fund due to the activities of a particular member would lead to the proportionate loss of income of that member. This indirectly could have strengthened the compactness of the guild.

Industrial activities experienced considerable changes in the Maurya period when widespread control of the
state over all sorts of economic activities were imposed. The combined testimony of classical accounts, the Arthasastra of Kautilya and Asoka's edicts leaves little room for doubt, that the Mauryan government participated in industrial enterprises in three ways: (1) monopoly over certain vital sectors of industry to the total exclusion of all private enterprises (2) state enterprises in some other sectors where private industrial enterprises were allowed to exist under government control and (3) control over all industrial and commodity production by revenue measures. In the first two types the Maurya rulers assumed the position of employers. The Kautilya Arthasastra lays down in an exhaustive manner the ways and methods of managing such industrial units. This theoretical practice was written with the sole objective of maximising the power and interests of the ruler, both political and economic. In the Arthasastra one encounters for the first time a definite system of procurement of worker, their work-load, nature of their employment - permanent, hired or contractual - wage system and working hours. But all recommendations relating to these aspects were made to the advantage of rulers. Some economic advantages and
concessions are doubtless allowed by Kautilya to industrial labourers but there are essentially fringe benefits.

But the congeniality of circumstances in the industrial units either in private enterprise or in state enterprise is necessitated to build-up the relation between the employer and the employee. The determining factors which can keep the relation healthy, depend mainly on the terms of employment, working conditions, rate of wages and mode of payment, etc. These conditions especially in the private enterprise in ancient India are not clearly focussed. In the state enterprise the picture of such terms and conditions has been highlighted in the Arthasastra of Kautilya and the Dharmasastra. In this connection it will not be unreasonable to point out that all these have been designed by one-sided decision (i.e. on the whim of the employer).

But in the case of economic injustice and insecurity of employment the workers felt the necessity of association. The picture regarding nature of association of workers in this context is not clear. Of course Kautilya mentions Samghabhrta which is interpreted by Dr. B.C. Sen as association of workers. Yes, association is no doubt
a source of strength to the workmen, but that such asso-
ciation was used to take part in a concerted manner against
the employer is not clear from any evidences. But to avoid
unnecessary disturbance and to curb the whims of the
industrialists the interferences of the state was felt
necessary. This is highlighted in the policy of
enlightened despotism of the Maurya rulers (Prāja sukhe
sukhān rajā, Prajānānch hitē hitam). The importance of
crafts and industries in the economic history of ancient
India, though secondary to agriculture, can not be mini-
mised. The industrial activities were mainly launched by
private enterprises and political authorities of ancient
India generally followed that what is known in modern times
laissez-faire policy. Except for the Maurya rule no other
governments prior to and after the Mauryas directly parti-
cipated in industrial production. Administrative control
over industrial enterprises in the Maurya period was con-
fined only to mining activities. Political authority in
ancient India by and large were interested only in the
revenue bearing potentials in industrial activities. Under such circumstances the state probably paid little
attention to developing and maintaining any systematic
industrial relation.
The nature of employer-employee relationship in industrial enterprises under private ownership reveals that in most cases it would be more suited to the advantage of the employer. The available evidences are too meagre to show the actual condition of the workers in industrial units in ancient India. But the recommendations and regulations of the legal treatises concerning procurement of labour, the working hours and wage systems were formulated to serve the interests of the employer.

The condition of the employee under state enterprise does not appear to have been any better than that under private enterprise. The Kaúṭilya Arthasastra has a penchant for employing contractor labourers in state undertakings. This implies that the contact of the worker had to be renewed after the specified period. Such a system was designed to provide very little amount of job security of labourers employed by the state itself. Monetary advantages were allowed by Kaúṭilya for workers but such measures were recommended in order to augment the amount of production in state undertakings (i.e. the economic benefit of the ruler). In the post Maurya period the state-owned pearl-fishing in the Pandya kingdom was
actually manned by convicts who were awarded capital punishments. This is a clear evidence which points out least concern of the state, about the minimum security of life of workers employed in a highly profitable state monopolistic industrial unit.

The emergence of the institution viṣṭi (forced labour) since the early century of the Christian era must have put the worker under much burden. The increasing reference to viṣṭi in copper plates of 4th to 6th centuries A.D. goes to show that greater exploitation was faced by the labourers from the employers. It is true that the term viṣṭi occurs mostly in the context of grants of lands and villages (i.e., rural agricultural tilting). But once introduced this sort of exploitation could be effectively utilised also in industrial enterprises. An indirect instances in this regard may be furnished by Nepalese inscription of 6th century A.D. which speaks of Bhottvisti (forced labour to carry commodities of merchants trading between Nepal and Tibet).

Theoretical treatises of course emphasise that humane treatment should be meted out by the employers to
the labourers. Some noble principles are also laid down by the lawgivers to ensure the security and protection of the workers, from the exploitation of their employers. A few restrictions have been imposed by them upon the activities of the employers in order to curb economic oppressions of the workers. But these recommendations however noble and lofty, were made fringe benefits to employee without which the employee could hardly survive and sustain. Seen from this angle economic benefits and concessions to the workers were not only very much inadequate but were actually designed to perpetuate exploitation by the employer. Moreover the rules and regulations in the theoretical treatises regarding employer-employee relationship were narrative in nature. It is doubtful how many and how much of these principles were obligatory in the context of employer-employee relationship. The nature of ideal, rules and regulations regarding industrial relationship thus appears to have been largely tilted in favour of the employer.

It is, however, in the ideals of the organization of guilds that one finds considerable stress on mutual cooperation and an attitude of sharing. If followed,
such ideals could lead to lesser degree of imbalance in industrial relation. In the history of the development of guild laws one may find some realization of the importance of co-existence, cohesion and compactness in an industrial unit under private (i.e. non-governmental) enterprise.
NOTES


3. James Burgess and Bhagawanlal Indraji, *op. cit.*; also, R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 31-36, p. 48, etc.


5. This will be evident from the tax named कारुकरा (levy on craftsmen) figuring in a Sātavahana record and also from various types of levies imposed on different craftsmen in the charter of Visnusena (592) (EI, XXXI, pp. 163-81).