Chapter I

Background of the Labour movement in Bombay in the late 19th and the early 20th century.

Introduction:

In the proposed research an attempt is made to trace out the root of the labour movement and how it has grown and what is the pattern of its evolution in the city of Bombay in the period mentioned. Industrial development close to the mid 19th century brought with it the inevitable class struggle. This led to the emergence of a working class force, and it eventually led to the conflicts of interests, issues of secure employment and blatant cases of industrial exploitation. The number of workers increased in the due course and this resulted in the growing rift between the workers against the British and the native Indian industrialists. The equations between them by late 19th century went through astounding changes. This gradually prepared the required ground to raise the voice of the voiceless. Parallel to it, the mid 19th century had also witnessed many political and socio-economic developments worldwide, new ideas and philosophy emerged challenging the old ones. India too witnessed its own series of socio-economic transformation. It certainly cannot be ruled out that some of these ideas also filtered down to India and resulted in comparative studies. The time frame chosen is 1920, because we see a formal development of labour movement in the city of Bombay around the same time and so the movement in an organised form can be studied with more clarity. The thesis ends around 1945, so as to enable to study the responses of this movement under the British government. The study is primarily based on identifying following aspects:

1. The factors which led to the labour movement in Bombay and its guiding principles.
2. The ideological influence which the international events had on the mobilization of the labour in India.
3. The study has traced the origins of labour movement in its formative stages and the course of development in the later part.
4. The present study reflects on the introduction of communist ideology and its impact on the labour movement.
5. The role and emergence of various leaders and their ideological conflicts is been further explored.
6. The study also discusses various types of labour movement and its aims and objectives.

7. The research has also investigated the levels and scales of success of various labour movements in the city of Bombay and the reasons that culminated for their failure.

8. The study has taken few prominent strikes in the city as case studies to highlight the pattern of the labour movement.

9. The study while trying to achieve objectivity to the research has also discussed the issues and concerns of the Mill Owners management towards the labour movement.

10. The study has successfully incorporated the discussions of various Reports, Enquiry commission’s recommendations, the Factory Acts and its impact etc to give all dimensional perspective to the theme of research.

The data collected in the form of statistics is vital and it gives good insights on some of the theories discussed in the study. It has certainly opened up the debate on the comparison of labour movement in pre and post independent India. The present study has taken interdisciplinary approach while discussing the topic. The use of statistics to indicate and draw comparatives, the valuation and percentages of the growth of the textile industries in Bombay, from the economist point of view, the political ideologies with elaboration of their defined geo-political affiliations, the sociological approach of studying the social stratification with the evaluation of the standard of living of the workers and the historical approach while identifying various milestones in the labour movement gives it all dimensional results. The present study has made attempt to draw some parameters on the role and accountability of the management and the workers in order to allow the continuous process of the industrial development. This study will enable us certainly to understand the present day labour movements. The study also provides insights on various perspectives of the labour that migrated from rural India to the newly emerged town. The issue of migration which we still face in many urban centres is handled with pragmatic approach while doing the period study.

Limitations of the Study:

1. The emergence of the labour Movement in Bombay from 1920 to 1945 has primarily focused on the movement and trade union activities in Bombay city and not the Bombay Presidency, even if the trade unions formed in Bombay had its activities
nationwide. The study mainly focuses on the labourers and workers in the textile industry of the Bombay city.

2. It has covered the labour movement only at the end of the 19th century, just to formulate the links and create necessary base for it.

3. It has not drawn out comparison of trade unions in other parts of the country or world; however its influences are briefly documented.

4. The study has not included the post independent labour movements, as the area of research doesn’t extend beyond 1945.

5. The area of study has not advocated any particular political ideology, but traced the genesis of communism in India.

6. The study does not feature all the leaders of the labour movements, but covers some prominent leaders who were consistent and influential in the movement.

7. The study also does not provide any list of labour or trade unions in Bombay, for the reason many of them existed for a short time and they also didn’t play any key role in the movement.

8. The study limits itself to the pre independent era however it leaves the scope for further evaluation of the labour movement in post independent India.

The study on labour movement in India and especially in Bombay offers plethora of literature and a good collection of primary records. The documentation of various Enquiry Committee Reports, Factory Acts, labour commissions, etc gives phenomenal insights into the subject matter. The positioning of all this data offered a wider scope to interpret and evaluate it further. The comparative analysis in some secondary literature and journals made the study more interesting and provided scope of further learning.

The reference of Indian Journal of Social Work, was done elaborately as many of the articles have the advantage of being contemporary observations and it offers a view point of the situation and classification of data. In the exhaustive list of reference os articles I would like to mention some of the articles in the form of literature review like the article of Malathi Ruikar on “Women in Trade Union” was used for the listing of the women leaders amongst the workers and the article also focuses on the disadvantages and constraints the women initially had while participating in the labour movement, similarly the article written by J J Panakal on “Industrial Absenteeism” highlighted on various factors that prominently affected the work culture in the factories.
The article of A Major, Devasagayam, on “The Employer-Employee Partnership”, elaborates on the bridging the gap between both the ends of the industrial unit. The focus of the article was on sharing the onus of industrial disputes equally on both. In the article titled, “Textile Trade Unionism in Bombay”, of P D Kulkarni, the stages of trade unionism is discussed along with its constraints. K N Srivastava on “Labour and our Economic Crisis” elaborates further on connecting it with the industrial disputes and how it affects the overall structure of our economy and the impact of strikes in the long term development of the industries. Moorthy M Vasudeva article on “Strike as a Labour Weapon”, critically evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of strikes and lock outs in the factories. Similarly the article of Thomas Edward, “Labour Legislation in Post-War India”, gave a different perspective to balance out the impact of some of the labour legislations in pre independent India and how the implications were further seen in post independent India.

The articles in the Indian Journal of Economics, equally allowed different perspectives for my research. It suggested various parameters and factors for the labour movement in India. The articles of K S Srikantan on “Indebtedness of the Mill Worker”, made the understanding of various factors and conditions under which the labourers would take debts and how it eventually affected their savings and finally their standard of living in the city of Bombay during that time. On the other hand the article by B R Seth on “Minimum Wage Legislation”, gave details about the necessity and applicability of legislation on wages which would bring uniformity across all the industrial units and how the primary contention of disputes can be taken care of and easily monitored by the central agency.

The article by Shitla Prasad, Saksena, discusses on “Applicability of the Principle of minimum Wage in India”, which is in continuation of the argument of Seth. The arguments put forward by Radhakamal, Mukherjee in “Labour Welfare and city Improvement” increases the horizon of the labour welfare and how the neglect of the welfare of this voiceless section can equally retard the concept of urbanization and how they are interconnected to each other. The issue of industrial dispute was an essential to study, because the genesis of the labour movement is reflected through this unattended corner of the industrial development. The articles by, K B Madhava, “Analysis of Trade Disputes”, and “Trade Unionism”, P S Lokanathan, “Industrial Disputes and Legislation”, N H Pardasani, “The Bombay Industrial Disputes Act”, B V Narayanswamy, “Industrial Disputes and their Settlement”, simplified this complex topic and the various aspects of the disputes and its responses were discussed in them. Similarly the articles by Amar Chand Bhatia, “Labour
“Unrest in India”, B N Rohatgi, “Labour Problems and Labour Legislation in India”, and S K Rudra “Some Aspects of Indian Labour Problem” equally gave a comparative and national perspective to my research which streamlined my process of chapterisation and allowed me to see it from both macro and micro level.

In order to get some contemporary perspective and comparative analysis the articles in Economic and Political Weekly, were used extensively some of the articles like, S Bhattacharya, on “Capital and Labour in Bombay City 1928-29”, Koolman Dick, “Bombay Communist and the 1924 Textile Strike”, N R Sheth, “Our Trade Unions: An Overview”, etc placed many unanswered areas in the brackets of understanding. Another article by Koolman D, “Jobbers and the emergence of Trade unions in Bombay city”, in International Review of Social History addressed the changing role of the jobbers right from their inception, to the beginning of the 20th century and the post recommendation of the Royal Commission of Labour. The study of the role of Jobbers in fact offered various socio-economic approaches to the labour movement.

The Royal Commission on Labour in India, Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (RCL) was a very extensive volume on the labour and its conditions at the national level and how it distinctively covered the labour in the textile industry along with other peripheral industrial and semi industrial units offered valuable information. The objective and recommendations of RCL formed the base for various labour legislations in the country post 1931. The report offers a vivid account of testimony, interviews, observations and recommendations; however there were equal number of objections and criticism to the Whitley Commission. The reports in the Labour Gazette, Indian Tariff Board (ITB) (1927), Annual Reports of The Bombay Mill Owners Association, Report of the Textile Labour Inquiry Committee, Vol. II, Final Report, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1940, Report of Bombay Strike Enquiry Committee, 1928-9, Abstracts of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India from, 1863 -1894 were some of the primary data referred and it gave maximum scope for interpretation and to draw some comparisons through annual reports wherever applicable.

The secondary literature was also used extensively to understand the labour movement across the world during that time, the works of Cole .G.D.H and Filson. A.W: British Working Class movements: Select Documents (1789-1875) and another by Cole. G.D.H: A Short History of the British Working Class Movement (1789-1947) allowed me to create my
theoretical base for the topic, even E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the Working Class*, was too useful to understand the position of the labour in England and how systematically they continued their struggle and finally it culminated into a major labour movement in England. The influence it had on India and the native Indian labour leaders who took some lessons and used it against the colonial government in Bombay. The contemporary work of A R Burnett Hurst, *Labour and Housing in Bombay: A Study in the Economic Conditions of the Wage Earning Classes in Bombay*, highlighted the social and economic status of the workers and their pattern of living. The scholarly work of following authors needs mention for their attempts to address this topic, scholars such as Breman Jan, *Labour Movement in West India, from Past to Present* mainly focuses on the movements intensity in western India, it only brings about the development of the industries and the issues which were raised by the labour class.

In the similar manner the work of R. K. Das, *History of Indian labour legislation* focuses on the legal and legislative mechanisms revolving the issues of labour. Another work by V.B. Karnik, *Strikes in India*, gives us various situations for which the strikes were called out in different parts of country where industrial establishments had cropped up. Similarly another work by the same author, *Indian Trade Union: A Survey* focuses on the social and educational status of the working class in India. Another work contributed by Mathur. A. S. and Mathur J. S, *Trade Union moment in India* does offer us insights into different types of labour movements in India, but the shaping of ideological perspective in unionism is missing.

Also the work by J. Edwin, *Trade Union leadership in India: A Sociological perspective* offers interesting reading and is also well researched, but the parallel labour class movements in the world would have offered us a pragmatic approach. Moreover the historical study is missing in this as its nature of research rests more upon studying the society of that period, by focusing on the dynamics of leadership.

Similarly Richard Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay (1918-1929): A study of Organization in Cotton Mills* offers good insight about the various local, provincial and national level movements of working class, but it refrains from discussing the ideologies and conflicts that shaped them. Another good work by S. M. Rutnagar, *Bombay Industries; The Cotton Mills*, focuses around the issues of workers in cotton textile units, this book offers a good perspective of the patterns under which the mills evolve and the manner in which the workers were instrumental in building up this industry in Bombay. However the work
ignores the international developments which were equally responsible for the development of industries and the resistance of the workers in Bombay.

The work by Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force In India, A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947* was very valuable source of reference, it in fact gives the inputs in the tabular form and suggests various dimensions in the purely textile industry.


Similarly to get a better perspective on the trade unions and the industrial relations the works of the following authors was equally useful for understanding the futuristic approach Punekar, S. D. Deodhar, S. B. Sankaran, Saraswathi, *Labour welfare, Trade Union and Industrial Relations*. The edited Vols I, II and III by Bani Deshpande, Roza Deshpande, Umakant Mokashi, *(ed)*, *Selected Writings : S.A. Dange*, gives inputs on the repressive policies of the colonial government and the native Indian capitalist. The private papers of N M Joshi, Saklatvala, Dange from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library completed the required research void of understanding the labour movement.
The researcher has tried to balance the study by referring to the primary data, archival material and articles in the Journals. The methodology is qualitative and the objectivity of the study is to a great extent tried to be maintained during the study. The heuristic approach while studying, understanding and interpreting the labour movement in Bombay is required in order to enable further scope for reinterpretation. The chapters were codified and were further subdivided to streamline the arrangement of the data in the chronological order. The sub topics were further subjected to classification in describing the objective of data collection and the possibilities of acquiring the source of the information sought for. The thematic approach towards the sub section and to the complete chapter was the essence of the research.

The four stage process of codification, collection, editing and compilation with special emphasis on the tabulation method was followed. The tabulation method was significantly incorporated since there are inclusions of statistical tables in almost all the chapters to give a better analysis of the topics. The total rows and columns are cross checked and classified accordingly.

The forms of tabular, statistical and cartographic methods of documentation were used to classify and different variables were used for comparison of the information. The tabular presentation helped in analysis of trends, relationship and other characteristics of the collected data, it also helped in understanding the interrelated characteristics of the data. While processing the statistical data the technique of central tendency was applied ie to work out a single representative figure for the table or the data under scrutiny.

The following measures were used: Arithmetic, Median and Mode. The arithmetic method was used for the calculation of the sum of total figures available chronologically, the median method was used for arranging the data and figures for ascending and descending order and the mode technique was used for discussing the frequency of the occurrence. The tabulation is in the forms of uni-variate, bi-variate, tri-variate or multi-variate.

The process of reclassification is applied in some statistical cases so to draw inferences. The chapter scheme was to have the objective approach towards the topic and the focus of the research was equally collateral to supplement the area of the study. The compilation of data was done in a coherent manner and the thematic approach was applied while classifying it. The effective chapter scheme provided enough scope to interpret and analyze the data. The study of primary and secondary sources provided the scope and space to align the information
in the pragmatic manner. The introductory and conclusive segment of the research made the topic relevant so as to allow a consistent timeline which streamlined the process of the other three chapters. The qualitative methodology enhanced the process of dissemination and gave meaning to the contextual study. The content analysis provided the scope for interpretation and reclassification of the sources under study.

The generalization and analysis of the data, tables, reports, surveys and other relevant findings underwent two stages of editing at micro and macro level. In micro editing the grammatical errors, alignment of the paragraphs, consistency and flow of the matter, sentence structure were done.

In the macro editing the overall scheme of the chapters and thesis underwent supervision. It involved the continuation of the flow and consistency from the previous chapter, the headings and subheadings under required formats, the chronological sequencing of the events and deciding the limitations of the topic. The requisite data was used for the final compilation of the thesis.

The Industrial revolution pushed many European nations on the threshold of introducing various mechanisms of replacing man with the machine. The ripple effect of its socio-economic changes even engulfed the newly acquired colonies of the European countries around the world. As the idea of industrial revolution filtered down from England to India, it also brought with it the stages of evolution of industries and some socio-economic practices of inequity in the new colonized country. The inauguration of industries in India in mid 19th century, under the patronage of the British and the native entrepreneurs also opened up the debatable issue of the rights and exploitation of the workers by both the Europeans and the native industrialists in India. In India, the process of industrialization at the early stages was financed to a large extent by foreign capital (for example, in the railways, the jute industry, the tea industry etc.). To that extent, ‘the internal burden of capital formation was lightened. Moreover, most of the industrial workers had family lands in their villages, where they used to migrate whenever necessary’¹.

The changing paradigms of the urban and rural labour underwent a phenomenal change by the mid 19th century. ‘The plentiful and cheap supply of labour encouraged experiments in

new crops largely through European initiative and capital\textsuperscript{2}. The small scale and cottage industries in India which to a great was exhibiting the self-sufficiency of the villages were completely disturbed with the advent of a new economy. ‘So instead of witnessing the industrial revolution on her own soil, India served as a colonial appendage of metropolitan England, quickening the process of Industrial revolution in the master country and at the same time suffering a forced disintegration of her own traditional economic order. Development of capitalism in India was, therefore, a very torturous and much-belated process\textsuperscript{3}.

Unlike Europe, where the artisans and craftsmen when they changed their traditional skills to adapting into modern industries, they were able to retain their age-old skills, whereas in India the traditional handicrafts and cottage industries became victims of the textile industries and were left with no saviour, with the emergence of the colonial era in India, simultaneously it also led to the decline of its age-old monarchical order.

The already miserable landless peasants were now forced to migrate to the newly developed towns in search of employment, due to which they suffered at both the ends, by losing out on their traditional skills and also equally finding it difficult to adjust to the newly urbanized areas of the industrial sector. ‘A pre-dominantly family-based system of the economic organization began to give way to a predominantly industrial system, in which the representative unit of production was necessarily larger than the family’\textsuperscript{4}. The shift from the native self-sufficient economy to the newly introduced paradigms of development pushed the country to the new economic designs of progress. ‘Industrial revolution tore up by the roots of social relationships and institution; it destroyed the old life of the village and created the problem of the new factory town\textsuperscript{5}.

The earliest record of Indian enterprise suggests that a group of Ten Indians and fifteen European merchants for the first time organized the Bombay chamber in 1836. In the due


\textsuperscript{4} Sukomal, Sen., \textit{op.cit}, p .1.

course, a merchant from Bombay C. N. Davar took the initiative of starting the first spinning company along with fifty odd local traders in 1853. Although it opened up new avenues of employment, but it also isolated the working class from sharing the profit of their produce. They now merely became one of the components in this newly mechanized society. The new work required a skilled and trained workforce. The efficiency and physical constraints were neglected, as they were subjected to the rigorous discipline of performance.

The emergence of the Indian labour class had two fronts to combat, one of the existing colonial rule and the second one was the newly emerged capitalist’s class of both the native Indians and the Europeans. “The growth of the textile industry in Bombay and India illustrates one of the internal class contradictions of capitalism”. The growth of port cities like Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay exhibited a cleavage in the social economy as they became centers of maritime trade and later the epicenter of industrial units.

The cotton textile industry in Bombay presidency also multi-folded itself in the peripheral areas like Sholapur, Ahmedabad etc.

The following Table I illustrates the growth of Mills and the operatives from 1879 to 1914:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mills</th>
<th>Operatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-90</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>99,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-01</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>1,56,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-14</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2,60,847</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 A Cotton- textile mill known as “Fort Gluster Mills” set up at Howrah in 1817 by the British capitalist. Quoted in, Gopal Ghosh, *Indian Trade Union Movement* T.U publication, Calcutta, 1963, p.13. Cowasji Nanbhoy Davar’s father, a wealthy Parsi merchant, was a broker for English commercial firms engaged in the India and China trade. Davar was an active figure in the establishment of the Bombay Steam Navigation Company, and in 1853 to 1833 he helped organize the Bombay Hydraulic Press Company and a large cotton-cleaning enterprise. In 1875 a report prepared for the British textile interests pointed out that Indian mill” are almost exclusively owned by natives, and are under native supervision. Quoted in the, *Report on Bombay Mills*, Mr. John Robertson of Glasgow, Bombay Mill owners Association 1875 and 1875-76, p.74. The earliest of the Bombay mills were the Oriental, the Manekji Petit, the Alliance, the Great Eastern, the Coorla and the Morarji Also refer to Pillai P P, “The Indian Cotton Mill Industry”, *Indian Journal of Economics*, Department of Economics, University of Allahabad, Vol.V, 1925, p . 127.


The above figures (Table: I) clearly indicate that in three decades the textile industry in Bombay not just sustained, but also became one of the main sector of revenue for the British government in India. The increase in the number of operatives from 39,537 to 2,60,847 it was almost six times also indicate the migration from rural areas to the urban. As per Burnett Hurst there are ‘three other aspects of the migration of labour to Bombay, first the caste of the worker-immigrants, second the extent to which they are accompanied by their wives and children and third the relationship between the occupations which the migrants assume when they reach the city and the districts from which they come’\(^9\). It is equally important to study this aspect because as we unfold the movement of the working class the patterns of migration and their uncut affiliation to their rural roots also played an important role in it. The following Table gives the breakup of their origin\(^{10}\).

**Table: II: Districts providing main supply of Cotton-Mills workforce 1911-1931.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Distance from Bombay (miles)</th>
<th>Percent of total mill hands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnagiri (Konkan)</td>
<td>(101-200)</td>
<td>49.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satara (Deccan)</td>
<td>(101-200)</td>
<td>7.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolaba (Konkan)</td>
<td>(1-100)</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poona (Deccan)</td>
<td>(101-200)</td>
<td>5.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolhapur (Deccan)</td>
<td>(301-400)</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmednagar (Deccan)</td>
<td>(201-300)</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>(Over 750)</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of above districts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>75.83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century in a way had established Bombay as the highly migrated city in India. The highest numbers of migrants were primarily the peasants or the landless.


farmers, they constituted mainly from Ratnagiri (Konkan), Satara, and Poona. As the Table II indicates that the migrants from Konkan maintained the perennial flow throughout the next three decades to the industrial city. Another inference which we can draw from the ratio of migration is the decrease in the percentage after 1931, as it also indicates that many of them perhaps must have settled in the city and so the percentage of migrants is seen as reduced from 75.83% in 1911 to 53.62% by 1931. The dropping of almost 22% in the migration suggest that the many a seasonal workers must have preferred to stay permanently in the city. This can be corroborated by the fact that the number of mills increased and so the operatives in these mills in Bombay after 1930.
The following Table of the average daily employment of men, women, and children from 1884-1947 clearly indicates the above observations:\(^{11}\):

Table: III. Average Daily Employment of Men, Women, and Children in Bombay Cotton Mills (All Shifts), 1884-1947 (Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>76.50</td>
<td>22.20</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>77.47</td>
<td>20.33</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>66.80</td>
<td>24.63</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>77.72</td>
<td>20.38</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>69.22</td>
<td>25.37</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>77.96</td>
<td>20.49</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>70.47</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>79.50</td>
<td>19.68</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>71.01</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>79.09</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>71.11</td>
<td>25.38</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>78.10</td>
<td>21.49</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>23.30</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>77.66</td>
<td>22.15</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>73.81</td>
<td>22.37</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>77.34</td>
<td>22.62</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>73.54</td>
<td>23.54</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>77.38</td>
<td>22.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>74.02</td>
<td>22.23</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>78.23</td>
<td>21.77</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>75.12</td>
<td>21.36</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>78.56</td>
<td>21.42</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>75.35</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>77.11</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>76.09</td>
<td>20.34</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>78.01</td>
<td>21.96</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>75.62</td>
<td>20.69</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>81.06</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>75.46</td>
<td>20.61</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>84.08</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>75.45</td>
<td>20.37</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>85.07</td>
<td>14.93</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>75.86</td>
<td>19.65</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1944</td>
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<td>12.14</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>76.03</td>
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<td>1918</td>
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\(^{11}\) Morris David Morris, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
The Table. III should be studied for two aspects, one for the growth of the men operatives and second for the decline of women and children operatives. It is also a good indication that by the end of 1930 the employment of children in the textile mills of Bombay was completely stopped. The Royal Commission on Labour (henceforth RCL) in their observation on migration has stated some of the main reasons for migration as due to the “connection between a factory and a particular village or group of villages, recruits would continue to come from these, while adjacent areas yielded none or the lower castes and those who are regarded as outside the pale of Hindu society find that in the industrial areas caste disabilities lose much of their force. With the growing realization of the humiliation of their position and of the freedom which industry offers, there is an increasing readiness to migrate to industrial centers”\(^{12}\).

The new industrial era shaped up the peasants and the village artisans into a new identity of the labour class. Furthermore the RCL observed that, ‘one of the strong arguments for the development of industries in India is the insurance which it provides against the uncertainties of agriculture’\(^{13}\). The city of Bombay was about to enter into a new phase of development as by the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century Bombay already developed as the second biggest city and one of the two largest industrial centers of India. According to the Census of India, in 1911 ‘the population of the city stood at 979,000’\(^{14}\).

The density of the population in the cities can be attributed mainly to some arbitrary policies of the British as they destroyed the indigenous small-scale and cottage industries, which was followed by introducing various unjust forms of revenue collections like the permanent settlement in land which legalized the eviction of the peasantry from land and made the landlords the ‘lawful’ owners of the land. This created a ‘vast floating mass of people in India’\(^{15}\). The greed of capitalist class was reducing the workers to inhumane conditions and alienating them from deriving the benefits in the post-production process. The working hours were stretched beyond their endurance and the wages barely afforded to them a decent standard of living. It slowly appeared that there was no difference in the operation and existence of man and the machine. It is quite difficult to trace the stage of transformation


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p .19.


\(^{15}\) Gopal, Ghosh, *op.cit.*, p . 29.
when man virtually became the machine. The gradual exploitation of labour became the primary source of profit. The figures of profits sometimes were synonymous to the intensity of the exploitation of the workers.

In order to understand the working class movement in Bombay in the 20th century, we will have to understand the evolution, processing, and passing of the Factory Act of 1881, which is the first milestone towards placing the voice of the voiceless to the British government, it is indeed important to also trace its genesis from where it percolated in India. It was not merely the clauses of this Act which is important, but also the penetration of ideas of the western world in India that needs to be studied. The Factory Act of 1881 cannot be studied as an isolated case, but perhaps the beginning of the labour movement in the following century.

It is equally essential to understand the journey of the labour movement in Europe and what hardships they had to go through, as this will enable us to understand the approach of the native government in England and the struggle of the working class there to fight for their just rights. ‘The genesis of the Act also points its needle to the worker's movement in Europe and especially in England. The first so-called Factory Act was passed in 1802 on the initiative of Sir Robert Peel16. However the Act did not yield much result as expected ‘in 1805, the weavers formed a general combination with the object, not of striking for higher wages, but for pressing Parliament by petition, to pass a Minimum Wage Act. The Bill overwhelmingly got defeated in the House of Commons. It provoked the first large-scale industrial movement in the factory districts in 180817.

The workers in the new industrial districts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, and the south Wales started identifying the common issues which affected them all. It is also interesting to study that all the workers were not in the mood of petitioning their demands in the Parliament. ‘The ‘Luddite’18 movement of 1811 started in the midland areas, targeted the

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18 Ibid., pp 40-41. The name “Luddites” arouse because the machine breakers carried out their campaign and issued their warnings and proclamations in the name of one “Ned Ludd” or “King Ludd” of Sherwood Forest- a mythical leader whose name linked itself up with the legends of Robin hood as the friend of the poor. Luddism spread to Lancashire and Yorkshire and the name was applied to all organized attacks on machinery.
obnoxious frames, as the framework knitters felt that their standard of life was being beaten up by the new method of production.

It was around in the year 1815 that a movement was started by Robert Owen to reform the working conditions in the factory. Robert Owen was the successful cotton spinner of New Lanark. He was a great employer, who had grown up among the new machines and been an active agent in the triumph of the new productive forces. He was an ardent supporter of the reforms in the factories, as he believed that the workers should be empowered, only then they will equally be able to enjoy the benefits of these economic developments. Owen strongly emphasized the role of education in building up man’s character, along with a suitable social environment.

According to Owen education was indeed a keystone of socialists system as well of the factory system. He was against the method in which machines were used, he believed that “the machinery are the new forces of production they must be socially controlled and organized for the benefits of all. They must be used to lighten labour and to diffuse plenty. Labour must be recognized as the measure of value and machinery as its servant”.

Robert Owen, as a true socialist strongly condemned the exploitative tricks of the capitalist class and identified labour as the sole creator of value in the unit of production. In 1815, he submitted a Draft Bill, whereby he demanded incorporation of few provisions in the Factory Act. ‘The Bill suggested, application of the legislation to all textile and not only to cotton factories, the minimum age for employment of children to be ten and regulation to the extend to eighteen, the maximum working hours in a day should not be more than 10 ½ hours in which 1 1/2 hours should be given for breaks and meals; prohibition of night work for persons under 18 years and finally appointment of inspectors to execute the Act’.

The purpose of elaborating the role of Robert Owen in this chapter is to draw some parallels between demands placed by him and the suggestions given for the First Factory Act of 1881. It can be observed that workers movement after 1865 had different dimensions and a definite ideology. The dichotomy of ideology in the early and later 19th century England was clearly

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19 Robert Owen(1771-1858) was from Great Britain and he was ceaselessly active in preaching his new gospel from 1817-1823. In 1824 he went to America and remained there till 1829, he founded ‘New Harmony’ the first unsuccessful experiments in the making of cooperative committees. His report on ‘Lanurk’ was regarded as by far the best of his economic writings, plainly enunciated the socialist form of the labour theory of value.


21 Cole and Filson., op.cit., p. 312.
visible. The industrial development in India by now had prepared the ground for the emergence of the working-class movement.

It was now left to the reformers to choose from the utopian socialists’ ideology which we can rightly associate with Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengallee (hereafter SSB) rather more closely to its utopian socialism which was led by Robert Owen (1771-1858), Claude. St. Simon (1760-1825), Charles F.M. Fourier (1772-1837) and Etienne Cabet (1788-1856). ‘These utopian socialists from Great Britain and France, instead of basing themselves upon the scientific laws of social development, worked out idealistic plans of society of their own imagination’ 22. The experience of the working class movements in England taught the leaders in India that mere economic demands or development should not be the only focus, it should also cover the improvement of the social conditions of the workers.

SSB along with few enlightened representatives of the workers proposed some interference and monitoring on the working conditions in India and especially in the Bombay city. He believed that the strength and reactions of socialist approach only will sail the reforms in factory system. He did not wanted, that the reforms should become practical politics, the way it happened in Britain. The decade from 1870-1880 was the seeding time to experiment the six decades of factory reforms of Britain now in India. The leadership and initiative of SSB served only to clarify the movements of forces and to mobilize like-minded opinion for the factory legislation. It will be however seen that after SSB introduced his first draft on 18th April, 1878, there were comparisons drawn to the conditions of workers in Great Britain that too of India. Though there was a strong diversity in the nature of work amongst the working class in India. The classification of their work exposed them to a diverse series of problems. However, they all had some common key issues to voice their protest on.

They were working in various fields such as plantations, mines, the newly introduced railway departments and finally in the textile factories. The exploitation of labour was practiced right from the inception of generating workforce in the industries till the post-production process. What is more interesting to investigate is to how the issues and manifestation of just two to three percent of working class, amidst a huge population, reached the stage of a Legislative Act. The working class situation in India prior to 1875, was more favourable to the factory owners as they could arbitrarily apply their rules and 

22 Sen, op. cit., p. 11.
regulations on working hours, wages, holidays and on employment of women and children, this advantage to the factory owners in India, must have become the rallying point of all mobilization in Britain to favour the Factory Act of 1881 in India.

Another debatable theory could be that the House of Common in England and the British government in India didn’t want, a series of the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist campaigns to begin in India, as they were still recovering from the aftermath of the revolt of 1857. However, on a fair note, it should be acknowledged that the British government at least didn't brutally suppress the demand for legislation on factory system in India. They allowed an open atmosphere of discussion and debate so as to engage the natives in the deliberation and increase the consciousness of the rights and duties amongst the workers.

Lord Salisbury once in agreement with Lord Lytton (1876-1880) felt that,

“Good government might keep the masses loyal to the British administration, but they were mostly inert and to expect active political support from them as a consequence and recognition of good government was an optimistic dream. Good government avoids one of the causes of hate, but it does not inspire hope”

The growing number of the labour in Bombay city was indeed preparing the ground for the city to take lead in setting the precedent of setting up their first fair labour legislation.

The number of people engaged in the cotton industry (urban) and combined with factory hands was ‘7,380,278 as per the Census of 1891’.

The ‘extension of textile industry in Bombay was about 15.82% , as compared to 6.71% in Madras as per the census of 1891’.

In order to take the account of the regulation and the working condition, a Commission was appointed by Governor of Bombay in council to inquire into the conditions of the operative in the Bombay factories. The origin of the commission was rightly pointed out by the Honorable Mr. B.W. Colvin in 1879 which was discussing the Bill of 1881, in the Council of the Governor General as;

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“Attention had first been drawn to the question of factory labour in India by certain remarks which were made a few years ago in a report on the administration of the cotton Department in Bombay. It was said in that report that the poorer classes derived great benefit from the mills, but that the advantage carried with it corresponding and serious disadvantages. The hours of labour, it was observed were not limited by any government regulation the working day was undoubtedly long, the nature of the work was fatiguing, whilst women and children were largely employed, and generally without any periodically returning day for rest like Sunday. Those remarks had attracted attention and had led to the correspondence, the result of which had been the appointment of the commission by the Bombay government with instructions to investigate and report upon the subject”26.

Similarly, the background of this commission was echoed during the Council debate in March 1881, by the Honorable Mr. C. Grant, who referred to the debate which took place in the House of Lords in 1875, on the motion of Lord Shaftsbury, “It would appear that attention had been first drawn to the subject in report upon factories by Mr. Redgrave and very possibly Miss. Carpenter’s mission to India had something to do with the agitation which arose on the subject. She, no doubt discovered that some of the factories in India were open to the objections which had been brought against the unrestricted employment of children in English factories. The result was that a commission of inquiry sat, at Bombay and took great deal of evidence and discovered the existence of some abuses”27.

The Factory commission of 1875 was deputed on the lines of Short Time Committee of 1830's in England. The members of the commission tried to maintain balance by interviewing and recording testimonials from different strata associated with the factory system. It included workers, foremen, managers, medical practitioners, surgeons and health officers, engineers and also child labourers. The purpose of the commission was to investigate; working hours and provisions of meal breaks and holidays; employment of children and the provision of safety measures in the factories.


The working hours and the weekly breaks for the labourers.

The testimony of Mr. Bhana Naik, Muccadam of Manockjee Petit spinning weaving mill in Bombay, was that ‘they work for over 12 hours; with half an hour for meals. There are only two closing days in a month’28. Similarly, the evidence of women workers also supported the standard working time as ‘6.00am to 6.00 pm with half an hour recess time’ 29.

The statement of the manager of Bombay limited spinning and weaving mill, Mr. James Helm was that ‘there are no fixed hours of work; it does get extended beyond 12 hours and no holiday on Sunday’30. It was also suggested to the commission that if all the mills were closed on Sunday and eight other holidays in the year, that would leave about 305 working days a year. The mills ought to be closed on Sundays because the operatives would otherwise have no time to buy provision or attend to their domestic affairs. It would be ‘good machinery, but he was not sure if the mill owner would agree as it would affect their profit margin’31.

Issue of employment of young children in the Factory:

Most of the witness did admit that the practice of employing young children prevailed and there was no formal restriction on the lowest age bar. As observed by Dr. Thomas Stevenson, Health Officer with the Bombay Municipality, that it seemed some of them were employed from the age of 6 to 7 years and recommended that children below 10 years of age should not be employed. In one such visit to the Spinning mills of Girgaum, in Bombay, the members of Commission came across a boy 6 years old employed in the mill while hearing the testimony of some children they realized that at the age of 12 -13 years some of them had already spent 4-5 years working in the mill. The meager wages of Rs. 4 to 7 per month was making it difficult for them to survive. In all, most of the witnesses on record did agree that there should be some uniform guidelines to bring the unjust working environment under

28 Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the Governor of Bombay in Council to inquire into the condition of the operatives in the Bombay Factories (Bombay, 1875). Maharashtra State Archives, Home Department, File No.18393/2, 26th May, 1875, p . 18.

29 Ibid., p . 19.

30 Report of the Commissioners, File No.18393/2, 26th May, 1875 op.cit., p .18. Also see, 21st April, 1875, op.cit., p . 1.

31 Ibid., pp.6-8., Evidence of Mr. Tamooljee. Dhunjeebhoy, Manager, the Alliance Spinning and Weaving Mill (5th May, 1875).
control. The nine-member commission finally decided to conclude a report based on their findings.

However, one thing that prevented them from giving a fair report was that seven out of nine members were representatives of the mill owners. It was not surprising that they conveniently gave a version, which was not in favour of any kind of legislation for the benefit of the workers. ‘The biggest drawback of the submitted report was that the member of the commission themselves were not unanimous in their recommendations, but the official members and the medical officer advised the enactment of the simple law regulating the hours of employment of children and requiring that machinery should be properly fenced. They were further of opinion that the Act should be passed by the Government of India’\textsuperscript{32}.

The report of the commission didn't give any strong suggestive remarks and the issue of reforming the existing working conditions of the labourers got temporarily shelved, due to the larger picture displayed by the members of the commission against any industrial reforms. The meticulous work of SSB in framing this final draft in 1878 on Factory legislation must have been on the lines of the argument of Mr. Libbs, who while debating in the Governor General Council meeting in March 1881, addressed the house while supporting the Factory Bill in the contact that the appointment of that commission was necessitated because cotton mills had started with much rapidity in Bombay, then in other provinces. It was indeed necessary to have an inquiry of that nature to see whether there were really any of the very objectionable practices which had prevailed in the mills of England.

When he took Lord North Brook to see the working of the one of those well-established and adequately conducted mills in Bombay, Lord North Brook said

"if all the Bombay mills were similar to the one he had inspected; no factory legislation would be needed. The real fact was that an Act was required for those small factories where the small amount of capital and other such causes made the owner get as much as possible from the labourer’s who were employed in it"\textsuperscript{33}.

SSB tried to touch on the sentimental chord, by putting forward the issue of the health, of the workers and the unjust exploitation of children in the textile units. He also gave the scope to


\textsuperscript{33} Abstract, Vol. XX, Minutes 11\textsuperscript{th} March, 1881, \textit{op.cit.}, pp . 103-104.
the Governor in General in Council to use their discretion on the exemption of some factories and the hours of work to be sanctioned for them.

The draft prepared by him, requested the British government to define the setup of factory, it proposed 6 days working, prohibition of employment of children below 8 years, for young person between 8 to 14 years it should not be more than 9 hours in a day, for women 10 hours and adult male 11 hours and compulsory rest of 1 hour. It also called for the certification of age from Government certified Surgeon and if any employer appoints any child under eight years of age, he should be liable for fine of Rs. 10 for each case. He also proposed that ‘the Draft Bill after the approval from the Governor could be published in the Government Gazette under clause 15 of the rules for the conduct of business in the legislative Council’34.

However, he didn’t get a favourable and encouraging reply for the consideration of this Bill. It didn’t take much time for the reformers in India to realize that, the British government of India was just pacifying them and they were in no mood to accept their demand and the draft for legislation. By this time they had alarmed the government enough to think on preparing an ineffective provisional Bill towards The Factory Act.

This Bill was to apply to the entire country, but with inadequate relief measures. Though the Bill was still under uncertainty, however, it ‘didn't even provide any relief to the women workers’35. The tricks and delays on the part of the British government prompted SSB to use his second option of applying pressure from England, without wasting much of time he approached his friends, well-wishers, and people who could influence and guide the passing of his draft. He wrote a letter to Mr. John Croft, an influential person from Manchester seeking his support and also passing of the copies of the draft Bill to other members who could put pressure back in England. He even tried to draw comparisons on the condition of women and children workers in India and in Britain. He states “it should be a disgrace to any civilized government to permit the exploitation of women and children after the matter has been once brought to its notice”36. What makes this entire process interesting was the

36 Bengallee, op.cit., p. 155.
commitment and earnest zeal of SSB in getting the Bill first for discussion and then finally for culminating it into an Act of 1881.

The Act before completing its final cycle went through a heavy series of opposition and promotion from November 1879 to March 1881. The tenure of 16 months helped the draft to evolve into a Bill and finally into a form of labour legislation in India. The Bill was finally published in the Bombay Gazette of 29th November, 3rd and 9th December, 1879. It got the support from Mr. Janardhan Ramchandraji and Rughaba Succaram and 578 others in the form of memorial to the Council and the Viceroy dated 26th December, 1879, ‘a Bill prepared by Mr. Sorabaji, every clause if which is well worthy of consideration. The object of your memorialists in submitting this memorial is to support and forward the benevolent and humane object on this important subject’37.

Similarly, Shivkumar Hari Sathe and S.H Chiplunkar of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha addressed their suggestions and recommendation for the passing of the legislation. The letter dated 19th December, 1879, gave their consent for ‘a legislation and also highlighted the better condition of workers and children in England to that of India’38. The reply of Mr. M. Mowat Chairman of Bombay Chamber of Commerce to the Under Secretary Government of Bombay dated 31st December, 1879, had the same approach as of Sabha. It stated that ‘the Chamber approves of the introduction of regulation for the protection of children employed in the factories. The Chamber recommends that the permissive character of the Bill be removed and that it be made applicable to the whole of British India’39.

The Bill became a point of debate amongst the mill owners of Bombay. The Bombay Mill Owners Association (BMOA) convened a special meeting under the Presidency of Mr. Dinshaw Maneckjee Petit amidst the opposition to the Bill, one of the members; Mr. Hector put forward his comments supporting the Bill. He argued that exhausting labour is not economical labour. He listed the number of holidays in England to 10 per year, compared to 15 holidays in India throughout the year. He further added that, but in England these 10 holidays were added to 52 Sundays and 26 days for half Saturdays making 88 days in all, which was a common practice in the mills.

37Government of India, Legislative Dept, The Factory Act (XV of 1881), Paper Relative to The Bill to regulate Labour in Factories, File No. (10), (NAI), pp.1-2. Also see. pp. 139-140.
38 Ibid., (File No.16), pp. 3-6.
He strongly proposed that “the system on which we are now working is the most irrational system and trust that it will speedily be put to an end. A few mild regulation system will do the industry no harm on the contrary benefit it”\textsuperscript{40}. When the proposed Bill was put to vote Mr. Hector was the only one in favour of it against all the fourteen members present. The Bill also received the support, with some suggestion from Sir James Ferguson, Governor of Bombay in his minutes dated 16\textsuperscript{th} September, 1880 “it is not surprising, if employers here object to any such restrictions, as they have always done so in England, yet they have been obliged to admit that their profits have not been diminished thereby”\textsuperscript{41}.

The situation in India in this one year showed a clear dichotomy. It came to situation as E.P. Thompson rightly classified ‘the industrious classes touched at one pole, the mill owner who were illiterate or those whose literacy amounted to little more than the ability to spell out few words or write the names. At the other pole there were men of considerable intellectual attainment”\textsuperscript{42}.The successful elevation of the Sorabjee’s draft made him more force full and watchful. Though he was accused by many of his fellow community men who were established capitalist of the time, that his approach was not in the direction of the development of the industries.

As an active member of (BMOA) Mr. Muncherjee Nowrojee Banajee remarked “in reality the supporters of the Bill have left nothing. In fact these well wearing, but listless folks went into hysterics over the matter and appealed for help to the great father of Factory Acts, Lord Shaftsbury, who joined in the prayers of his by technical Indian friends for an Act to regulate factory work”\textsuperscript{43}.It can be rightly concluded that Sorabjee had anticipated this kind of personal attack on his efforts from his brethren, but still he chose to fight for a larger cause and forward its benefits to the labour class of Bombay and India. In fact Sorabjee and his supporters for the Factory Act were labeled as they acted like ‘a flock of sheep’\textsuperscript{44}.

\textsuperscript{40} Government of India, Legislative Dept, \textit{The Factory Act (XV OF 1881)}, File No.18, pp. 11-14. Also check Proceedings of the Special General meeting of the \textit{Mill owners Association}, January, 1880, pp. 210-214.

\textsuperscript{41} The Factory Act (XV of 1881), \textit{op.cit.}, File. No. 38, pp . 1-4.


\textsuperscript{43} Factory Act. XV, File.No.18, Bill No. 17, 1879, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, p . 9.
The affluent, influential and positional strong members of society were upset with Sorabjee’s support for the Bill while addressing a special meeting to discuss the Factory Bill. Its Deputy Chairman Bombay Mill Owners Association Hon. Morarjee Gokuldas questioned on Sorabjee’s integrity and his lack of vision in raising relevant questions “It is all very well to talk of the miseries of the mill hands, but men who overflow with sympathy for these beings carefully avoid saying anything on the great question. Which everyday assumes a serious shape. How are the labouring classes to be saved from begging?”

Similarly the Bill was denounced for application in Bengal by the member of British Indian Association in their memorial dated 10th March, 1880, Mr. Kristodas Pal, Secretary of the Association argued that “the condition of workers in Bengal was much better than the workers in Bombay so how can the government implement a bill on a more generalized term. The memorialists felt that ‘the extension of the proposed Factory Bill a great misfortune to it’

It was indeed quite surprising that Bengal as a province had pioneered many reforms was now trying to isolate itself from the Bill. The opposition to the Bill even came from Mr. Mackenzie Secretary of Bengal when he wrote in report “This love of legislation for legislation sake and without any reference to the wants of society, is one of the greatest evils of Indian administration in the present day”

With all its phases of ups and down, suggestions and opposition, from the original draft of Sorabjee Bengallee and to the Report of the Select Committee, the Bill received the assent of the Governor-General on 15th March, 1881 and The Factory Act of 1881 was passed. However, ‘its application was enforced only from 15th July, 1881’. However the Act of 1881 defined the term 'Factory' and it got most of the working areas under its control. The issue of employing young children in factories was taken care by adding a clause on the age of employment should be above 7 years and not more than 9 hours in one day with one meal break of one hour. It also suggested four compulsory holidays for them in a month, to be announced at the beginning of the month. It upheld the suggestion of certifying the age of young children through government certified surgeon as demanded by Sorabjee Bengallee in clauses 12 to 14. The provision was made for an inspector of factories.


48 Factory Act XV, File.No.21, op.cit., p. 3.
The Act of 1881 in its introductory stage should be commended because the way it was passed through its initial resistance, there was absolutely no way that, it would have seen the daylight. The Act of 1881 did compromise on the amount of fine to only Rs.200/- compared to Rs.1000/- suggested by Sorabjee. It otherwise, at its entry-level covered two important areas which needed equal attention. It included strict guidelines for the facing of machinery and hazardous areas in the factory premises under section 12. It also made provision for recording and reporting of industrial accidents to the local authorities. It can be sharply be argued that the Factory Act of 1881, failed to meet its intentions and purpose, but it should not be ruled out that this was the beginning of a long drawn struggle. Sorabjee should certainly get the credit of ‘raising one of the important and humanitarian questions, which he pursued with zeal’.

The deficiency in the Factory Act of 1881, as claimed by some, gave the reformers reason to modify their approach and prepare for a complete makeover in the Factory reforms. The next level now was to meticulously move the second movement to motion, on the issue of the working hours, consideration for women workers and raising the age of young employees. The Act of 1881 remained silent on the working hours for the adult male and female, the limitation on the working age of children needed a fresh review, moreover the implication of weekly break also depended at the discretion of the mill owners, the issue of the employment at night in artificial light, the hygiene and sanitation condition etc, needed more discussion and inclusion, but it did recommend six days working week and one day holiday in a week.

The Act 1881 at least for once brought the industrial workers in India and Great Britain on one plank. The passing of the Factory Act of 1881 was also a matter of victory to people, who supported and promoted it in Britain. The Indian Factory Act of 1881, which was to become very significant in the sense that ‘it led to the emergence of a working-class point of view in India in the subsequent years and ultimately to the birth of Indian labour movement would thus not imaginable without Bengallee’s initiative’. However that was another theory which started getting discussed, as on the role and intentions of British Parliamentarian system of Indian labour. The consistent efforts of Mr. Bengallee got acknowledged, but with a doubt on the intention of Lord Shaftsbury. The passing of Factory

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Act of 1881 led to the scale of comparison between the English worker and the Indian worker. It was judged on various parameters like the physique, stamina, climate, level of exploitation, traditional background, age of maturity among children suitable working hours and the wages.

The Factory labour in India at that time constituted hardly one percent of the working population and it still managed to draw the attention of the British reformers back in England, was it the trade competition that compelled them to initiate a Factory legislation which would slow the growth of industries and production in India and help Lancashire, Manchester etc to continue to regulate market was what was speculated around widely. Lord Shaftsbury who is regarded as the father of factory legislation in England also spearheaded the process of Indian Factory Act of 1881 in the House of Commons. The open discussion of the working conditions in the factories in Bombay also brought out the issues of migration and the scarcity of assured income in rural India. ‘The Indian worker was born in such a historical place of the country and it is no exaggeration to say that right from the moment of its birth, it had to move along the torturous path of protest and conflict’\(^{51}\).

The working class in England had cold climate and they had come from uprooted peasantry so for them working in the factory sometimes was the only option. ‘Whereas the Indian worker still had his rural root intact and sometimes had family back in the village so for them they would have something to fall back and in a situation like the factory was quite suffocating, amidst, unhygienic conditions? The machines were not always protected’\(^{52}\). This comparison enabled the Indian working class to parallel their struggle and equate their demands, it in a way placed them on the global parameters with the workers in the other countries.

The Bombay Government, with a view to introduce a special Bill applicable to the presidency, appointed a second Factories Commission to report and review the implementation of the Act in 1884. It appointed Bombay Factory Commission, which consisted of the Collector of Bombay Mr. W. B. Mulock as its President, two representation chosen by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and two by the Bombay mill owners Association and three other members nominated by the Government among whom were


included Dr. Blaney and Mr. Bengallee. The government also appointed a medical committee to investigate into and report on the health and fitness of the workers. The factory Commission took cognizance of ‘the number of working hours for women and children which varied from factory to factory, in its format report later on it urged that women and children should not be allowed to work before 6 am or after 6pm’\textsuperscript{53}.

The commission also recorded the first major meeting of textile workers in Bombay by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande in Sept 1884 in Bombay. Mr.Lokhande submitted a memorial of the meeting which was convened by him on 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 26\textsuperscript{th} September, 1884. The memorial was signed by 5,500 workers and submitted to the Commission, subsequently around 10,000 workers joined the movement and gave their approval to the memorandum. However it was evident that the government was not acting responsibly and so for almost four years the report did not get discussed nor its findings were implemented. Finally the Secretary of State Government of India Honorable Mr. C.J. Lyall, Esq. C.I.E introduced it in the Governor Generals Council meeting in January, 1890. It evoked strong protests from many quarters, except Bombay where the leading association supported the movement for more stringent legislation, it was at this stage suggested that the operatives should be given an opportunity to express their views.

This led to the appointment in 1890 of Dr. Lethbridge’s Commission with Dr. Lethbridge as its President, Mr. Bengallee and N.M. Lokhandy of Bombay, Babu Rashiklal Ghosh of Calcutta and Mr. Framji Mackenji, a foreman of Kanpur woolen mill were included as its members and they submitted their report\textsuperscript{54} on 12\textsuperscript{th} November, 1890 and its copies were circulated to Local Government, Chamber of Commerce and other mercantile bodies for their information and criticism. The Commission’s report was compounded with certain guidelines from International Labour Conference at Berlin, in 1890 wherein it was discussed and decided that the women should not be allowed to work at night in the artificial light. Thus the deliberations of an international conference influenced the course of the legislation in India, the Factory Act XI of 1891, which came into force on 1\textsuperscript{st} January, 1892 was a great improvement of the former Act of 1881.

As it was rightly pointed out by Sir Andrew Scoble in his address in the council;

\textsuperscript{53} Varickayil, S. D, Punekar, (ed), op.cit., p . 33.

\textsuperscript{54} Abstracts of the Proceedings, Vol. XX, March 19\textsuperscript{th} 1891, op.cit., p. 157.
“The duty of the government is to secure for factory workers here that their work shall be carried on with a proper regard to their health and safety and so as not to overtax their physical capacity.”

The strife between the labour and the capitalists was inevitable and it was clearly visible from their very inception stage. The rage against the inhuman conditions of the workers has been the universal phenomenon; it is also one of the reasons why the government machinery tried to pacify them, by passing some legislation with limited interim benefits. The mid 19th century in Bombay introduced the phase of modern industries and it subsequently also led to the emergence of the working class, the advances in the 20th century in the industrialization eventually accelerated the growth of both and also the struggle became more vociferous.

**Initial mobilization of the labourers:**

The term ‘working class’ has been used with this limited connotation that certain objective existence conditions provide ‘a commonality of basic interests derived from position in the productive system; the use of the term ‘class’ here does not posit the existence of class consciousness among the constituents of the class’.

The class consciousness in the 19th century was attempted by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and to some extent by Megahji Lokhande.

As rightly mentioned by Srikantan that in India ‘a purely industrial class does not exist every urban worker is fundamentally a villager’ as the earliest record of the mill workers meeting is traced to 23rd and 26th September, 1884 by Meghaji Lokhanday, he insisted on weekly holidays and adequate monthly wages with compensation for accidents in the mill premises. His earlier petitions very well reflected the demands for workers and another petition making the same demands was presented to the Viceroy and Governor-General on 24th October, 1889, ‘it was signed by over seventeen thousand workers’.

He also established an organization called Bombay Mill Hands Association in 1890, it was the first labour organization to be formed, in the country. Mr. Meghaji Lokhande submitted a

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58 Karnik, op.cit., p . 3.
Memorial of the meeting which was convened by him on 23rd and 26th September 1884, a
memorandum incorporating the following demands was prepared.

1) That all mill-hands be allowed one complete day of rest every Sunday.

2) That half an hour’s recess is allowed to them at noon.

3) That work in mills should commence at 6.30 am and close at sunsets

4) That the payment of wages should be made not later than the 15th of the month following
that for which they have been earned.

That a workman sustaining serious injury in the course of his work at the mill, which might
disable him for the time being should receive full wages until recovery and that in case of his
being maimed for life, suitable pension should be made for his livelihood. He became the
President, of the Association with D. C. Athaide, as its

Secretary. The successive commissions and their reports did not yield the required results.
In 1886-87 Mr. James Jones was appointed as the first permanent Special Inspector in
Bombay city, after returning to England he submitted a report which had observations on the
conditions of the working class in the textile mills of Bombay.

His report strongly condemned and described the gross violations in the mills, as the workers
had to work on the unguarded and unfenced machinery, the ventilation in the form of fresh
air and adequate light was very low, which created in the workers various health issues
resulting in their absenteeism, the mode of payments was also unfair and the employers
would be withholding the wages or their wages were cut under various unlawful pretexts.

59 Karnik, op.cit., pp. 7-8. The objective of the Association was to invite the attention of the Government and the public to the many grievances of the textile workers of Bombay, and to agitate for the revision of the Factories Act of 1881. It published a journal called Deenbandhu (the Friend of the Downtrodden). It was not, however, a trade union in its real sense. It had no membership, no rules and regulations, and no funds. It was essentially a welfare organization started and conducted by a public spirited individual. The earliest known example of a welfare organisation is the Bombay Mill hands Association, which existed spasmodically between 1884 and 1893. The association was formed to ventilate the workers feelings about their hours of labour and the internal regulations of some of the mills, with a view to influencing the government’s current revision of the Factory Act. At the same time, both of the Association’s founders had political and N. M Lokhande was a minor mill official and a member of one of the non-Brahman social reform groups. The association had no formal membership, no funds and no rules and depended on jobbers to bring an audience to its meetings also in Richard Newman, Workers and Unions in Bombay 1918-1929: A study of Organization in the Cotton Mills, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981, p. 111. Also See Gopal Ghosh, Indian Trade Union Movement, T U publication, Calcutta, 1963, p. 49. Also see Dipak Malik, Indian Trade Unionism in Development Perspective, Commonwealth, New Delhi, 1989, p. 43. Memorial Quoted in Sukomal Sen,op.cit., pp. 74-75, from R K Das, The Labour Movement in India, Berlin & Leipzig, 1923, pp. 9-10.
The report caused extensive debate and discussion in the House of Commons. The
discussion was reported in the local media in England, the plight and discontent of the textile
workers of Bombay received sympathy from various liberal corners including the support
from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. They could easily associate to the plight of
textile workers of Bombay to their earlier struggle and so they even sent a petition to the
Secretary of State to interfere and set some regulations on the working hours and protection
of children and women working in the mills.

They also recommended the granting of a compulsory weekly holiday to be introduced in
India on the lines of the mills in England. The final attempt to improvise the conditions of
the working class in the last decade of 19th century was with the appointment of the Royal
Commission on Labour in 1892. It made investigations on the conditions of factories in India
and the application and execution of the Factory Acts of 1881 and 1891.

The inquiry commission was presided by the Duke of Devonshire. When the commission
asked the witnesses to give their testimony we find not only the workers, but even local mill
leaders filled their questionnaire in response these testimonies. It became the first-hand
documents on the conditions of the workers in the factories.

In his reply to the questionnaire of the Royal Commission on Labour of 1892, N. M.
Lokhanday stated:

“The strikes are of frequent occurrence in every one of the mills in this city. The chief cause
is the reduction of wages on the day of payment without any previous intimation of workmen
of the contemplated change. These strikes sometimes last for four days.”

The workers also started engaging in absenteeism, due to long hours of work, small intervals
of a break, insufficient ventilation, and unsatisfactory wages. The increase in discontent is
visible amongst the working class in Bombay at the beginning of the 20th century. The
workers soon started comparing their age-old days of labour and the working conditions in
rural India, the effects of industrialization was now visible in their family and social life.

The reference to trade guilds or guilds of artisans of ancient India can be traced here, but
their functioning and features were more to strengthen its members rather than to exploit
them. The urban worker couldn’t connect to this new phenomenon of the capitalist class and

60 Karnik, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
the working class. The disparity in sharing the fruits of profit was traditionally unknown to him. ‘Thought they worked for wages, yet whatever they earned or produced or received belonged to them all’\textsuperscript{61}. This was perhaps the reason that many workers in Bombay despite their migration retained their rural contact as was rightly observed by the Royal Commission ‘the great majority of those employed are at heart villages. A larger number still have a home and members of their own family in the village and the latter may secure an income from agricultural work. Occasionally members of the same family relieve each other by turns in factory employment’\textsuperscript{62}.

This heterogeneous nature of the working class also had its own drawbacks which we will study later, but it certainly was one of the reasons for a no cohesive nature of trade union movement. The industrial sector in Bombay became the epicenter of multifold trade union activities. It also exhibited a typical colonial pattern. It followed no balanced growth of different branches of industry. ‘The Textile manufacture became the main branch of industrial activity of the city employing about 100,000 workers out of a total industrial labour force of the city numbering between 180,000 and 200,000’\textsuperscript{63}.

**Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha:**

The growing negotiations with the employers finally resulted in the first organized working class movement known as The Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha(KHS) in 1909. The Sabha was lead by N. A. Talcherkar, S. K. Bole and of B. R. Nare. Richard Newman strongly asserts the caste dynamics in the functioning of the Sabha. He attributes the Brahmin and Maratha hold over the Sabha, especially when he distinguishes that ‘B. R Nare, a weaving master of the Morarji Goculdas mill, and two non-Brahman leaders, S.K. Bole and H.A Talcherkar were part of KHS’\textsuperscript{64}. He tries to suggest that the influence on the workers during these times had to do with caste affiliations and their control over the jobbers. He further justifies his arguments when he mentions about S.K.Bole a Maratha leader of the Sabha that ‘he continued with reformers of many different backgrounds. He continued on the same lines in

\textsuperscript{61} Karnik, *op.cit.* p. 4.

\textsuperscript{62} RCL, *op.cit.* p. 19.

\textsuperscript{63} Sen., *op.cit.* p. 104.

\textsuperscript{64} Newman., *op.cit.* p. 111.
the interwar period, appearing as a spokesman of both the untouchables and the non-Brahmans as well as of the industrial workers generally."\(^{65}\)

However the fact remains that the KHS set the ground for established trade unions in the city of Bombay. The Sabha was not only involved in raising consciousness amongst the workers, but it equally promoted social welfare activities like conducting lectures, organising competitions, celebrating festivals, initiating campaigns on civic issues, providing legal aid and taking up issues of the working class to the mill owners. This kind of mobilisation was new to even the workers, as they failed to understand the objective of the leaders to help them in their cause.

The one closer to workers was B. R Nare, who was a weaving master working in the Morarji Goculdas mill, he was to a great extent able to connect to the workers, due to his first-hand experience in the mills. The membership of the Sabha was always a challenge to the leaders, as we see the mere membership fee was not the only purpose of the Sabha, but also the equal and sustainable participation in the activities. They could not influence much on the workers, so they targeted the muqaddams and the jobbers to be part of Sabha. This gave them indirect memberships and they could boast of their number of followers. This was perhaps one of the reasons that their direct memberships never swelled beyond 200-300\(^{66}\).

The Sabha had to suffer even financially and it was always in the need of funds to promote their activities. ‘The Sabha was not, therefore, a much more complex industrial organization that the Mill hands Association, it was in practice, a platform for politicians and philanthropists resting upon the foundation of traditional leadership’\(^{67}\). The Sabha found it too hard to sustain in this form and it started losing its ground in the post-World War I phase, when it failed to get increase wages to its members, it was not able to continue with its welfare activities and finally due to emergence of new ideology and leaders on the labour front who showed affiliations to the international labour organisation. The localized Sabha tried to sustain for almost one and a half decade with its own native ideology, but they failed to see the developments around them. Moreover they were not strong enough to influence the mill owners to accept their terms and get the benefits to the workers.

\(^{65}\)Newman, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

\(^{66}\)Ibid., p. 112. The Sabha was chronically short of funds and had to depend on the voluntary service of its officers and the patronage of Manuji Rajuji Kalewar, a wealthy contractor and chairman of the Sabha, who built a meeting hall and a group of chawls near the Madhorao Scindhia mill and paid for the running of a night school.

\(^{67}\)Ibid.
Apart from this the internal strife and personal conflict was equally a reason that post-World War I, the influence of Sabha started declining and by 1925 it was completely wiped out from the working class movement of Bombay. At the same another leader of national stature Bal Gangadhar Tilak aka Lokmanya Tilak also played crucial role in addressing the workers and writing on their issues in his newspapers. In fact when in 1908 he was sentenced to eight years jail, Bombay witnessed massive protest and strike for almost a week from the working class against the judgments. The genesis of the working class movement can be seen more closely during and after the end of First World War. ‘The strain and distribution of the burden of capital accumulation not only explain the origin of the trade union movement in a particular country, they also affect, among other things, the pattern of its growth‘

Conditions of Women in the Textile factories:

The conditions of women and children did not improve much after the passing of the Factory Acts of 1881 and 1891. The plight of working conditions of women became one of the rallying points apart from the minimum wage point programme. The shift in the traditional occupation also led to the shift in the family. The new employment opportunity in the city required more hands to earn more and to sustain in the expensive urban environment.

The women who was assisting her male counterpart in the agrarian field and simultaneously handled the household chores, was now in a different role. The responsibility in her rural setup was shared by others due to their existence in the joint family system. The new industrial setup in Bombay not only isolated her, but added more burden of maintaining both the ends. The decay in family as an institution of socio-economic security was not traceable in the city. The agricultural women workers now was assisting the male workers in the factories and learning new skills of handling the machinery. Their participation accelerated the growth of industrialisation. ‘Women were shockingly underpaid and the human factor was completely ignored. Employers took advantage of their illiteracy and ignorance and exacted heavy work from them‘. Malathi Ruikar evaluates the reasons for discrimination women faced at work. According to her, the nonparticipation of women in the trade union activities has caused her much harm for last five decades.

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68 Subratesh Ghosh., *op.cit.*, p .23.

The three factors\textsuperscript{70} which refrained her from taking up active leadership were:

Firstly lack of leisure time and multi-tasking at home,

Secondly role of trade union leader required attending activities in the evening, meeting people, strengthening the membership etc, all these required her to abstain from her house more often after her factory hours of work which was practically not possible and

Finally her lack of self-development, level of literacy and ignorance of activities beyond their limited sphere of work, made her periphery very limited. The total number of women employed in the factories, as workers in Bombay were always higher compared to the other provinces in the country.

The following Table IV will clearly help us to draw inferences of the percentage of women employed in factories in Bombay even in 1936.

As in 1892 there were 43,592 women working daily in 656 factories but by 1936, women workers numbered 239,857 in 9,323 factories\textsuperscript{71}. One important fact of the factory employment of women is that their percentage of total employment is greater to male in seasonal factories than in the perennial ones as is shown in the following table.

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Distribution by Province of Factory Workers, 1936\textsuperscript{72}.}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p . 252.

\textsuperscript{71} Industrial Labour in India, Report of International Labour Organisation, (ILO), 1938, p . 49.

\textsuperscript{72} Report of International Labour Organisation, (ILO), 1938, \textit{op.cit.}, p .49.
(Average Daily Numbers of Workers Employed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Factories</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1,584</td>
<td>113,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>3240,27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>20,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>1,667</td>
<td>460,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>140,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>53,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>76,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>80,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.P. and Berar</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>42,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>32,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.W. Frointer Province</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baluchistan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajmer-Nerwara</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore and Coorg</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,323</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,376,185</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table IV clearly illustrates that Bombay was leading even in the mid 20th century because the industrial development here was much faster, the native Indian entrepreneurs were investing heavily which resulted in a constant demand for the supply of cheap labour. In fact comparing the ratio of Bombay presidency to Bengal presidency men to women, we find the percentage of men is more in Bengal. One of the reasons for this could be that women in rural parts of western India were frequently involved in agricultural fields compared to the regions of Bengal and so they equally stepped out to contribute to the family by working in the factories and mills.
However, we also find arguments that ‘the woman in the industry has been criticized as a frequent absentee. She absents more often from work’\(^73\). The reasons for her absenteeism were many, primary ones were due to her multiple roles, many times her earning became secondary and she was required to be home to nurse the sick, to engage in family affairs or rituals etc, it was only when she was the sole bread earner as a widow, or single mother, we find less absenteeism on her part. The share of her earning became important only if the family was big or the earning of the man of the house was limited as compared to their requirements.

The working classes in Bombay were formally classified by the Royal Commission of Labour in India in 1930. The three categories\(^74\) they suggested were based on their observations and based on the testimonies they had conducted.

The first class belonged to ‘factories belonging to groups which are entirely, or almost entirely, seasonal’. It primarily consisted of all the cotton-ginning factories which were strictly seasonal.

The other two categories were completely seasonal and

Third category was of rice mills.

The commission also emphasized that the workers in the cotton textile mills need adequate provisions and their working conditions were deteriorating. We need to understand that the development of the mills in Bombay was the continuation of the systematic programme of industrialization in the city initially by the British capitalist later on the legacy was continued by the native Indian capitalist. Their primary agenda remained the same that is to optimise the profit margins even at the cost of the worker's exploitation. As the phases of industrial revolution worldwide witnessed the most common feature of disputes between the labourer's and the employers was a constant and consistent phenomenon. The modern organization of the industry has placed the working class as merely one of the clog in the machinery.

M. N. Roy has, in his well-known book, *India in Transition*, commented on the situation as follows: “The craft industries of India were not gradually replaced by factories. The commercial penetration of India by British capitalism pushed the productive forces backward.


\(^74\) RCL, *op. cit.* , pp. 75-76.
It was only two or three generations later that industries grew up in Indian cities. Thus the city workers of modern India did not come out of the ranks of artisans but comprised mostly of the landless peasants or agricultural labourer's. No wonder the majority of wage earners remained unskilled and loosely organized for a long period."75.

The exploitation of landless peasants turned mill workers is broadly seen in the beginning of 20th century or rather we can say the voiceless working class was now slowly gaining the voice to highlight their plight and discontent. As rightly said by S A Dange “We have seen India modernized and her industrialization is vehemently urged and carried on. Naturally, her industrialization will be accomplished and is being accomplished on the lines of European systems. When this is done, surely, all the evils of European industrialism, all the methods of class-war between capitalism and labour, will rear their breeding here in our Society too”76.

The unknown evils of the industrialization by now became the known evils and the working class suffered more at the hands of these known evils which came in the forms local supervisors of better known as jobbers. The role of jobbers needs special mention and a brief explanation as they played the vital role in the initial formation and mobilization of the working class. Though their intentions and objectives were never to create a mass-based movement, their control and hold inside and outside the factories made them a strong integrated force in the factories of Bombay.

**Role of the Jobbers:**

The role of the jobbers mainly evolved from maintaining discipline and acting as a recruiter in the factory. As Moore and Feldman describe in some circles the term labour commitment has been substituted for labour discipline and commitment involves both performance and the acceptance of the behaviours appropriate to an industrial way of life.77. The new industrial life in Bombay required the labour to adopt the guidelines set by these jobbers who many times acted as the intermediaries to their employers. In other words, the use of the term lays

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75 Quoted in Karnik, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22.


stress on the “phenomenon of internalization or moral conformity” as a crucial to the functioning of an industrial system.\(^{78}\)

The application of jobber in the factories of Bombay was a borrowed concept from Lancashire where each factory had a manager or assistant masters who were responsible for the smooth functioning of their departments. Burnett-Hurst has categorized the five types\(^ {79}\) of male workers in the mills.

The first category was the regular full-time workers who were on the regular payroll and would get their income end of the month. They, however, did not get any kind of job assurance nor did they enjoy the security of employment. It was this workforce which was in the later part mobilized and organized into the working class movement.

The second category was of the substitutes or also called in local terms badli or badliwalah (See ANNEXURE- II) this category of workers in the mills were nonpermanent and they were not on the regular payrolls. Their existence was always in an unorganized manner and they were the reserve force and called upon to fill in the void in case of absentee of the regular workers, their payment was never constant and based on the bargain or the arbitrary decisions of the jobber. It was this category of the workers which made the existence of the jobber mandatory as they were influential enough to generate this workforce and allow the smooth functioning of the mills. The jobbers were known to have their recruits from their native towns or villages, this way they were able to enjoy the loyalties of these workers and they in return were always obliged to him. The badli workers were mostly unskilled and they were not always keen to get trained in the factories, they were prominently known to avoid the work and fill in the hours of the day for the remuneration. The observations and records suggest that number of accidents were higher amongst them, due to the lack of technical knowledge on how to operate the machines. The working class movement in the due course took up their cause and was mostly in the eye of contention due to their lackadaisical attitude.

The third category was the contract workers for only one week and they were called athawada which is a synonym to weekly or for a week. They were better than the badli and were consistent in their work. They were contractual labour for a week and had stability of


\(^{79}\) A. R. Burnett-Hurst, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-49.
work for seven days. They worked continuously for a week and the following week would generally take a break. The number of such workers was lesser than the badli, but they were also seasonal in nature.

The fourth category was a worker who was termed in colloquial language as mawali, the one who was not at all keen on working sincerely and had his discretion to work at his leisure time. They were generally involved in creating nuisance or lazing their time in the mills without contributing much to the production. This section was not at all connected to any association nor to any ideology, for them the small earnings was more of a respite than a permanent accountable job.

The last category was the local goon or hooligan, who would use his muscle power and fear to retain his control over the workers and would often create the problem of law and order within or outside the premises.

The further investigation about them is that as these jobbers were either the cause of the migration of the worker from the same native place or regions or were the ones who were first introduced to, by the other co-workers. The worker generally after migration to the city would stay with their relatives or friends and at the initial stage have the temporary job, depending on how well he was connected to the jobber. The other medium of encountering with the jobber was the local mess or the canteen popularly known as Khanavali in Marathi. This local dining point was frequently visited by the jobbers and they many times had their recruits from here.

The acquaintance with the jobber was essential for the newcomers in the city and if they had to find a steady source of income till then his status was precarious and the survival was more of a struggle. The workers many times had to borrow small amounts from jobbers for surviving in the city and at times they would land up in the traps of Pathans who would exorbitantly charge them interest on the scale of 50% to 75%. The workers were constantly in the deficit of funds which put them in the state of penury. Their perilous situation became more adverse after the end of First World War.

It was a parallel theory that the more the adverse the working class the stable the position of the jobbers. The jobbers maintained their rural connect intact and alive despite their permanent settlement in the city. Their visits to their rural town were also part of their recruitment agenda as Burnett-Hurst rightly observes as ‘he visits his village, he paints the
life of a mill-worker in the brightest colors and endeavors to induce his relations and friends to leave their homes and fields for the more remunerative calling\textsuperscript{80}. The role of the jobber would sometimes begin from arranging for the migration to the city and then to getting him a local sharing housing in the form of a chawl.

The chawl also sometimes had a local \textit{khanavali} controlled directly by or managed by him which became the worker's allied arrangements. The displacement of the workers to the industrial city of Bombay made him more vulnerable and isolated him from the social life. In order to substitute the village fabric, we do find the jobbers engaging in their own social and cultural ghettos. The jobber would organize many social events and move around in his gang to show off his muscle and numerical power. He also replaced the role of the village headman in the city. The mill workers sometimes were identified on the basis of which jobber’s gang they are associated with. They even acted as the extended family to the mill workers resolving their family disputes and helping them in their social obligations. The effectiveness of the jobber outside the mills and factories was on the basis of his networking with the local money lenders, grocery stores, \textit{khanavali} etc. The workers always looked upon the jobber as their savior.

The role of the jobber inside the factory or the mill was more powerful and multi-dimensional. He was the main medium or rather the bridge between the employers or the mill owners and the workers. He was the guiding force to the workers inside the industrial premises.

His most important duty was to make the workers available in the factories and the lesser the clout the less his influence with the management. He was thoroughly aware that imbalance of his position would lead to his suspension and loss of the status amongst his co-workers. He patronized the workers by offering them benefits in various forms. He was suppose to imply the instructions and regulations of the management in the mills and see to it that the workers don’t deal directly with the management or the employers. One of the reasons for the unrest amongst the workers was also due to this gap between the employee and the employers.

\textsuperscript{80} A R Burnett-Hurst, \textit{op.cit.}, pp . 46-47.
There are also instances where the jobber would engage in discriminating between workers and extending favors to his loyalists. The wages of the workers were many times depended on the arbitrary sanctions of the jobbers. Since his job was fixed and permanent he enjoyed the maximum benefits from management and in the matters of conflicts of interest supported the management or the mill employers over the workers. This way his monetary interests were protected from both the ends. Moreover, offenses like insubordination were so broadly defined in the regulations that it was possible for a jobber to pursue his personal grudges and rivalries inside the mill. The consequence was that ‘mill hand loyalties necessarily tended to be identified with the jobber rather than with the employer’.

The primary source of his income was dasturi (bribes/commission) for recruiting the workers. Apparently, there were not many complaints about the practice of dasturi, perhaps there was no nodal body or redressal mechanism to take action against the jobber. The fear of the management about the ruckus or law and order issue was clearly evident in the initial decades. The assurance to the workers from the management against jobber’s highhandedness kept them always aloof from bonding with the working class. This alienation of the management did affect them grossly and kept them at the mercy of the jobbers. The badlis were another source of income for him as the workers in order to get daily wages or secure employment in the mills they would offer him a part in their salary.

The association which would begin in the chawls would allow the workers little scope to escape from the clutches of the jobber. In due course, the bond would convert into loyalties and finally merge in the form of a gang. The division of workers in this form was perhaps one of the reasons that the mobilization did not take place of close to five decades after the formation of first mills in the Bombay city. The deplorable condition of the badlis was to a great extent due to the highhanded approach of the jobber. The preferential work or relaxation in working hours, sanctioning of leaves, getting a secure and permanent position, providing extra benefits etc were some of the on job benefits the workers would enjoy if they were part of his gang. Apart from this the protection and security internally and externally was an added bonus to them. The regional and caste affiliation was more important than the technical skills.

The jobber’s role though looks very miniscule here, but the long-term damage it caused need to be evaluated. The absence of ideology of the jobber did not allow the workers to grow

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81 Morris, *op.cit.*, p. 29.
intellectually nor were they made conscious of their strength for collective bargaining. The numerical strength always remained underutilized or was used many times in an unproductive manner. The era of the working class movements had to combat these jobbers apart from the employers or the mill owners.

The formation of Bombay Municipal Corporation gave them more scope to actively participate and display their muscle power. The local elections would put them in demands in specific areas and they would use their clout to play the decisive role during the elections. The extra political mileage gave him clear ascendency and dominant position in the mills and in his vicinity. The industrial supervisor also extended his support sometimes to the jobber in order to get advantage from the pool of the labour of these jobbers. ‘So important were their interlocking levels of leadership that supervisors preferred to bring their own jobbers into a mill when they were appointed and take them away when they left. Indeed, it was not impossible for the replacement of a manager to lead to a complete change of staff throughout the mill, beginning with the departmental heads and ending with the ordinary workers’ 82. The hierarchy or the pyramid in the mills made the jobber and the nexus with the supervisor a strong base which the management never wanted to reckon with. So even ‘minor modifications of the system were equally difficult. If the jobbers lost some of their powers, their position as a whole was weakened and their usefulness as recruiters reduced. The mill owners were forced to conclude that the jobber was a necessary evil’ 83.

The role of the jobber becomes an essential area of study because we see the early trace of mobilization of the working class in Bombay under the jobbers. Their role has been criticised both externally and internally of the mill areas. However, we need to also give them the credit on many aspects.

First of all the streamlining of the recruitment process which they undertook did not affect the mills or the factories due to sudden absenteeism or outflow of seasonal workers to their rural roots during the period of an agricultural pattern. The uninterrupted availability of the workers even made the management rely on them more than the supervisors and managers of the mills. This elevated their position and control in the industrial premises and also allowed

82 Indian Tariff Board (ITB) (1927) III, p . 570, also see in Bombay Presidency Police Abstracts of Intelligence (BPPAI), XXXVII, 6th Sept, 1924, p . 586.

83 Indian Tariff Board (ITB) 1927, op.cit., p . 350.
them to work with more loyalty towards their mill masters. ‘The jobber was the fulcrum of labour organization in the Bombay Mills’ 84.

The other aspect which also needs to be understood is that in the mid 19th century the presence of Europeans on the mill premises was more and they always required some external help to communicate their instructions and guidelines to the workers, who were mainly from rural parts and it made the role of jobbers inevitable and they became indispensable in the initial part of setting up the industrial establishment in the city of Bombay. ‘It has been argued that the existence of the jobber system was due, not to employer’s inability to overcome the sociolinguistic differences between themselves and their workers, but to their unwillingness to go to the trouble and expense of doing so’ 85.

The way jobbers evolved in fact depended on the individual leadership of each jobbers ability to sustain his command and networking inside and outside the mill areas. ‘It was the jobber who, at least until the 1930’s gave meaning and content to the formal work regulations. In the absence of any strong system of superior supervision, the jobber had very wide-ranging responsibility for the performance and behavior of the workforce’ 86.

The jobber was known in different parts of India by different names, such as ‘sardar, muqaddam or maistry, is almost ubiquitous in the Indian factory system and usually combines in one person a formidable series of functions’ 87. The work profile he had was either mechanic, the fitter and merely junior supervisor, but it ‘is he who is the de facto recruiter, and largely exercises in practice the powers of dismissal, punishment, and grant of leave to the workers’ 88. He generally gets promoted due to his seniority in work and at times competency in his skills.

As rightly observed by Radhakamal Mukherjee, ‘the improvement of the economic position of the individual jobber would have been of greater advantage to his fellow-workers as well

84 Newman, op.cit., p. 251.
85 Morris, op.cit., pp. 131-32.
86 Ibid., p. 142.
87 RCL, op.cit., p. 23.
88 Radhakamal, Mukherjee, The Indian Working Class, Hind Kitabs Ltd, Bombay, Second edition, 1948, pp. 46-47. Another kind of an intermediary between the management and the miner is the sardar. He keeps himself in touch with the miners’ villages and districts, and thus enables semi-idle agriculturists to find employment, and having found employment for them forms a stable link between them and their families also see, p. 49.
as to the management if his function as the recruiter was relegated to the background while he by his technical skill and experience could be promoted, as he never is, to become an overseer or a foreman. With vocational and industrial education of skilled and semi-skilled workers and the introduction of an effective scheme of apprenticeship training, it will be possible to raise skilled workers and jobbers to higher subordinate ranks in the factory which are now monopolized by the illiterate classes. It was only in 1920’s that the role of jobber was questioned and his high-handedness was reported.

The voice against the jobbers for the working class came from the organized trade union. The trade union leaders had realized that the main cohesive force of the working class is also the biggest hurdle for the mass mobilization so as long as the jobbers would be there, the role of external leaders would not be welcomed. So ‘in practice, therefore, each mill hand was part of a limited labour market, defined by lines of patronage and operated through personal relationships as well as a cash nexus’. ‘The description of the system clearly indicates that the power of the jobber, his semi-autonomous position as the disciplinary authority in the mill, derived not only from the arbitrary coercive rights he exercised in the name of the employer but also from the general insecurity of the workforce for which he was responsible.’

‘The Royal Commission on Labor spent more time investigating the subject and clearly recognized that the largely uncontrolled powers of the jobber were responsible for much of the instability which characterized the labor force and accounted for the “general prevalence” of bribery. The commission recommended “the exclusion of the jobber from the engagement and dismissal of labor,” these functions to be taken over by a specially trained labor officer who would be “subordinate to no one except the general manager of the factory. Among the benefits, it saw flowing from such a change were suppression of bribery and the reduction of absenteeism and labor turnover’. (Also See ANNEXURE –II).

A jobber was many a time as illiterate as the workers and had very less ambition to go beyond his position which he always found lucrative and commanding. The jobber did not

89 Ibid., pp. 46-47.


91 Morris, op.cit., p. 145.

92 RCL, op.cit., p. 149.
see the exploitation of the workers as an unjust act of the employers as he would himself replicate it. The expansion of the mill or the benefits of the workers were not on his agenda. ‘The jobbers found themselves pressed into service as a transitional leadership at the lower levels of the unions, responsible for collecting subscriptions and cementing the membership until the union’s own organization had matured. One result of their involvement was that the union tended to acquire its members in groups equivalent to a jobber’s circle of influence, it might, for example, recruit all the workers in one department but none in another, Or all the workers except a single gang that was isolated in a technical process, a kind of industrial enclave where the jobber was able to defend his traditional authority against the advance of the union’s influence’93.

The changing role of the working class and the slow and gradual emergence of their consciousness made the employer understand that the jobbers, in the long run, will not be able to handle the strikes and lockouts. They sometimes created the deliberate void of the workers in the industrial premises which also became evident, due to the questioning of the process of recruitment and frequent absence of skilful workers for the job.

‘The official report on the working of the Indian Factories Act in Bombay for 1913 complained that ‘the high labor turnover was encouraged by the jobbers and went so far as to suggest that trade unions were needed to solve the problem’94. The growth of the working class movement after 1920’s percolated with the new political ideologies and ideas of organisational behaviour. The new unions started shrinking the jobber’s floor of influence in the mill areas. ‘The outward sign of the jobbers decline was the badli control scheme of 1935, which attached a pool of badlis to each mill and tried to spread the available work more evenly among them.’95.

The badli system became more transparent and organised, the workers were not at the mercy of the jobbers for their survival means. The introduction of the card system in the due course for the badli workers streamlined the process of temporary recruitment which was the base of the existence of the jobbers. ‘Each badli received a registration card which assigned him to

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93 Newman, *op.cit.*, p. 219. Jobbers who did not identify themselves with the mill committees were set upon and beaten in the mills and in the streets. In the spring mill the jobbers and masters lost so much authority that Dange had to intervene against his own members to allow the mill to stay in production, p. 222.


a specific mill. Each morning he was to appear at that department with first claim to any temporary employment. Only if no regular card-carrying badli was available could a department jobber go to the mill gate and recruit other labour. Supported by the government, this proposal was quickly accepted by the Association and formally introduced into all mills in 1935"96. The frequent introduction of various Enquiry committees and commissions also brought in strict regulations of the execution of various Factory Acts.

‘The elimination of child labour and the cessation of the industry’s growth meant that the workforce became older, more urbanised and less pliable. Jobbers found it more difficult to maintain their old ascendancy over the men’97. It was essential that the jobber’s role and influence over the working class declines in the mills of Bombay, as it enabled the workers to associate beyond their caste and regional affiliation. The Bombay Mill Owners Association (BMOA) was readying itself to get away with the tyrannical hold of the jobbers so when the government highlighted the extensive of the jobbers on the working class it readily accepted the suggestions and took this opportunity to get rid of them or to regulate their roles in the mills.

‘The Association also proposed that mills keep service records for all jobbers. These service records would note the reasons why a jobber left or was dismissed so that those fired for taking bribes could be spotted’98. They equally pleaded their helplessness in monitoring the growing menace of jobbers and their operational gangs. They felt that the supervisors and the Managers were held on ransom, due to their coterie in the mill unit. They strongly condemned and recorded their observations that ‘occasionally an employer showed some awareness that all was not well and that jobber power might be contributing to the labour difficulties which were paralyzing the industry.

As the Report of BMOA of 1936 points out, ‘the jobber class which is slightly superior in mentality to the labourers is getting impudent, playing upon the ignorance of the latter and is many times the main cause of strikes by instigating and spreading dissatisfaction amongst the labourers behind the curtain for its own self-interests’99. Though the process was slow,


but it was experimented across the mills of Bombay ‘In 1937 the Millowners’ Association boasted that as a result of the cooperation between its own labour officer and the Government Labour Officer the power of the jobber had been sharply reduced, when a jobber is dismissed for bribery, the offense is noted on his record card by the Association and if he seeks to obtain a post in another mill, a copy of his previous record is available to the mill concerned’.

The cases of bribery started getting reported to the employers which was not the case prior to 1920’s as recorded that ‘in 1935, 25 persons holding important posts in the mills were dismissed for bribery’. The further blow to the elimination of jobbers control happened in 1934 when the Bombay Trade Disputes Act was introduced. The Act brought in the most important post on the industrial premises in Bombay. The post of the labour officer was created, who was to mediate with the employers on behalf of the working class for their rights and to bring out issues pertaining to their working conditions in front of the management.

It was he who strongly advocated ‘the idea of this “badli [substitute worker] control scheme” was to establish a pool of substitutes with first claims to temporary and permanent jobs’. The emergence of the working-class movement in the form of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and other local and regional unions replaced the jobber's feature of controlling the labour force.

The primary difference was the jobber would control them and influence them for his personal benefits, but the trade union leaders would influence them to create consciousness and participate in the collective bargaining and improvise their working conditions. As N. M. Joshi rightly stated “twenty years ago the Jobber was a power and with all his defects he was a real connection between master and man and if he agreed to any course of action the men would accept his ruling. The Jobber carries little weight today, therefore to prevent the labour being exploiting by undesirables the Mill owners should make some effort to build a bridge by helping to create strong workmen’s’ unions’.

100 Report of Indian Tariff Board (ITB), 1927, IV, p . 204.
101 Morris, op.cit., p . 151.
103 Morris, op.cit., p. 138.
The vital role of the jobbers as initial gathering point for the working class cannot be refuted. ‘The textile labour-force, therefore, far from being amorphous chaotic, represented a well-organised universe of numberless jobber-units’\textsuperscript{104}. The late revival of the working class movement to great extent attributed to the process of repairing the damage done by the jobbers in the industrial setup of Bombay.

**The Wages of the working class:**

The lucrative offers and the desire to earn a steady income forced many peasants to migrate to the city of Bombay. The wages offered did not match to their expectations and moreover, none of them anticipated the inflation of the city life to group them and drain them of the meager amount they would earn after spending more than half the day in the mills. The village life and sources though were uncertain, but it at least gave them support morally and socially. It was believed that ‘few industrial workers would remain in the industry if they could secure sufficient food and clothing in the village; they are pushed not pulled, to the city’\textsuperscript{105}. The complete new pattern of survival with virtually no savings, left them penniless, many would not even think of bringing down their family to the city of Bombay, only for the fear of draining from their small source of income. As RCL observed ‘The worker is surrounded by conditions which are entirely novel to him, disciplined hours of toil are a strain on the body that is not accustomed to them, and they involve a corresponding strain on the mind which is apt to be underestimated. The difficulty and distress felt by most workers in accepting’\textsuperscript{106}.

The strategic policy of the initial industrialist and mill owners was ‘to pay less and earn more’, as human labour was in abundance in India. They native capitalist followed in the footsteps of the colonial masters as ‘when the British recruited workers from among the ruined craftsmen and the poorest strata in the villages, they fixed wages conforming to these rural standards, which were much below the cost of labour’\textsuperscript{107}. The working class of Bombay desired as per their contribution and hard work, but mill owners felt that they didn’t deserve more, than what was allocated to them. As the basic or living wage for a worker should be

\textsuperscript{104} N. M. Joshi, Private Papers, Teen Murti Memorial Library (TMML), File No. 44, p . 103.


\textsuperscript{106} RCL., *op.cit*, pp . 16-18.

\textsuperscript{107} Sukomal, *op.cit.*, p . 29.
such as ‘to include not merely the cost of maintenance for himself but also does some
supporting his family, clothing them, housing them, educating them and giving them
privileges incident to their standard of living, besides the provisions for still something more
in the way of saving’\textsuperscript{108}.

The farmer, who had now turned into a mechanical worker, not only had the cultural shock
but was finding it difficult to be part of this new hourly functioning of life. The dawn and the
dusk were witnessed by him in the dull and dingy work premises. The ill ventilation and
short breaks were quite a new phenomenon to him. His family life was shattered and the only
agenda for him was to secure his source of income in the city of Bombay. The glamorous
stories of the city life made him create his own imagination as pointed out by Burnett-Hurst,
‘the streets of Bombay appear to be paved with gold, but those attracted by the high wages to
be earned seldom realize until they reach the city that these high wages are accompanied by
a high cost of living, and that, while a man by himself may be able to save a proportion of
his earnings, when he is accompanied by his wife and family he more often falls into debt.
The frequent outbreaks of plague, cholera, smallpox, etc., claim their victims very largely
from amongst the workers\textsuperscript{109}. Their demands for higher wages did not go beyond the jobbers
and the constant fear of dismissal from work forced him to accept unjust pay packet. (See
ANNEXURE- II).

It was indeed ironical that the worker who was shaping the growth of industries in Bombay
was not even placed last on the chart of sharing the growing profits of the mills. He was
captured in the vicious cycle of more demand for money to meet his basic requirements and
less supply in the form of exploitative wages. This put him under the perennial role of a
debtor, in his small habitat he had nothing which he could call of his own possession, ‘his
jewels, vessels, saris, in fact, everything of howsoever little value is mortgaged. The
indifference of the employer, the extravagance of the employee and the avarice of the
money-lender have cumulatively brought about this situation. The root cause is low wages.
While wages are ridiculously low, the family is abnormally large. The consequence is that
even to meet the elementary needs of himself and his family, the labourer has to run into
debt\textsuperscript{110}.

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Department of Economics and Commerce, University of Allahabad, Vol. XX , 1940, p . 710.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} Burnett-Hurst, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 10.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110} K.S, Srikantan , \textit{op.cit.}, p . 185.
\end{flushright}
The burden of sustaining in the city haunted him every day and the psychological trauma he carried every day of ‘dread of dismissal’. The clutches of debts would begin from the day he would come to the city with his little, failure to get immediate employment would force him to take small loans either from the jobbers, Pathans or local money lenders. The gap between his wants and adequacy of wages always fell short of and so taking debts became one of the features of the working class in Bombay.

Devasagayam has classified these debts into five types:

The first one for his personal needs and survival in the city of Bombay.

The second one was for various rituals or ceremonies whereby he had to maintain his social obligations in the community.

The third one was for any unforeseen emergencies, such as sickness, ill health or for taking care of medical expenses.

Fourthly was due to birth of new arrival in the family, which added to his expenses and finally, his borrowing on various occasions, for his uncontrolled requirements.

This would result in almost most of the families in the debt so ‘an average debt of at least Rs.45 in half the working class families of Bombay’. The cost of living would escalate every year and the availability of the cheap labour reduced the bargaining power of better wages from the working class. This disparity started growing strongly during the First World War. The mill owners were keener on paying the dividends than a hike in the wages, whereas the workers were demanding fair wage point to be adopted unlike other industrial countries worldwide.

The question of fair wage was rightly described by N M Joshi, ‘What is called ‘Fair Wage’ will vary not only from industry to industry. On the financial condition of the industry which will necessitate in some cases wages being lowered who actually the cost of living any be rising’. The 12 hours of work did not give much scope to the workers to engage in other

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111 Ibid.
source of income. The ‘cost of living went up to 54% above, the pre-war level’\textsuperscript{115}. The scale of wages did not see much rise though the mill owners were keen to pay them dividends which were one-time solace, but not rise in their consistent source of income. It as reported that in 1917-18, not less than 97 strikes\textsuperscript{116} took place in different mills of Bombay, with primary demand of 20% hike in wages.


\textsuperscript{116} P.D, Kulkarni, \textit{op.cit.}, pp . 227-228. The cost of living yet being 34 to 39% higher on the 27\textsuperscript{th} December, 1918, there was a strike in one mill in Bombay and 11\textsuperscript{th} January, 1919 there was a general strike in all the mills. It continued for eleven long days when at least 35% increase was granted. This wave of strikes reached its peak on 2\textsuperscript{nd} of January, 1920 when a general strike in Bombay was organized by workers themselves which lasted for one full month. This time the demands were reduction in working hours from 12 to 10, annually one month holiday with pay and increment in wages proportionate to the cost of living. The memorandum putting forward these demands was drafted in a general meeting held in December 1919 in which workers of 75 mills where represented, on the largest and the widest general strike in Bombay textiles ended with the granting ended with granting of 55% rise in wages. All these strikes were organised by the workers themselves. The war time struggle had taught the workers a lesson.
## Comparative Monthly Earnings of Textile Workers in Different Centers

The Table V indicates that the workers across the country in the textile industry also had the disparity in the wages, so the fair wage formula was an idealist dream for the working class in the textile industry of India.

In fact, the textile workers across the country were looking forward to the working class in Bombay to set the precedent and to take lead in the movement of raising their demands. The ratio of the single earning member was equally alarming as 71.65 percent in Bombay depended on the earnings of only the head of the family.¹¹²¹

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### TABLE V: (1936-1938).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Important centers</th>
<th>Rising spinning Centers</th>
<th>Frame Centers</th>
<th>Weavers (2 looms)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>As.</td>
<td>Ps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sholapur</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baroda State</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indore State</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ujjain (Gwalior)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Nagpur</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madura</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cawnpore</td>
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<td>Calcutta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lahore</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
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class to their rural earnings brought out the scale of differences as the uncertainty in the
monsoon and crops would leave the farmer undecided on his annual income. The failure in
the recovery of their invested income would force them to mortgage their land and very
rarely they would be able to free the land from the local zamindar or the money lender, but in
the city the only investment they had to do was of their time, and regular work would fetch
them sometimes more than what they would have earned in their villages, this comparison
was for a long time the reason for the isolation of the workers from any mass movements.

The rural employment was seasonal and it was the phase of no income generation to the
family. Since the landholding was a joint venture due to the joint family system, it was easier
for one family to move to the city in search of a stable employment. The city life was looked
upon as a more civilized life, but to meet the new standards was equally challenging because
‘the worker needed sufficient purchasing power to enable him to live as becomes a member
of the management, one such was the levying of fines on the workers under various pretexts
in order to enforce discipline and reduce absenteeism.

The ‘deductions from wages fall roughly into three classes, namely, fines which are imposed
for disciplinary reasons, deductions on account of damage sustained by the employer and
deductions for the use of material and tools and for other benefits provided by the
employer’\footnote{RCL, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 217.}. The absence of union gave the mill owners arbitrary power to enforce different
laws in their respective mills. A number of fines were also not uniform, nor was there any
accountability of the expenditure of the amount collected through fines from the working
class.

The initial attempt is seen only with the proposal of Workmen’s Compensation Act
introduced by the Government of India in 1921. It took three years of discussions and
deliberation for the proposal to be formed into the Final Act, which came into effect only on
1\textsuperscript{st} July, 1924. ‘Thus the Act covered workers in all but the smallest factories, in mines, on
the railways and tramways, on certain types of building work, and in certain less important

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\footnotemark[1]] Shitla,Prasad, Saksena, “Applicability of the Principle of minimum Wage in India”, \textit{Indian Journal of
\item[\footnotemark[2]] RCL, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 217.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
branches of employment\textsuperscript{121}. The Act did try to cover the workers against the accidents during the working hours, making provisions for some kind of benefits in case of disabilities, but it did not prove effective and beneficial to the working class. The Act was recommended for further modification.

\textbf{The standard of living of the labourers:}

The last part of the woes of the working class of Bombay was their deteriorating standard of living. This issue was also debated in the Imperial Legislative Council of May 1920 by Mr. Haroon Jaffer, and his resolution evoked from Sir Thomas Holland a characteristically clever, sympathetic and inconsequential speech. “I would rather see the mill industry of Bombay wiped out than accept an indefinite perpetuation of the conditions under which many of the workers are necessarily compelled to live”\textsuperscript{122}. The worker in the city had less accumulation but was still to follow the entire social obligations single headedly. These obligations did not affect him much in his rural roots, as the expenses were shared in the bigger family.

The Royal Commission of Labour in 1930 tried to draw the estimate\textsuperscript{123} and they came to the conclusion that a worker in the city on an average has to perform five marriages and funerals in a generation, which incurs to him the amount of Rs.42 annually. The other serious issue of the working class in Bombay was the place of his habitation. The lush green open fields and farms, the homegrown food products, adequate leisure time and scope of various social gatherings became a distant dream for the workers in the city. The worker's dwellings in Bombay were usually around the mill areas prominently the central part of the city. Burnett-Hurst classifies them in three categories\textsuperscript{124},

a) They were commonly known as Chawls, which was a cluster of houses, small rooms either inhabited by one family or also occupied by many people in sharing.

b) The second ones were sheds constructed out of wood, tins etc, it provided temporary shelter and was not strong enough during incessant rainy season of Bombay. It was the

\textsuperscript{121}\textit{RCL, op.cit.}, pp. 297-98.

\textsuperscript{122} Bombay Chronicle, 25\textsuperscript{th} May, 1920, col 4,5, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{RCL, op.cit.}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{124} Burnett-Hurst, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 19.
low-rent housing and was generally inhabited by the workers who could afford to spend much on the housing and

c) The third one was known as Zavli, it was a regular hut made out of dry leaves from the date or coconut trees.

The Chawls were the most common place of the inhabitation of the mill workers, it had a common bathroom, wells, common corridor, verandah etc, it tried to replicate the village life for the workers. ‘In 1921-22, the predominant rents for single rooms tenanted by the working classes in Bombay ranged from Rs. 3.8 to Rs. 5.8, the most common rent being Rs. 3.12 per month. It was found in 1917-18 that approximately 97 percent of the working-class households in Parel were living in single rooms, the Budget inquiry conducted by the Bombay Labour Office in 1921, over 60 percent of the households were overcrowded.

The average number of persons per room in Parel was 3.5, It should be noted that a single room is often occupied by several families. According to the Census of 1921, there were in Bombay no less than 135 instances in which a single room was occupied by six families or more.” 125 The overcrowding126 in these chawls was a common phenomenon, to have your own house was the luxury which a miniscule number was able to enjoy. The poor working conditions and improper sanitation facilities added to their health index. The healthy farmer from the rural region would struggle to remain healthy and free of various diseases.

The Royal Commission observed, ‘in the Bombay Presidency where over 80 percent of the workers are employed in the cotton mills, their physical condition is admitted on all hands to be poor. An investigation carried out a few years ago showed that these mill workers have a noticeably low average weight as compared with other classes of labour” 127.

125 Quoted in Burnett-Hurst, op.cit., p. 28. Report on an Enquiry into Working Class Family Budgets in Bombay City, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1935. Census of India, 1921 reported that 70% of the houses in Bombay city are one roomed.

126 Ibid., Quoted in Appendix. Overcrowding of Rooms, ‘Overcrowding as defined by the census officials in England, is said to occur when there are more than two persons to a room’. Using this standard there was overcrowding in 74 out of the 120 households surveyed, check, p. 127.

127 RCL, op.cit., p. 246.
The room of the chawl would not measure beyond three meters by four meters and it rarely had extra space of privacy to the married couple. The unsanitary conditions at times would affect the newly born and it would lead to high mortality rates in these working class pockets. The structure of the building would also be in dilapidated condition and the owners would not be in the position to repair them. The common spaces would act as the leisure time addas (spot of the assembly during free time) and they would engage in their small discussions. When compared to the living conditions in Bombay it came to the light that ‘of the total population of Bombay 66 percent live in one-room tenements as against 64 percent in Cawnpore, 6 percent in London, 3 in Edinburgh, 9 in Dundee and 13 in Glasgow.’

The safety of the worker was perhaps the most neglected of all the features, the unhealthy living conditions compounded with the risk of life and disability while working on the machines. The lack of immediate medical help and no regulatory on the compensation policy the workers were virtually at the mercy of their management and employers. The Royal Commission of Labour reported the number of accidents in the factories from 1922 to 1929. Reporting of the accidents:

The following table given the results of the reported accidents in all factories subject to the Factories Act since the definition of “factory” was widened in 1922.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No. of persons injured</th>
<th>No. of persons injured per 100,000 employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fatal</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Fatal</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>5,562</td>
<td>6,960</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>5,507</td>
<td>7,037</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>1,690</td>
<td>8,055</td>
<td>10,029</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>2,181</td>
<td>9,901</td>
<td>12,645</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>3,155</td>
<td>11,441</td>
<td>14,866</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>3,403</td>
<td>12,066</td>
<td>15,711</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>12,590</td>
<td>16,348</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>1,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>15,579</td>
<td>20,208</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>1,301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI clearly indicates the rise in the number of accidents from 6,960 in 1922 to 20,208, it was almost four times within a decade. Similarly the percentage for injury over 1,00,000 also doubled from 512 in 1922 to 1,301 by 1929. The value of the worker's life by the mill owners and the employers can be evaluated by drawing reference from these rising figures. The introduction of new machinery, however, did not relieve the workers nor it benefitted or elevated their working conditions in terms of safety.

As reported by Burnett-Hurst, ‘accidents in the Bombay cotton mills average about one per day. Yet little has been done to set up machinery for dealing with them. Many a slight injury has become serious or fatal through neglect or want of proper treatment. There are no “safety-first” rules, no proper facilities for removing the injured person to the hospital, and only one mill holds a first-aid class. The efficiency of the workers is directly proportionate to the facilities and safe working conditions they get, but in Bombay, the labourers despite all the adverse situations and circumstances not only performed well but excelled in their work. The ‘triumph of the machine over the man became synonymous with the insatiable greed of the capitalists for maximum profits and led to the lengthening of the working day the intensification of labour simultaneous with miserably low wages’.

The Factory Labour Commission also pointed out in 1908 that the number of working hours was not only inhumane but amounts to be redressed soon. They had witnesses who testified that on an average an adult worker would work for almost 13 to 15 hours in the textile

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130 Burnett-Hurst, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

131 Sukomal Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 3.
factory. It was due to the revelation of such testimonies that in 1911 a statutory was introduced for limiting the working hours to maximum 12 hours in one day. The working class movement was the inevitable phenomenon by the beginning of 1920 as the workers had plenty of grievances and it was time to take on the capitalist class who all these decades suppressed the voice of the workers. The labour movement in India varied in its stages of evolution and had its own ups and downs. What makes the study of Bombay labour movement an interesting area of study is the way the city responded to the call of various movements. The city of Bombay from 1920 became the yardstick for the success and intensity of the entire struggle for freedom in India.

The Non-cooperation movement appealed to the workers in the industry to boycott their work, similarly during the Civil Disobedience movement we find the participation of the workers in great force. The national leaders had understood it very well that to target the colonial government they will have to hit at the commercial and economic sector of the government. The city of Bombay was now the financial capital of the country and the revenue it generated was of considerable amount. The colonial masters and the native Indian capitalist were now in nexus to exploit the labourers and the working class which was the new pattern of governance for the marginalized in the city. The trails and errors of the last century had given the labourers enough of experience to place their plight and discontent in a more systematic manner to the management. The only void was of having an organization of national stature who could bring momentum to the movement. The ground was also prepared for the emergence of new labour leaders who would primarily focus on the issues and problems of the labour and lead to their amelioration.

The struggle for freedom was getting shaped up in India, but for reasons unexplained it didn’t directly take up the cause of the workers and the labourers. The political aspirations and participation in the democratic set up of the governance became the primary agenda of many national leaders of the time. We do not find the leaders of the Indian National Congress or Muslim league or any other political party engaging directly with the labour movement. The systematic isolation and non acceptance of their vital role was more convenient for the colonial government. The indirect links of some of the capitalist class with these leading political parties also acted as a major deterrent. The act to balance between both the ends was a very thin line and it was many times overlooked. The emergence of labour consciousness though was a slow and gradual process, but it was waiting to get addressed for a long term resolution. A big section of the society was still
unaware and indifferent to the issues and the sufferings of the labour class and this was also one of the important task for the new labour leaders and the movement.

The next chapter will deal with the leaders of the labour movement, their influence and promotion of their ideology, the process of mobilization, its penetration in different sections of the industrial units, and the impact of Communism during the initial years of the labour movement and finally the analysis of their attempts for generating consciousness of the class war or struggle amongst the workers.