CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

(1) THE BACKGROUND:

Trade unionism in India is not confined to blue collar industrial workers alone. It has spread over white collar salaried employees as well. White collar employees who were shy of trade unionism in the beginning were unionized in a big way by the middle of the present century. White collar employees, both in the Government Sector (Post and telegraph, Railways, Central excise etc.), and in Public and Private industry have formed strong trade unions.

The non-clerical Supervisory, technical and administrative staff, popularly known as Officers constitute a special category among white collar employees. They are closer to management and are usually considered part of the management as they perform technical, supervisory and managerial roles in industry. Some of them have professional associations of long standing. However Officers started organizing into trade unions about two decades ago. Officers in industries such as
Life insurance and banking as well as in Government administration and manufacturing industries have established Unions.

Officers generally do not use the term trade union; they call their trade unions' associations'. Local and regional associations of Officers in a single undertaking or industry usually combine into federations at the all-India level; and federations have combined into confederation of all federations of officers in India.

Officers associations have lately taken to occasional militant trade union activities. Officers are strategically placed in the industry and constitute a vital category of employees, from the point of view of industry, society and economic development. Growing Unionisation among them is therefore of special significance for the social scientist as well as for society. Indian industry and society at large. In this background, I got interested in the study of trade unionism among bank officers.

Social scientists and others have shown considerable interest in trade unions in India. Various aspect of trade unionism have been studied by economists, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists union practitioners and general observers. However until recently, the literature on Indian trade unions was dominated by general historical treatises and factual studies of union organization. In view of close connection between trade
unions and politics in our country it was fashionable for students of trade unionism to analyse the origin and growth of trade unions, degree of unionization among workers, their leadership patterns, administrative problems, interunion rivalry, social and economic implications of trade unionism for industry and society. Ramaswamy (19??) says, 'There is parrot like deprecation of all that is considered evil in trade unions. The political affiliation of unions, multiple unionism, and outside leadership are bemoaned in every study'... 'there is striking absence of behavioural and attitudinal data pertaining to the ordinary member.' There were hardly any studies dealing with the social reality of trade union organization at the grassroots level. A few studies which made attempts in this direction were mainly concerned with the problems of leadership and worker's interest in union activities. (e.g. Vaid (1965), Mathur and Mathur (1965), Punekar and Madhuri (1967), Sheth (1965, 1966) etc.) Ramaswamy's (1977) work on trade unions and workers in Coimbatore is the first major publication dealing with the structure and function of trade unions in a clear sociological perspective.

Not many studies of trade unionism among white collar employees in India are available. Singh (1967), and Karnik (1974) and Sheth (1966), give a short historical note on white collar unions. A few empirical studies by Goil (1968), Mitra (1968); Pandey (1968), Dayal and Sharma (1974), Punekar and Savur
(1967), and Punekar (1971), are concerned mainly with the nature and extent of white collar unionism and the factors facilitating and restricting such unionism. However I am not aware of any detailed sociological analysis of a white collar union.

(II) REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE:

A number of studies on white collar unions in the western society are available. Significant among these studies are those of the unions of salaried professionals (Goldstein: 1954, 1955, 1959); of the unions of the managerial employees (McCormick: 1960), and of the unions of the engineers and chemists (Seldman and Cain: 1964; Strauss and Sayles: 1954, Strauss: 1954, 1964), and of professionals (Bernard: 1955), of Bankmen (Blackburn: 1967) and Blackburn and Prandy: 1965). Authors such as Solomun and Burn (1963), Sturmathal (1966) and Bain (1970) have examined the white collar union movement in general. I shall narrate in brief some significant characteristics of white collar unionism on the basis of this literature.

These studies have identified several factors responsible for the emergence and rapid development of white collar unions. These factors include increase in the number of white collar workers either because of nationalization of industry (such as coal industry in Britain); expansion of white-collar oriented industries, increased bureaucratization in industry resulting in strained relations between white collar employees
and the top management; decreasing opportunities for upward mobility, harrowing of the gap between the salaries and wages of white collar and blue collar workers respectively.

It has been shown that initially white collar workers were slow to unionize. The reluctance of the white collar workers towards their unions was attributed to such factors as high social status, fear of loss of prestige because of unionization, and unionization as something discouraging individual effort, limiting scope for advancement, poor relations with management and union was seen as 'dirty' 'low' and something belonging to blue collar workers.

The existing literature also suggests that white collar unions are different from blue collar unions in several respects. The main distinguishing characteristics of the white collar employees are: their relatively higher social status, educational background, occupational position and middle-class culture. These factors are believed to be conducive to the special features found among white collar unions. These special features include: the use of the title "Guild" or "association" for such unions, their stress on activities characterizing social clubs; their reluctance to indulge in militant activities; their conciliatory and constructive approach to management and their widespread emphasis on what is generally called responsible unionism.
Strauss (1954) has shown that white collar workers were better organized into trade unions not by their identification with the blue collar workers but by stressing the fact that unions are the best measures to achieve middle class values and goals and also by making the union and its activities acceptable to the middle class white collar employees.

On the other hand, similarity between unions of blue collar and white collar workers arises from the similarity between the perceived interests of these two groups. Blackburn and Brandy (1967) are critical about the usual pattern of argument that white collar unions are different from blue collar unions. They have argued that white collar unions are similar to blue collar unions in that they emerge from the same circumstances as those of blue collar unions, however, according to them, excessive preoccupation with the difference of white collar unions would give rise to unproven assumptions about the nature of trade unions in general. These authors emphasize the need for the study of 'the character' of white collar union. Union character according to them is the resultant of union completeness (Proportion of actual members to potential members in a union) and union-ness measured on the basis of seven dimensions. These dimensions are (1) whether the union regards collective bargaining and related activities as main functions; (2) Independence from employers; (3) willingness to use militant methods; (4) Willingness to be
identified as a trade union, (5) Registration as a trade union, (6) Affiliation to trade union federations and (7) Affiliation to labour party. So instead of emphasizing the difference between white collar and blue collar unions they emphasize the need to place the whole question of trade union within the general framework where unionization is measured as a function of unionization and union completeness. So white collar unions are different from blue collar unions in that they are at different points on the continuum, the difference being one of degree only.

Bain (1970) on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of literature on white collar workers unions in manufacturing industry in England, has put forward some generalizations with respect to growth of white collar workers unions. He finds no significant relation between the growth of white collar workers unions and factors like sociodemographic characteristics of white collar workers such as age, sex, social origin and status, economic factors such as earnings and conditions of employment, aspects of work situation and such aspects of trade union as their public image, recruiting practices and structures. However he finds significant relation between the growth of white collar unions and employment concentration, union recognition by management and government action.

Solomon and Burns (1963) on the basis of census data show that with the heterogeneous white collar workers the unionization has taken place more in peripheral than pure
white collar groups. Also unionization is greater where 
white collar workers are concentrated in large numbers than 
in other areas and also greater in non-manufacturing than 
in manufacturing industries. Government and Public sector 
industries are more unionized than non-government and 
private sector organizations.

Sturmthal (1966) gives a comparative picture of white 
collar unions in industrially developed societies. He has 
drawn some general conclusions with respect to their member­ 
ship, leadership, organizational structure, method of opera­ 
tion and ideology. According to him, white collar work force 
has grown enormously in the industrialized countries in the 
west and in Japan. The white collar groups in these countries 
are quite heterogeneous due to variations in education,level 
of responsibility, time span of discretion and freedom. The 
three broad groups of white collar workers suggested in this 
study are (1) Clerical and allied workers, (2) Professionals 
including first line supervisory workers, and (3) Sales 
workers, white collar unions are found to have different 
degrees of admixture of the characteristics of trade unions 
and professional associations. Not all white collar unions 
are separate from blue collar unions. Also not all such 
unions are non-political. However, a large proportion of 
white collar unions are separate from blue collar unions and 
are politically neutral.

I shall review in brief the available Indian studies 
of white collar unions. Goyal (1968) mentions about -
Phenomenal growth during the years 1951-61 in the number of white collar workers due to tremendous growth of industry, increase in the number of banks and Life Insurance Company, commercial offices and establishments, and increase in the number of governmental and semi-government offices. Also tremendous growth in unionization of white collar employees has been registered viz. two and a half times in wholesale and retail trade, Life Insurance company and banking and three and half times in service groups. Keeping in view the trend of unionisation in last 10-15 years, he predicts a rapid growth of white collar workers unions. Goil (1968), who has collected data based on 10 white collar unions concludes that they all have a very high (average 80 p.c.) degree of unionization. They are registered unions, recognized directly or indirectly by their management and all but one have leadership from within and are independent unions.

Factors conducive to white collar unionization were identified as: growth in the number of white collar workers, rising prices, feeling of being underpaid, fear of retrenchment. According to him, the restrictive factors were employers opposition, indifference of employees, union rivalries, lack of experience and inadequate help from big unions.

Mathur and Papola (1968) explain the increase in unionization as essentially due to proximity and existing objective conditions such as employment prospects, social status - accorded to them, nationalization. Motivation to organize
comes from dissatisfaction with existing economic and social conditions. Significant characteristics noted by them are insider, part-time leaders, absence of paid leaders and militancy. Mitra (1968) identified large membership and active vigorous militant organization as characteristics of the unions he studied. According to him, economic and non-economic factors like absence of uniform scales, rationalization fall in real income and soaring price have contributed to their growth.

Non-economic factors such as experience of more formal and distant relations between the superior and the subordinate staff, awareness of their big size and key position in the administrative process; chances of promotion becoming fewer and fewer, bad treatment by boss, interest shown in them by the political parties etc., have played the role in contributing to their growth.

Problems faced by them were identified as domination by political parties, unhealthy rivalry due to mushroom growth of unions, outside leadership.

Punekar (1971) surveyed 21 white collar workers' unions in public and private sector industries, he shows that the development of most of these is of recent origin mostly between 1950-60, have high unionization between 80 and 100 percent. Their main functions: to give economic and other benefits to members, they emphasize collective bargaining, however haphazard, and shows that management's attitude to
these unions did not appear to have crystallized. This attitude was characterized by initial opposition, hostility and victimization followed by willy-nilly acceptance of the unions for negotiations. He enlists strong points of white collar workers' unions as high unionization, sound finances, internal leadership, confidence shown by members in their leaders and educated and intelligent membership.

Pandey (1968) analyzing the direction of changes in the behaviour pattern of white collar unions has identified such changes as use of direct action to achieve their demands collectively. Despite the fact that they use political pressures, they do not identify themselves with any political party. They show concern for wider issues. He identifies causes of changing character as loss of prestige, inflationary pressures and educated unemployment.

Only one study concerning officer's unions is available. Dayal and Sharma (1971) studied the first 17-day strike by officers in state Bank of India. According to them, unlike the clerical employees' union, the officers' union was not officially recognized by the management. The management dealt with the clerical union on a collective basis. The method employed to deal with the officers' union was characterized by informality rather than by any set procedure as in the case of the other union. Settlements were not signed and declared as such but by way of administrative instructions. Long delays in their implementation were common.
The present study is highly influenced by the works of Munson (1970), Sheth (1977) and Ramaswamy (1977). The concept of trade union as organization as well as the typology of member centred union, dependent and political union developed by Munson are used in the present study. Sheth's conceptual framework of trade unions as interest groups in a democratic society and social reality of trade unionism in India and Ramaswamy's study of worker and his union have suggested broad framework for the study.

(III) FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM:

This is a sociological study of four Officer's associations relating to three nationalized banks A, B and C.* The associations included here function at a regional level. The study aims at understanding these associations as trade unions. The main research questions to which my investigation is directed are:

(1) How are these associations formed? What are the main organizational and environmental factors which contributed to the emergence & growth of these associations?

(2) What is the nature of their formal and informal organization? What are their main functions? How are they structured?

(3) How are leaders and members recruited to these associations? What is the nature of their involvement in the association? How is this involvement related to their roles as bank officers and their social obligations. - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

* Names of the banks are kept anonymous.
towards their families and the wider community? What are the officers' expectations from their associations?

In view of the absence of relevant comparable research on officers' associations the present study is essentially exploratory. I intend to study the structure and working of these associations in terms of union organization, and in relation to members, industry and society. Major aspects of study can be described as under:

1. Emergence and development of officers' trade unionism in the three banks under study.

2. Officers' Unions as organizations: their objectives and functions in relation to members, bank management, and the wider society, their Formal structure, division of work and authority patterns.

3. The unions and their leaders: factors responsible for choice of activists; degree of involvement in union work; compatibility between the union role and roles played in industry, family and wider community; attitudes towards various aspects of union organization and activities.

*The officers' associations under study will hence forth be referred to as unions to avoid confusion in expression or interpretation.*
(4) The unions and their members: reasons for joining the union; degree of involvement in union work; expectations from the union and attitudes towards various aspects of union organization, leadership and activities; perception of union involvement in relation to roles played in the industry, family and wider community.

All these aspects will be analysed in the context of the existing observations and generalizations among industrial workers including white collar workers. The major issues in Indian trade unionism such as the nature and extent of union democracy, the relationship between trade unions and politics, inter union rivalry, leadership patterns and workers involvement in trade unions, will be examined in the light of the findings and conclusions of the information collected for this research. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the sociology of Indian trade unions and, more importantly, raise meaningful questions for further research.

(IV) METHOD AND APPROACH:

As this is an exploratory study, no attempt was made to identify a representative sample of bank officers or their unions. As Ahmedabad and its surrounding region constitute one of the largest banking centres in the country and as officers in the nationalized banks in the Ahmedabad -
regional are fairly well unionized,* I decided to study officers' unionism in Ahmedabad.

My preliminary enquiry revealed that only one of the officers' unions in the nationalized banks in the Ahmedabad region had a non-employee (referred to as 'outsider' in popular usage) as President & was affiliated to a national federation of trade unions. All the other unions were parts of the respective federations of individual banks. One Bank had two officers' unions. In some banks, while the majority of officers were in their distinct unions, a small proportion of them were members of unions of the clerical and subordinate staff (generally known as award staff). At one bank, the officers' union emerged as a separate entity from an earlier combined union, of officers and clerical staff. In this background, I decided to study officers unions which could be clearly identified as such and chose such unions in three banks - A, B, C. ** Officers unions in these banks were firmly established for more than a decade.

(V) METHOD OF STUDY:

The data collected for this study during the period 1976-79 are based on the following sources:

* According to my information officers unions are functioning in all the nationalized banks in the region and have almost full membership.

** Union A and Union B at the banks A and B respectively and Unions CX and CY at the Bank C.
(1) Informal discussions with leaders of Officers' unions as well as the award staff unions in several nationalized banks in Ahmedabad.

(2) Informal discussions with some top management personnel and leaders of officers unions as well as their national federations among the three banks selected for the study. Few confederation leaders also were informally interviewed.

(3) Recorded information relating to the membership, structure and activities of the unions under study.

(4) Preliminary interviews with five leaders and five members of the unions under study with the help of a relatively unstructured interview guide.

(5) Structured interviews with 35 leaders and 92 members covering the unions under study. The structured interview schedule (See Appendix) was prepared on the basis of the experience gained during the preliminary interviews I had informal talks with all the present leaders as well as the founder leaders that were available in Ahmedabad during the period of my field work. However structured interviews were taken from 17 office bearers and 17 managing committee members and one opposition activist who never got elected in the union. The sample of members comprised approximately 10 percent of their respective total strength in Ahmedabad.
(6) Observation of proceedings of various meetings that took place during the period of field work at the unions A and B. These meetings included six executive committee meetings, eight general body meetings for members, six meetings of the confederation state council and one meeting of the executive committee of the confederation of the unions among bank officers.

(7) Observation of various trade union activities and action programmes that took place during the period at the four unions.

Data pertaining to actual working of the trade union organization could be gathered mainly from two unions. These will be called unions A and B corresponding to the banks A and B respectively. The two rival unions among officers in bank C (to be called Cx and Cy) were involved in acute rivalry during the period of my field work. Hence I was not allowed the opportunity to observe any meetings or major activities of either of the two unions, I was however permitted to spend some time at the union office and observe normal interactions among leaders and members. Hence, most of my information with respect to actual working of the unions, their informal structures etc. is restricted mainly to unions A and B.

(VI) PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT:

Chapter 2 provides the background information on the banking industry in the Ahmedabad (Gujarat) region, and
includes a short profile of bank officers in the region. Chapter 3 deals with the emergence and development of officers' trade-unionism in the three banks under study in the background of trade-unionism among workers and white collar employees. Chapter 4 discusses the objectives and functions of the unions while Chapter 5 is concerned with the formal as well as informal structure of these unions. Chapter 6 presents the social and professional profile of union activists, their involvement in union work and their attitudes and expectations with respect to their unions. Chapter 7 deals with the rank and file members of the unions, their social and professional background, their entry into the unions, participation and involvement in the unions and their attitudes and expectations with respect to the unions as well as to trade unionism in general. In the last Chapter, I shall summarizes the findings and conclusions from the present research and examine one of the most important issues in trade unionism namely trade union democracy in the light of the present study.