CHAPTER III
Absenteeism is an universal phenomenon. It is omnipotent in the industries of developed as well as developing countries. The difference between the two is that its magnitude is high in less developed countries.

The idea of absenteeism is not alien to India. Its history can be traced to the year 1931 when Royal Commission on labour evinced interest in the study of absenteeism. After investigation it found that incidence of absenteeism was high in many manufacturing industries, plantations, Railways and Tramways. The commission was shocked by high rate of absenteeism among factory workers which ranged from 44% to 69% in case of male workers and 44% to 75% in case of female workers. In plantations the incidence varied around 26% in Surma Valley and 31% in Assam Valley in 1929.

The Royal Commission on Labour attributed rural orientation and village-based character of workers as the chief cause of high absenteeism. Workers were dragged to cities owing to economic pressures. They were pushed and not pulled to cities.

A decade later Labour Investigation Committee found no change in the incidence of absenteeism. In the Cotton Textile Industry, for example the rate of absenteeism

1. Royal Commission on Labour of India, 1931.
In 1944 was found to vary from 5.7% (in Ahmedabad) to 15.4% (in Sholapur) and in cement industry from 5% to 15%. In the tea plantations of Assam it was as high as 24.5% in 1943-44.

The Labour Investigation Committee considered the following as the causes:

"The workers remain absent for various reasons of which some may be genuine but others not so. Sickness is responsible for a considerable part of the absenteeism in most places. Epidemics like cholera, small pox, and malaria always break out in severe form in most industrial areas. The low vitality of Indian workers makes them easy prey to such epidemics and bad housing and insanitary conditions of living aggravate the trouble. Probably the most predominant cause of absenteeism, however is the frequent urge of the rural exodus. Other causes are industrial accidents, social and religious ceremonies, drinking and amusements etc.

Panakal and Rao after a careful study came to the conclusion that the following are some of the relevant causes of absenteeism.

1) Unsuitable working conditions.

ii) Unfavourable mental attitude arising out of boredom, discontent with wages, resentment against inefficient supervisors etc.

iii) Lack of provision for general welfare.

iv) Inadequate medical facilities for minor injuries.

v) Increased distance between the management and workers.

Hao conducted a study on fluctuations in absenteeism in various industries of India such as cotton, woollen, coal, mines, iron and steel etc. He found that the rate of absenteeism varied from 10% to 15%. He found that incidence of absenteeism was high in plantations (25%) and mines (40%).

3 Murthy found that younger workers remain absent more times than old workers. Young workers are not regular, as they are less responsible and more free and also adjust with a given work, less experienced and training for the job assigned. Old workers on the other hand are responsible, experienced and already adjusted with the work. Therefore, he establishes inverse relationship between length of service and absenteeism.

Sinha has classified causes of absenteeism into three:

I. Inplant Causes:
   i) Ineffective selection and placement procedures
   ii) Excessive industrial fatigue
   iii) Over-staffing
   iv) Irregular flow of production
   v) Ineffective use of skills
   vi) Poor supervision
   vii) Inadequate training programme
   viii) Ineffective grievances procedures and
   ix) Low morale and poor employer-employee relation.

II. Personal Causes
   i) Illness of self or family
   ii) Accident to self or family
   iii) Seeking other employment
   iv) Household duties
   v) Child care, recreation and
   vi) Use of alcohol.

III. Community or Social Causes
   i) Inadequate housing
   ii) Poor transportation

---

iii) Marketing and shopping difficulties
iv) lack of social facilities like hospital, credit etc., and
v) seasonal causes.

Sinha and Singh found a positive relationship between absenteeism and job satisfaction in the department of an Indian steel company.

K.N. Vaid in his book Papers on Absenteeism has highlighted the role played by chronic absentee worker in escalating rate of absenteeism. He has classified them into five groups:

i) entrepreneurs
ii) status seekers
iii) epigurians
iv) family oriented and
v) sick and old.

Baldev R. Sharma selected 30 variable to find out their relative association with absenteeism in an automobile industry in Bombay. He put them under the following factors.

i) personal factors
ii) background factors
iii) implant factors

iv) workers satisfaction
v) union involvement and
vi) social factors.

He came to the conclusion that except for rural-urban background and union involvement most of the selected variables failed to show significant association with absenteeism.

Let us discuss causes of absenteeism under the following headings:

I. Inplant causes
II. Economic causes
III. Social causes
IV. Institutional causes
V. Human Relations as a cause
VI. Others.

I. Inplant causes

There are various internal causes of increased absenteeism:

a) Management and Management Practices

Nine out of ten factories are in the grip of inhuman management. By it we mean a management which is indifferent
to the needs and aspirations of workers. It believes in the principle of 'hiring and firing'. It is an indeed old fashioned form of organisation where workers are treated as chattel or cogs in the machine or a mere factor of production. Labour is seldom considered as a human being despite the fact that the International Labour Organisation at its 44th Philadelphia Conference reiterated, "Labour is not a Commodity". Bad or inhuman management therefore is an important cause of increased absenteeism.

This sort of management creates 'fear' in the minds of workers. Fellow-workers develop nervousness and become feverish, when a worker is punished for not abiding by the wishes of the management. And also the unilateral decision of the management to dismiss, suspend or discharge or lay-off of workers create scare in the minds of other workers. Workers therefore try to escape the notice of the "management" by remaining absent uninformed. High absenteeism to a large extent is the logical concomitant of harsh attitude of the management.

Very often management pays deaf ears to the request of workers. For example if a worker has asked for leave of absence well in time, the management will keep him in dark about its sanction till the last day. The worker
feels uncertain and decides to take a risk by quitting work without pay. This is a classic example of undemocratic form of management. Management is also in the habit of condoning or ignoring absences in case of a few workers. The same management takes a serious note of absences of other workers. It only means that the management discriminates among the workers. It may be a policy of expediency for the management. But certainly it is not a good human approach towards the workers. It is crystal clear from the above analysis that poor employer-employee relations is the chief cause of high absenteeism. The industry is divided into two hostile camps—capitalists and workers. They refuse to abide by the principle of peaceful coexistence. Compromise between the two is difficult if not impossible.

Biased or prejudicial promotion policy of the management may be an additional cause of absenteeism. If the management promotes a junior worker overlooking the seniority of other workers of appointing a new man on the basis of merit, the affected workers are unwilling to co-operate with the new man. Workers feel awkward and insulted to work under their juniors or new man.
b) **Working Conditions**

Bad working conditions lead to accelerated absenteeism. If the factory is ill-ventilated, poor-lighted and surrounded by unhygienic environment, workers get tired or fatigued very soon. These adverse working conditions act as obstacles to hard and better work. The efficiency of workers to a great extent depends on the working conditions. Workers get exhausted much earlier than the scheduled time if the working conditions are poor. Noisy work i.e., the continuous movement of the crane or of working machines may aggravate the boredom of the work.

c) **Lack of Induction Programmes**

It is found that newly recruited workers begin remaining absent more times than other workers. This happens because the worker is novice to the work and is not yet acclimatized with the factory environment. Lack of induction technique therefore, is the cause of high absenteeism prevailing among new workers. By induction technique we mean introducing the new entrant to the place of work, the handling of machines, store-room, his neighbours, safety measures and emergency exit-road to urinals and latrines etc. He needs to be informed about
his wage and other allowances, non-wage benefits, leave benefits etc. If he is fully informed on these issues he is likely to involve himself with the work. He may feel free for work as he can manage things properly. Absenteeism may go down considerably.

d) **Workers and his Co-workers**

Man does'nt live by bread alone. He wants a place and status in the society. So is equally true with the workers. 'Man', Aristotle said, "is a social animal". He wants association of men living around him. If a worker is lucky rave good companions he is not likely to remain absent from work. He feels satisfied and happy in working along with them. He forgets the domestic worries amidst them. The point to know here is that workers are not tempted to remain absent on flimsy grounds e.g. flu or slight head-ache or stomach-ache if they enjoy good company. If the worker is denied of good friendship in the workshop, he may return home on the pretext of slight headache or cold and cough. One of the important reasons, for high absenteeism, therefore, is the absence of solidarity or we-feeling among the workers themselves.
II. Economic causes

a) Job Satisfaction

Dr. Singh and P. Singh have tried to establish a positive relationship between absenteeism and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction means full or near full satisfaction derived from the job performed by an individual. It is all inclusive i.e., an individual is satisfied with the work if it is remunerative, less exhausting, free from authoritarian rule, maximises leisure and affords more comforts. An individual is non-satisfied with his work if it is low-paid, tiring, carries a taint of bossism, denial of free and frank opinion, and lack of leisure.

On this basis it is argued that absenteeism is directly related to income levels. Workers who are in the upper-income bracket are fully satisfied with their jobs, whereas the lower-income bracket workers are exposed to all ills of jobs. The same view is explained in other way also. Psychologists make a subtle distinction between job and work. Job is agreeable and pleasant because it fetches money. But the work is disagreeable and unpleasant due to unhealthy working conditions, tyrical attitude of management towards workers or strict disciplinary action taken against erring workers etc. A minority of well-off

class affords all comforts and pleasures of life. Job is satisfactory to them as they command obedience and loyalty from their subordinates. It is precisely for this reason that the propensity to irregular work is negligible in this case. But a majority of worse-off workers are dissatisfied with their work-environment. Therefore the propensity to irregular work is very high in this case.

In the Indian context of poverty, unemployment, job satisfaction plays no important role. Workers stick to jobs inspite of poor conditions of work as job is essential for their living and it is difficult to find an alternative job. So workers in due course of time adjust and try to put up with the ambivalent attitude of management.

b) Take Home Pay

Inadequate take home pay is another compelling factor affecting absenteeism. Workers generally have a big size of family. The principal earner is a single man, the number of dependants is more. This eats into the earnings of the main bread-earner. He borrows from various sources to sustain his dependants. On pay day he has to pay back all standing loans. The taken home-pay is very small. This forces him to borrow again. He is therefore caught in a vicious circle and for him there is no way out. He
tries to compensate the low take-home-pay by accepting outside work. He therefore remains absent from his regular work to attend to extra work.

c) Indebtedness

Workers are in the habit of borrowing money from non-banking agencies e.g., money-lenders of Pathans at exorbitant rates of interest for the following reasons:

1. To celebrate marriages of sons and daughters.
2. To perform certain religious functions like birth of a child or death of persons in the house.
3. To celebrate festivals on grand scale.

On the pay day and after, the money-lender or Pathan will be waiting at the gate of factories to recover their loans from workers. Workers naturally do not turn up for work in order to avoid the clutches of creditors.

d) Wage Differential

It may happen that wages and allowances may diverge in two similar industries in the same region which is economically undesirable and socially unjustified. If the wage differential is based on productivity criterion, there is less scope for complain. If the wage differential is otherwise workers placed in the less paid industry suffer from inferiority complex. In order to get out of this
mental rut, they go on in search of extra work outside to compensate their low earnings. This is possible only if they avoid their regular work.

III. Social Causes:

a) Migratory Character of Labour

The Royal Commission on Labour (1931) considered rural orientation or village-nexus character of workers as the chief cause of absenteeism. There occurred an influx of men from rural to urban places in search of jobs. It was not the 'pull' but the 'push' that brought the people to big cities. This inevitably led to frequent visits of workers from urban places to their villages. This is a traditional argument which has sprung from two views (i) the view of alleged shortage of labour and (ii) the view of surplus labour. According to (i) in the earlier days of industrialisation in India, industries suffered from shortage of labour. Workers very often abstained from work to visit their native villages. According to (ii) the management adopted a hostile attitude in controlling discipline in factories which compelled the workers to flee to their villages. In both (i) and (ii) the rural nexus character is supported.
Morris, D. Morris has disproved the two allegations and advises not to shed tears on 'Paradise Lost'. In the past workers recruited were village-born. They evinced interest in their villages. It is not true with the present labour force. Today workers are urban born. They have no link with the villages of their parents. In brief labour force today is much committed to place of work rather than to villages. This changed view is further supported by a few empirical studies made in India. Dr. V.B. Singh conducted a study on the committed aspect of work-force in the cotton textile mills of Kanpur. One of the findings of his study is that 75% of labour force employed in this industry is committed to the place of work in Kanpur. Similarly Lombard made a study on co-relation between absenteeism and migratory character of labour in case of a small number of engineering industries in Poona. He has found a significant co-relation between the two.

Despite the new light thrown on the issue, it is not easy to dismiss the traditional view as totally irrelevant. The studies mentioned suffer from the defect of either small coverage or limited to a particular area. It is therefore erroneous to generalise from particular case to the whole country. It is our common experience, and there is no need to produce statistics to show that a large

exodus of workers to 'villages' is a fact even today. The reasons may be varied i.e., workers own land or houses or they visit villages to meet their relatives. This can hardly be denied in a country like India based on customs and traditions.

b) Social Obligations

Social obligations like attending the marriage of a relative or a friend, attending religious ceremonies or visiting holy places also cause absenteeism. K.N. Vaid has found that in case of workers in cotton mills of Delhi the highest absenteeism is concentrated in months of May and June. The explanation generally given for this finding is two fold (a) May and June are very hot months. But this is valid in case of all places in India much less of Delhi. (b) Schools and colleges remain closed during these months. Parents are free to move to their native places. But the most convincing argument given by Vaid is that a perusal of Hindu calender reveals that the month of Jaiatha (corresponds to May) has more than 15 auspicious days for religious and social ceremonies. Therefore we see that there is greater movement of workers during May and June to attend to social obligations.

c) **Welfare Activities**

Absence of welfare activities like housing and transport may cause absenteeism. If the workers occupy the houses built by the employer in the vicinity of factory, they will be regular in attendance. But a fortunate few enjoy this facility. A large number of workers live miles away from factories. They have either to walk down the distance, use bicycles or use other modes of transport such as city-buses, trains etc. It is a known fact that now-a-days buses and trains run crowded. Many times due to overcrowding worker miss to board a bus or get into a train. They cannot reach the place of work by other means of transport as taxis or rickshaws as the workers hardly afford them. They also cannot intimate their absence through other ways of communications like telephones. Telephones are a luxury to the class of workers. No doubt they can use public telephone booths. Even this facility is beyond the capacity of workers to pay.

IV. **Institutional Causes :**

a) **Employees' State Insurance Scheme**

Introduction of Employees' State Insurance Scheme is another cause of increased absenteeism. According to ESI
scheme an insured worker is entitled for 56 days sick leave with half-pay. Workers prefer sick leave to unauthorised absenteeism. It is therefore clear that the scheme encourages workers to go on sick leave. Many times this facility is not properly used. Hence the scheme is much censured.

Employers have always put the blame for escalated absenteeism on to the introduction of ESI scheme. This is empirically proved by Prof. Sonachalam. He compared absenteeism rate in a few industries of Tamil-Nadu before and after the enforcement of the scheme. He found that absenteeism rate in the post-ESI scheme, is much higher than the present ESI scheme. Employers blame ESI doctors for liberal sanctioning of sick leave. One view attributed is that as the doctors have paid heavy capitation fees to secure seats in the medical colleges, they expect to get back their money as quickly as possible. Once such easy way is the liberal issuance of sickness certificates and get dole for it. This is a serious charge on the sincerity and honesty of ESI doctors. It needs to be verified before an allegation of this sort is levied on them.

ESI doctors voice the view that they have always worked in the interest of workers. Workers quite often exhaust their authorised leave due to socio-economic needs.
They are in a fix when they urgently need leave to receive their friend or to attend to friends' marriage. At such occasions management also takes a harsh attitude in sanctioning extra-leave. The workers have no choice but to approach the ESI doctor for a favour. Doctors are very generous in giving sickness certificate on humanitarian grounds.

ESI scheme makes a positive contribution in raising absenteeism. This is a fact regarding compensation paid by ESI. Workers are in the habit of taking loans from money lenders on the promise of returning it soon after the recovery of compensation from ESI office. It so happens that when workers receive the compensation, they use it for pressing need. They start avoiding work in order to escape the notice of money-lenders. Workers also remain absent to go over to ESI office to receive the compensation amount.

Workers refute the view of management. Workers like the scheme as they obtain pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits from it. The scheme allows them to go on leave with half pay rather than forgo wages. Workers get compensation against certain diseases and accidents which improves their physical efficiency and economic condition.
b) **Inter-Union Rivalry**

Industries in India are inundated with multiplicity of unions. They create an unfavourable climate inside the factory. Trade Union leaders and workers become active in carrying out propaganda in favour of their own trade union. The place of work i.e., factory is plagued by inter-union rivalry. In short too many unions and that too small unions fill the factory with 'election oriented,' climate rather than 'production oriented' atmosphere. Under these conditions workers cease to take interest in work performance. On the other hand they actively participate in union-work. This is possible only if they do not report to work. Of late, workers indulgence in union activities has led to increased absenteeism.

The bad effect of trade union doesn't end here. It will spread its tentacles to other workers. Because of union rivalry, workers who are not interested in it remain neutral by missing work on election days. This is the natural consequence of multiplicity of unions in Indian industries.
V. Human Relations as a Cause:

Workers and Supervisors

Generally it is found that human relations between workers and supervisors are strained. They are responsible for creating ill-feelings between worker and workers. They use all means fair or foul to bring about disunity among workers. If a worker comes late or found talking while working with his neighbour, he is threatened or abused by the supervisor. Supervisors are notorious for their rigid and un-kind behaviour with the workers. Workers are therefore frightened by their unsmooth attitude of the supervisors. The workers start avoiding work to escape the wrath or anger of the supervisor. The work-oriented rather than the man-oriented approach of the supervisors is no less an important cause of high absenteeism.

VI. Others:

a) Chronic Absentee Worker

It is argued that chronic absentee workers inflate the rate of absenteeism in industries. A chronic absentee is more prone to absence than his co-workers, given the same environment. He is described as born lazy and hates
K.H. Vaid has worked in this direction and has classified such workers into five groups: (i) enterpreneurs, (ii) status seekers, (iii) epicurians, (iv) family oriented, and (v) sick and old. The level of absenteeism rises if the chronic absentee happens to be a key worker. It all means that a high chronic worker or a group of chronic workers constantly avoid work for more times than the regular workers.

The concept of chronic absentee worker is a myth for the reasons given below:

1. If a chronic worker is born lazy and hates work, his entry would have been avoided by a proper recruitment policy. This belief has been denied by experiments conducted on college students by Prof. Donald Hebb. Prof. Donal reports of an experiment in which college students who needed money were offered Rs. 20/- a day to submit themselves to the following conditions: They were to lie on a comfortable bed for 24 hours a day; of course they would be permitted to get up for their meals, and for attending to bodily needs but for the rest of the time they would do literally nothing. Few of the human guinea pigs could endure these conditions for more than two or three days. The upper limit was six.

---
(ii) The so-called chronic absentee seeks to maximise his earnings by accepting outside work which is more paying. According to K.N. Vaid, the chronic worker is not poor. He earns between Rs. 120/- to Rs. 150/- per month. If his motive is to maximise total earnings he can do so by being very regular. The most point to remember here is that a worker starts remaining absent from work in order to attend to outside work which is more rewarding and less cumber some.

(iii) If the key worker is identified as chronic absentee worker the whole edifice of chronic absentee comes down to the ground. A key worker by definition is skilled and indispensable to the industry. It is wrong to charge him as being adverse to work. He is not motivated by earning extra money as he is adequately paid.

(iv) Another reason as to why a few workers repeatedly remain absent from work is that the work they do is monotonous and not stimulating. The workers very soon get bored about the work. They start avoiding work. Therefore it should be the endeavour of the management to make the work more pleasant and enthusiastic by introducing new devices. For example in some industries in USA jazz music is played during the working hours. Workers forget the monotony of the work and take greater interest in the same work.
(v) Another argument advanced in defense of the concept of chronic absentee is that the distribution of absences of habituated work follow consistently the pattern of negative binomial. This clearly means that some workers in industries account for larger proportions of total absences.

Maule gives a correct answer for negative binomial pattern of chronic absences. Workers in India are drawn from the two extremes—rich and poor. Hence workers in Indian industries have started with unequal social and economic liabilities. Workers coming from rich class show less proneness to absence. Others who come from poor class tend to abstain from work more frequently. So the hypothesis that proneness to absence is greater in case of habituated worker is correct but the cause of such proneness is poor socio-economic environment of workers and not unequal inherent abilities of such workers.

b) Social Evils.

Workers are habituated to consumption of liquor and gambling. It is reported by Rege Committee that absenteeism rises soon after the pay day. Workers take nice time and enjoy life spending their money on drinking and gambling.

13. Quoted in Studies on Absence from work by D.N. Gangoly & H.C. Kasbekar in Industrial Psychology Division, Report No.9, Central Labour Institute Sion Bombay 22.D.
14. Govt. of India, Labour Investigation Committee, 1944.
c) **Sickness**

Sickness of worker or other members of his family is an important cause of enhanced absenteeism. The food consumed by a bulk of workers is less nutritive and miles away from the well defined balanced diet. He is denied food containing high contents of proteins as he lives in object poverty. Sickness therefore is not beneficial for the health of workers. It lowers the physical efficiency of workers and what is worst absence of worker becomes inescapable and inevitable. Studies have been made on this line and found out that 'low absence' is associated with good health and high absence goes hand in hand with ill health.

The common diseases to which workers fall prey are as follows:

I. **Digestive**
   1. Dysentary and Diarrhoea.
   2. Other digestive diseases.

II. **Respiratory**
   1. Upper respiratory
   2. B-ron chitis
   3. Asthma
   4. Tuber culosis lungs.
III. Malaria
IV. Minor injuries
V. Skin affections
VI. Eye diseases
VII. Myalgia
VIII. Fractures
IX. Illdefined diseases
X. Others.

Workers have to stay away from work if someone falls ill in the house. It may be his wife, children or aged parents. He is not rich enough to engage a private doctor. He has necessarily to remain in house to take them to doctor or doctors, fetch medicine and look to other needs. With the advent of E.S.I. Hospitals workers are freed from these worries. But the thing is that the worker even here has to attend to ailing member of his family. He hasn't got servants on whom he can depend. This is true in case of workers covered by E.S.I. Scheme. Large number of workers are still to be covered by the scheme.