CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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About the Study

The present study entitled, "Trade Unions: An Organizational Analysis" is an empirical inquiry into the structural features of trade unions and their implications for internal administration especially, for democratic and oligarchic tendencies in the governance of trade unions. The study deals principally with the present day structural manifestations of working-class movement under the aegis of diverse trade union organizations which are considered more or less, as contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the working-class movement on the one hand and the development of a system of industrial relations on the other.

The term, "Working-class" is conceived here in its traditional meaning [K. Roberts et al., 1977; K. Roberts, 1978:22] which comprises workers in the unskilled, skilled and white-collar occupations to the exclusion of professions pursued by professionals such as physicians, technicians, managers and other professional practitioners. Notwithstanding deviant trends in the recent past, trade unionism remains a typical feature of and stronger amongst working-class. The trade unions as the socio-economic manifestations of working-class movement have a few characteristics which basically differentiate them from other economic groups. Some of these superficial distinctions are that, they are often larger than other organizations of this kind. They do insist their economic claims more explicitly in highly visible negotiations with reputed employers and industries. Unlike other professional associations, unions do not pretend to perform professional functions apart from those of defending and elevating the economic status of their members [Landsberger, 1976:869]. Trade unions have traditionally been understood to comprise workers primarily of middle income manual, skilled, white-collar and lower technical occupations,
bargaining, for better wages and working conditions. Historically, unions first appeared among occupations with the highest degree of social cohesion and most solidaristic informal organization such as mining, printing, transportation, manufacturing and skilled crafts [Form and Huber, 1976:771]. The creation of a trade union, thus, according to Commons and others [1918] was an expression of an already existing occupational and class solidarity.

Trade unions these days have come to be accepted as the universal structural features of the modern industrial societies. They have been recognized as the integral components of the social structure of all industrialized and industrializing societies world over. They represent a powerful economic, social and political force in the work environment. In the context of a contemporary working-class, the trade unions have come to be regarded as the most important institution as they have more determinate role to play in the working lives of the vast mass of working population and they encompass more needs of the workers than any other single institution. A closer look at the functions of unions reveals that apart from the routine central role they play in handling day-to-day grievances of their members, they have more important ideological, political and socio-psychological role to play in the lives of working-class people. As such, they are among a few relatively coherent, organized voluntary associations with mass membership based on modern occupational interests. They have contributed to further political development by playing a significant role in the political socialization of the working-class [Robert Kearney; 1971:2]. Some scholars have suggested that unions are the focus of social and political attachments of their membership [Form and Dansereau, 1957]. Where national unions and union federations have political bases, as in India, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, the political role of unions for their
members may become equal in importance to the economic role. If union leaders marshalled sufficient voting strength to place them in positions of governmental power, they might influence the industrial complex and industrial relations through legislation. The union becomes the immediate political community of the worker within which the issues that directly affect his day-to-day life can be posed for argument and decision [Mills, 1948:253]. It is believed that trade unions as voluntary organizations of workers dedicated to improving employment conditions through collective efforts and the method of collective bargaining with employers have an important role to play in the emergence of India as the largest democracy in the world.

In the West, however, few institutions are more constantly debated than the trade unions. They are said to be the cause of strikes, main reason for inflation. They are accused of being largely responsible for poor economic performance of the industrial sector. They are even alleged to be a threat to individual liberty. The Times (London) of 14th September, 1977 came to the conclusion that the unions are the biggest national problem. But a few others suggest that they are the harbingers of industrial democracy, the most coveted goal of all socialist democracies, and a dream of all welfare societies. This is so due to the fact that the exceptional times in which we live, the strategic industrial decisions are too important to be left to management alone [Giles Radice, 1978:1-2]. It is argued that a broader democratic role for trade unions is quite consistent with their traditional objectives and their main purpose has always been a democratic one, that is, to change a system of authoritarian decision making into one in which management and unions decide jointly. As such, independent unions, in truth, are an essential part of democratic society and are the major source of democratic change within industry. Allen Flanders [1968:46] has rightly said that there is probably no other
voluntary institution than a trade union which brings as many people into part-time service on behalf of their fellows and gives them a first-hand experience of the democratic methods of administration.

Though the prime function of trade union is industrial representation, they have to take into account that workers are also consumers and parents, tenants and potential or actual house holders, sometimes sick, disabled or unemployed and eventually old-age pensioners. So, trade unions have not only to fight against deprivation and inequality at work-place, they have also to act as a pressure group for social justice in the widest sense [Giles Radice, 1978:140]. However, one cannot over emphasize the role of trade unions in industry as in many cases, they are believed to be running parallel administration in the management of industry. The social and political involvement of trade unions derives from and remains subsidiary to their major task of democratizing and humanizing industry. Now they have come to be so well accepted as ubiquitous structural components of the firm that it is difficult to conceive of a largescale industrial organization without trade unions being present in it. And no study of an industrial complex can be rendered complete without more than a passing reference made to the unions operating therein as integral components of the industrial-milieu. In view of their important role in the industrial societies, trade unions have now come to be taken up for systematic study more than even before by the social scientists. Disciplines such as sociology, social work, economics, commerce and management studies have approached unions from diverse perspectives and orientations creating a vast literature on trade unions. However, most of the studies undertaken so far seem to be lacking in the focus on structural features. The literature on unions is replete with theories on the origin and causes of unionism and growth of unionism as a movement in the industrial societies. A few studies in the recent past are empirical in approach but focus on
historical development, demographic and ecological features, their political affiliations and their role in the industrial organization in general and role in industrial relations in particular. There are not many studies with structural dimensions and internal administration of unions as their focus, rendering scholars myopic to the realities pertaining to actual functioning of trade unions. The empirical works on trade unions themselves have been very sparse, more so are the studies focusing upon the organizational features of trade unions, their internal structure and functioning. Further, empirical studies on trade unions in India are very sparse and whatever attempts that have been made so far, are far from satisfactory and are painfully lacking in the organizational perspective and have thus rendered so important an area pertaining to trade unions as this full of speculations and misconceptions. This has exposed a yawning gap in social work research, warranting careful empirical analysis of the organizational structure and functioning of trade unions. The Indian academic world has contributed little to public understanding and to the empirical literature on labour movement and industrial relations. This state has been attributed to the tardy development of industrial relations as a field of academic specialization and also to the need for empirical work it requires in the field, a mode of study and approach that has been since long neglected by Indian Social Science Institutes and Academics [Kennedy, 1966]. The amount and quality of work being turned out in this field is an obvious index of the sorry state in which it finds itself today. Apart from Indian Society of Labour Economics established in the year 1957 and Delhi based Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations founded in the year 1963, which is the only non-governmental agency in India for industrial relations research, there are hardly any serious attempts made to develop industrial relations as a major field of academic specialization. No other institute
or university other than Andhra University at Waltair offers a full time post-graduate course in industrial relations whereas, at other institutes and universities it constitutes only a part of the total course on management or sociology or social work or commerce or economics. Further, if we scan the journals published in India, Indian Journal of Industrial Relations started in the year 1965, is the only journal devoted specifically for publication of research output in the field of trade unions and industrial relations. There is also a surprisingly large flow of books on matters pertaining to labour and unionism, but most of them serve only as textbooks at lower academic levels rather than expositions of novel ideas or research findings. Very few, if any, deal analytically or critically with questions on unions, unions structure, labour relations and government policy on labour [Kennedy, 1966:4]. though there is a vast literature on the history, emergence, growth and consolidation of unionism in India, most of these studies deal with the development of factionalism, and divisiveness and the resultant formation of diverse trade union organizations. It needs to be mentioned here that several of these studies considered as important by the students of Indian labour movement are impressionistic and lack empirical support and as such can best be described as historical and statistical accounts of union movement in India. A close survey of literature reveals that the major focus has been the origin and growth of unionism in India, especially since Independence [Punekar, 1948; Agrawal, 1956; Mathur and Mathur, 1957; Ornati, 1957; Karnik, 1960]. Further, there are very few works with the role of unions in the industry and in the system of industrial relations as focus [Hiremath, 1989]. A few other studies seem to have attempted to throw empirical light upon the trade union leaders, leadership, leadership dynamics, and emerging patterns of union leadership [Punekar and Madhuri 1967; Hiremath, 1989]. Though there are quite a few good works on
the internal organization and administration of trade union in the context of Western societies [Allen, 1954; Roberts, 1956; Radice, 1978], similar studies on unions in India are almost non-existent rendering it a potential area of social work research. As mentioned earlier, the major institutional purposes of a trade unions are economic - satisfying economic needs of the workers, political - serving as a rival power to management, social - providing a community and society to the workers in which they become meaningfully integrated, and finally psychological - fostering a sense of security, recognition and conditional response. What structures and strategies it develops in course of achievement of its purposes, the manner in which these structures are developed and strategies are employed, the machineries through which these aims and objectives are institutionalized and operationalized, the manner in which the union structure functions or operates, in short, the way in which the union anatomy is structured and union physiology functions are the questions frequently posed to the social scientists which have not been answered satisfactorily and empirically so far. And it is in this context the purpose of present study gains significance and becomes pertinent and relevant to the need of the hour.

It is strongly felt that among many problems that face unions in the recent years two are of such great importance that they call for immediate attention and analysis. The first of these is the problem of integrating democratic responsibility with a strong administrative and fighting machine, and the second is the necessity of adapting the structure and procedures of the union to the nature of differing industrial and political entities with which it must deal in its functioning to achieve its objectives. When a union takes a fighting stance with a great industrial magnate, it must be able to marshal and control its forces and its personnel. Further, once an agreement is entered
into, the union requires requisite authority to regiment its members to live by their bargain. It also requires a political machinery, an internal administrative structure with streamlined patterns of authority and communication, as much as an industrial bureaucracy, to control and coordinate diversified and vast functions of a large-scale organization. These administrative and strategic requirements of a large-scale combative and defensive organization bring about a tendency towards centralized control. Yet, most of the unions are required, by constitution, to be responsive to the desires of membership and that the leaders be subject to, and spokesmen of the will of the majority of whom they represent. Many interesting compromises and delicate adjustments are devised in the actual functioning of a union to solve this problem which requires union leaders to be democratic politicians and autocratic and authoritarian commanders at the same time.

Statement of the problem

In consonance with the issues thrashed out in the foregoing discussion, the present study addresses itself to the intricate realities pertaining to the internal structure and the actual functioning of trade union organizations. In doing so, it seeks to probe into both, the static and dynamic dimensions of unions as important institutions in the lives of workingmen. However, the specific focus of the study remains the analysis of union organizations and to ascertain the measures, extent, nature and causes of democratic and oligarchic tendencies in the governing and the functioning of unions.

Since the issue of democracy versus oligarchy in trade unions has moved into the foreground of attention in the recent studies of unionism and union organizations, a need for coherent body of empirical knowledge is being felt among the social
scientists. The issue of democracy in trade unions is of special interest to the students of social work in view of the strong belief among such scholars that unions despite of their democratic structure tend to be oligarchic in their functioning [Robert Michels, 1915: 10]. Though most of the unions make it explicit in their constitutions that their union proposes to function on democratic principles, through elected officials and a representative executive, scholars in the field of organizations have expressed their serious doubts with regard to the democratic administration in trade unions. The lack of empirical research in and literature on this field has come to make the issues still more complicated rendering scholars in the field myopic to the realities pertaining to the internal structure and functioning of trade unions.

Hence, the present study seeks to undertake an empirical inquiry into the structural and functional aspects of trade union organizations with a view to analyse and identify the structural and situational determinants that facilitate democratic and oligarchic administration in the trade unions.

This requires the study to focus on the structural features of unions such as division of labour, division and delegation of authority, status and role systems, hierarchy of offices, normative order as envisaged in the constitution, patterns of communication, union executive, its constitution and functioning various other committees and bodies that help unions to discharge their duties toward their membership, leadership structure and leadership styles and so forth. As such the study proposes to devote an independent chapter on the internal structure of union organization with a view to ascertain the implications of these structural features for the functioning of the union.
In the absence of universally accepted indices of union democracy, any study aimed at measuring the extent of democracy in unions needs to develop and operationalize the concept of union democracy. Union democracy has been variously defined and in consonance with the multiple definitions, various indices of union democracy have been identified.

Various schemes have been employed to ascertain the extent and determinants of democracy and oligarchy in unions. However, none of the schemes could independently be considered as adequate. In course of investigation an attempt is made to develop and operationalize the indices of democratic and oligarchic elements in the union organization drawing upon various theories of organization and administration. As such, a composite scheme that represents the best combination of existing schemes for identifying and measuring oligarchy and democracy in unions seems to be indispensable to give a realistic, valid and verifiable account of union democracy and oligarchy. Hence, one of the main objectives of the present study is to combine the indices employed in the studies carried out hitherto and develop and operationalize a composite index of union democracy, which would be more realistic and valid than any other index employed so far. The literature review would reveal that the frequency of convention, responsible leadership, membership participation in decision making, size of administrative component, leadership turnover, frequency and extent of competition in union elections, extent of voting in union elections, strike ballot, existence of organized opposition groups, existence of party system and referendum on important issues and so forth have been employed as indices of union democracy in different cultural contexts. As such, one of the important tasks of the present study is to develop a composite index of union democracy and oligarchy incorporating the schemes mentioned above. However, components
Further, the study also seeks to identify such of those components of industrial milieu that might be found significantly associated with the extent of union democracy, or may explain the incidence of democratic and oligarchic tendencies in union organizations. It is logically assumed that, the democratic and oligarchic tendencies and the patterns of administration are the functions of structural features of the union organization and components of industrial milieu, in which the union operates. As such an attempt is made to identify such structural features of the unions studied and also such situational factors that might be of implications for the actual functioning of the unions.

In other words, the main thrust of the present study is to analyze the organizational structure of trade unions and identify and operationalize the indices of democratic and oligarchic tendencies therein as a preparatory work, and then proceed to apply the indices so devised in the study of union administration to throw empirical light upon the realities pertaining to the democracy and oligarchy in Indian trade unions. In doing so, the study seeks to relate the indices of union democracy with the organizational features so as to discover whatever causal relationships that may be of relevance in analyzing union democracy in other social settings and further identify structural features of unions and the environmental factors which may facilitate or retard democracy in unions. In short, the study seeks to standardize models of union democracy to help arrive at generalizations with predictive value and thereby seek to propagate a new theory of union democracy as applicable to the study of Indian trade unions.
Objectives

Thus, in consonance with the foregoing discussion, the study addresses itself principally to the following objectives.

1. To empirically study the internal structure of trade union organizations and to depict the actual functioning of trade union organizations with respect to internal administration.

2. To ascertain the implications of structural features for the functioning of unions.

3. To identify and operationalize indices of union democracy and to develop a composite model for the analysis of union democracy based on hitherto existing models.

4. To measure and ascertain the extent of democracy in the trade unions and to identify structural and situational factors that have implications for democratic and oligarchic tendencies in trade unions.

Based on the findings of the present study an attempt is made to propagate a composite theory of union democracy to explain and predict the phenomenon of union democracy in Indian context, and to propose a few suggestions that could render unions not only more effective in their functioning but also more reflective of the needs and aspirations of the working-class they represent.