

Sharit K. Bhowmik: *Industry, labour and society*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012, xi + 211 pp., Rs 250 (pb). ISBN 978-81-250-4762-9

The author states that the book under review is a compilation of lectures and notes he prepared for his post-graduate teaching. It is presented in text-book format with each chapter beginning with a list of the issues discussed therein and appended with a list of key concepts and/or definitions. A list of readings and references is provided at the end of each chapter. As the author admits, the book presupposes knowledge about some of the basic issues involved in the field.

Consisting of an introduction and eight chapters, the book begins with an account of the economic, social, and political dimensions of the great transformation brought about by industrialisation, followed by a chapter that examines aspects of the social organisation of industry such as hierarchical structure, bureaucracy and various management strategies.

Three chapters follow on workers' participation in management, trade unions, and labour movement in India, in that order. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate if the chapter on trade unions had been the first of the three. This would have served as a theoretical backdrop for the discussion of the labour movement in India followed by an analysis of workers' participation in management. It would have been worthwhile to strengthen the arguments/analysis in various areas while converting classroom lectures into a book on the subject. Thus, the chapter on 'Trade Unions' could have been strengthened by including issues such as the internal politics of trade unions, oligarchical tendencies of union leadership, and the possibility of collusion between union leaders and management. Again, there are several passing references to collective bargaining across the chapters, but no theoretical or empirical analysis of the same. E.A. Ramaswamy's pioneering work on these issues (*The Worker and his Union*. Delhi: Allied, 1977) as well as K. Mamkoottam's eye-opening account of the Tata Workers' Union (*Trade Unionism: Myth and Reality – Unionism in the Tata Iron And Steel Company*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982) could have been used to good effect in this part of the book.

A discussion of the informal sector is integral to any work on industry and labour in India. The essential inter-linkages between the formal and informal sectors of work are examined in Chapter 6. The discussion of the social and legal protection of informal sector workers and the 'Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Bill, 2007' provide welcome information on recent developments in the field.

The impact of globalisation which necessitated structural changes so that India could remain globally competitive in the industrial world is addressed in Chapter 7. Several important consequences such as liberalisation and privatisation, flexible specialisation, increase in informal employment, voluntary retirement schemes, and out-sourcing of labour are briefly discussed.

The last chapter voices concern about the tendency to compromise on the dignity, freedom, and equity of workers accompanying the labour cost-cutting that occurs due to the need to reduce production costs for the sake of global viability. The author rightly emphasises on the implementation of the right to employment, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue contained in the concept of 'Decent Work' proposed by ILO.

However, it is surprising that, while the author devotes considerable space flogging the long dead horse of 'labour commitment', there is no mention of the problem of 'alienation' in industrial work, despite the long and important theoretical debates in the area and its continued relevance in the age of information technology. The problem of 'emotional labour' in the service sector is a case in point (Arlie Hochschild: *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

A better organisation of the scheme of chapters (as observed earlier), and a more consistent presentation of the themes in terms of theoretical and empirical analysis, would have contributed to the academic rigour of the book. While some chapters like those on 'social organisation' and 'trade unions' are completely theoretical in nature, others are more India-centric, with the shift from one perspective to the other being quite abrupt at times, disturbing the flow of the discussion (perhaps a reflection on what we do in the class-room)! Also, abrupt use of Indian terms/concepts in the middle of a review of theoretical perspectives may work for a classroom lecture, but not for a book! A case in point is the

reference to 'a Dalit child' (p. 22) in the middle of a discussion of Talcott Parsons' functional theory of the family in industrial society!

The book could have been better edited. The process of dispute settlement under the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 in India is repeated both in Chapters 4 and 5. There are also some lapses in referencing. For example, David Pocock and Robert Redfield are mentioned (p. 26), but missing in the list of references cited! In spite of its shortcomings, the book will be useful for students as it brings together some of the basic issues in the field of industry and work, including contemporary ones.